

# SUMMER READING

## on ECOLOGY, JUSTICE, and DEMOCRACY

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I READ RICHARD EVANOFF'S BOOK *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics*, Routledge, New York, 2011) as part of my summer vacation reading that focused on the current ecological crisis and what to do about it. As my practice (ProsperityForRI.org) focuses on community prosperity on planet Earth, I am immersed in the daily struggle at the community level to keep Earth a livable planet with justice for all.

In addition to Evanoff's book, I also read Lester Brown's *Plan B 4.0* and Ellen LaConte's *Life Rules*. Lester Brown repeats what he and many of us have been saying for years, with only this year's special flavor for additions. We are in big time trouble, and going green is the only alternative.

I read Ellen LaConte's *Life Rules* in an early draft and commented on it. I found it fascinating as a draft, and even better this time around. Using HIV, bacteria, and much else in the natural world, LaConte provides us with a picture of how life on Earth has traditionally responded to crisis, and what might be done this time around. Her focus on how wide input from a variety of species working together in an ecosystem, almost as if they were in a consensual democracy, underscores her belief that only democracy will allow people to solve the current problem.

LaConte also maintains an optimism that we humans will solve the ecological crisis and that human communities will thrive beyond the current darkness. She provides many examples of light in the darkness, and things to do in your community, which adds strength to her message and makes it more useful.

Brown and LaConte all write for the attentive popular audience, and reading was easy. Evanoff presents us with something entirely different. It's a text book for an environmental philosophy class, written for peers and students in academia.

Turning to his book, the first thing I have to say is that he really gets it. He totally understands that the crisis on earth is a convergence of many factors, and that in order to undo the conundrum, we have to be careful to place our solutions in a very large context involving prosperity in human communities, justice, and the health of the planetary and all local ecosystems. Nothing will actually solve problems on Earth unless the solutions take into account healing the ecosystem and making sure human communities are thriving at the same time. This will only happen in a situation in which justice prevails because people have the habit of abusing power, and abuse of power over people, also results in an abuse of the land and waters. Richard Evanoff absolutely gets this and lays it out quite well.

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In a well documented series of chapters Evanoff lays out the intellectual history of a three-way relationship, as follows: "You can not end poverty without healing ecosystems, you can not heal ecosystems without ending poverty, and you can not get to either without closing the military industrial complex". For the intellectually inclined and for new students who need to know the history of thought in their community, this is well done.

The middle chapters focus on relating bioregionalism to the healing of ecosystems, the creation of prosperity in human communities, and how none of this is possible without a real system of justice and democracy. His analysis is clearly written, and as a 40 year practitioner in the field, I think he weaves the strands together quite properly. Dense, but anyone with an interest in the subject will keep moving through it.

As I came to see more clearly what Evanoff was trying to accomplish with the book, I started to wonder what he would say to do in order to bring Bioregionalism and Global Ethics to our communities (from neighborhood, to watershed, state, region, country, and planet). The description and prescription are necessary, but can we actually bring those prescriptions to our communities? Here, it seems to me, he does not provide much useful advice. I speak from my experience of bringing the criticisms of economic development strategies to local policy discussions — while at the same time trying to grow those economic activities that meet reasonable criteria for actually healing ecosystems and trying to grow justice. As an on the streets guy, I will be talking one day about the medical industrial complex and how using it as the centerpiece of economic development in the community makes it much harder to have health care for all; the next day I will be helping a culinary school fit composting into the green hospitality curriculum. Examples of this sort I would like to see in a book of this depth, but was disappointed.

I did appreciate his clear statements on why the Green Party, as the only overtly political organization clearly articulating a plan to heal ecosystems, address poverty, and to build justice is a necessity in these times. As a founding member of the Green

Party, as a former candidate and leader in my local and state parties, I absolutely know that one of the ways we must confront the ecological crisis on earth is with an independent politics that clearly articulates the message expressed so well by Evanoff. Evanoff recognizes the problems Green Parties around the world face. Money-based politics will never be the strong point of Green Parties. Governing in a world of short term budgets and in a world filled with war will never be easy, but the politics represented by the Greens is an important component of what must happen as we go forward.

It is going to take many different things to heal our home planet and our communities. It will take many different people doing many different things in order to accomplish this gargantuan task. One thing we can always use is a clear written description of what is going on and how we got this way. If you are serious about expanding your view of the crisis and providing yourself with additional tools of analysis, *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics* will provide value.

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Compost Initiative in an effort to collect and compost all the food scraps in Rhode Island so it can be used to fuel our agricultural renaissance.