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BIOREGIONALISM AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY ON A GLOBAL SCALE

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INTRODUCTION

This paper suggests that current trends towards globalization are creating entirely new social and environmental problems which require cross-cultural dialogue towards the creation of a new "global ethic." Current models of development are based on an implicit global ethic which advocates bringing everyone in the world up to the same standards of living as those prevalent in the so-called "developed" countries through unlimited economic growth. This goal is not only unattainable but also undesirable because it ultimately undermines the ability of the environment to sustain both human and non-human flourishing, exacerbates rather than overcomes social inequalities both within and between cultures, and fails to achieve genuine human well-being for all but a wealthy minority (see Evanoff 2011).

An alternative bioregional global ethic is proposed which seeks to maximize ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being through the creation of economically self-sufficient and politically decentralized communities delinked from the global market but confederated at appropriate levels to address problems that transcend cultural borders. Such an ethic is based on a transactional view of the relationship between self, society, and nature, which attempts to create more symbiotic and less conflictual modes of interaction between human cultures and natural environments, while

promoting the flourishing of both. Instead of a single monolithic global ethic, bioregionalism suggests that there should be sufficient convergence between cultures to allow for the successful resolution of mutual problems, but also sufficient divergence to enable the continued evolution of both biological and cultural diversity on a global scale. (Key texts on bioregionalism include Andrus *et al.* 1990; Berg 2009; Dasmann 1984; Desai and Riddlestone 2002; Dodge 2005; McGinnis 1999; Sale 2000; Thayer 2003.)

The paper specifically argues that decision-making is at present concentrated in the hands of global institutions which mainly favor the interests of global elites. A bioregional model of international relations would decentralize political and economic decision-making power to the local level, giving citizens more control over issues which directly affect their lives. Local problems can most effectively be dealt with through local measures, but when problems transcend cultural boundaries, it is still possible for local communities to confederate themselves into larger units to address concerns at the regional and global levels. The paper suggests that more direct forms of democracy based on confederal institutions offer the most plausible way to extend inclusive participation in decision-making processes, at both the local and the global levels.

THE NEW WORLD (DIS)ORDER

Globalization socializes production and consumption on a global scale but concentrates both economic wealth and political decision-making power in the hands of a small managerial class of global elites. The failure of current models of development to promote the goals of ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being can be accounted for in part by the inherent difficulties of attempting to manage the global economy on the basis of highly centralized forms of decision-making and hierarchical social structures, given the complexity of social and ecological relationships that

globalization necessitates. A bioregional model of participatory politics is one that expands the scope of moral concern beyond self to include both community and environment. It thus aims at a holistic view of society while simultaneously debureaucratizing government and decentralizing political power.

Currently most of the discussion on how global society should be structured is being conducted within the framework of global institutions, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO, which often intentionally limit participation to political and economic elites within the first and third worlds, and shut out participation by local communities and NGOs. The negative impacts of these institutions on ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being is already well-documented (see, for example, Anderson 2000; Caufield 1996; Chatterjee 1994; Chossudovsky 1997; Danaher 2001; Danaher and Burbach 2000; Goldman 2005; Jawara and Kwa 2004; Mander and Barker 1999; Peet 2009; Rich 1994; Wallach and Woodall 2004).

Corporate influence in the global decision-making process is pervasive, while citizens find it increasingly difficult to make their voices heard. Citizen participation in discussions leading to the creation of the WTO, for example, were virtually nonexistent, with most decisions being made behind closed doors by unelected government officials representing business interests (Nader and Wallach 1996). There is also widespread disillusionment with the ability of international initiatives, such as the Rio and Johannesburg earth summits, the Kyoto and Copenhagen conferences on climate change, and the UN's Millennium Development Goals, to effectively address environment and development issues, given the tendency of such projects to be ultimately coopted by business interests.

In short, existing institutions do not fulfill the conditions for genuine democratic participation in global decision-making. As a response to this concentration of power in

the hands of business and governmental elites, the bioregional proposal suggests that people should reclaim their ability to manage their own local affairs and to democratically decide how global relations should be conducted. If this response is to be effective, it will be necessary to go beyond reformist efforts which merely lobby current institutions or try make them more accountable. The bioregional paradigm also suggests, however, that it would be necessary to go beyond those socialist models which accept the legitimacy of centralized control but simply seek to place such power in the service of attaining socialist goals. A genuine democratic alternative to global capitalism requires decentralizing political power by moving it away from nation-states and international organizations towards local communities.

It can be plausibly argued that the terms of contemporary political debate are no longer between the left (advocating more power to government) and the right (advocating more power to business), but rather between those elements which support, and those which oppose, the centralization of power and wealth in the hands of global capital (*cf.* Bakan 2004, ch. 2). The global economy increasingly depends on a confluence of power between government and business. Attempts to manage a highly complex global economic and political order through any form of "central planning," whether the locus of this decision-making power is political (as with the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, etc.) or economic (as with transnational corporations), are bound to favor the interests of elites and to gloss over the interests of non-elites, and hence are unlikely to be able to adequately provide for the latter's needs.

The bioregional alternative, conversely, is based on the decentralization of both political and economic power in the interests of non-elites. The bioregional model of intercultural relations offers a "third alternative" to both capitalism and Marxism, and is opposed to the centralization of decision-making power in either the hands of the state

and government elites (as with socialism) or the hands of private enterprise and business elites (as with capitalism). Political and economic decentralization along bioregional lines allows for the reemergence of *Gemeinschaft* cultures, which are based on personal relations and adapt economic structures to the needs of people, rather than the continuation of a *Gesellschaft* culture in which human relations are depersonalized and people are expected to adapt themselves to the needs of the economic system. Because such relations are local rather than global, they are more immediate and hence more manageable. Adequate attention can be focused on the quality of the relationships we have both with others and with the environment, rather than simply on the quantity of goods and services that are being produced.

A bioregional global ethic involves abandoning many of the structures of our present global society and also creating minimal institutional structures to insure that cultures can enter into more truly ethical relationships both with each other and with the environment. Rather than attempt to universalize a certain set of cultural values or to generate a more highly complex set of ethical norms to govern a more highly interrelated global society, a bioregional global ethic would respect a high level of cultural and ecological diversity but simultaneously seek to obtain sufficient levels of cross-cultural agreement to allow those various forms of social and ecological domination which are made possible by our present highly interrelated global society to be overcome. Such a global ethic can only be realized, somewhat paradoxically, through a process of deglobalization (Bello 2004), in which production and consumption are organized on a local, bioregional scale (without necessarily excluding all forms of trade), and ultimate economic and political decision-making power is located not in the hands of a global managerial elite but in local communities.

Under the present system local communities have become alienated from the decision-making process being conducted in what many have to come regard as self-serving world policy-making bodies and inefficient global institutions. As new problems arise, attempts are typically made to resolve them by further centralizing decision-making authority in global institutions and adding additional layers of bureaucracy. The bioregional contention is that local problems can be dealt with more effectively at the local level by decentralizing decision-making authority and by protecting and extending local community rights. Shiva (1993, p. 154; see also 2005) similarly writes of the need to "democratize the global." In a democratic global order, local communities would retain both the right to information about projects that will have a direct or indirect effect on them and the right to prior consent, meaning that no projects or activities can be carried out without the agreement of the local communities they will affect. These principles accord with the bioregional notion that final decisions about whether or not to implement a given development project should be made not by the national government nor by international bodies but rather by the local community that will be affected by the project.

A CONFEDERAL MODEL FOR CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS

In the new "borderless" world traditional ideas of national sovereignty and democratic control are being discarded as political power is increasingly concentrated in international institutions dominated by the interests of global elites. From a bioregional perspective there are now greater reasons than ever for political philosophy to radically rethink the issue of sovereignty in a way that locates ultimate political and economic power in the hands of local communities. Sovereignty in the bioregional paradigm is constructed, as with Aristotle, at the level of the *polis* and its surrounding environs, rather than at the level of the nation–state or the global arena.

Contra the dominant development paradigm, the bioregional paradigm places ultimate decision-making power in the hands of local communities which can nonetheless be confederated at the appropriate levels to deal with issues and problems that are transcommunal in nature. This approach differs from Whitaker's (2007) proposal for a "bioregional state," which advocates restructuring political institutions along bioregional lines, but retains both the state and democracy based on proportional representation. Engel's proposal for a "bioregional federalism" based on a covenantal model of global governance that "joins self-rule (autonomy) with shared rule (communal policy-making)" (2008, p. 27) seeks to distribute "common but differentiated responsibilities" at both the local and global levels, while also skirting the issues of the state and representative democracy.

In Bookchin's libertarian municipalism (1990a; 1991; 1994; 2007; see also Milstein 2000; Marshall 1992), which gives a contemporary articulation of the principles of direct democracy and constitutes one possible model for how bioregional communities might be organized, political and economic power is ultimately based in community assemblies which permit citizens to directly debate and democratically decide policy. Bookchin speaks of physical decentralization as part of a "maximum program" for libertarian municipalists, but argues that existing political units, including large urban areas, can be immediately decentralized institutionally by dividing them into smaller administrative districts which can be democratically managed (1990b, p. 7). Bookchin envisions the revitalization of a citizen-based politics as a means to confront the entrenched power of both national governments and capitalist economic institutions. As with Marxism, libertarian municipalism foresees the eventual dissolution of the state, but without an intervening period in which the proletariat takes control of government and the means of production. Ownership of the means of production and economic policy-

making would not be in the hands of workers alone but rather under the direction of the local community as a whole (*cf.* Hawkins 1993).

While political power would ultimately be located in local communities, communities could nonetheless be confederated into larger units to address regional, or indeed global, concerns. The purpose of these confederated units would not be to *make* policies, but rather to *enact* policies formulated by the local communities. Here is Bookchin's own description of confederalism:

It is above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities. The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. Their function is thus a purely administrative and practical one, not a policymaking one like the function of representatives in republican systems of government. A confederalist view involves a clear distinction between policymaking and the coordination and execution of adopted policies. Policymaking is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration and coordination are the responsibility of confederal councils, which become the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighborhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power thus flows from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and in confederations, the flow of power from the bottom up diminishes with the scope of the federal council ranging territorially from

localities to regions and from regions to ever-broader territorial areas. (1990b, p. 4)

Whereas the bulk of communication in the current global system takes place horizontally between elites and vertically from top to bottom, the communication model suggested by confederalism is one in which there is a high degree of communication horizontally between individuals, groups, and political communities and vertically from the bottom up, with final decision-making power remaining at the grassroots level.

There are a number of tensions in Bookchin's model which have not been fully worked out (see, for example, the criticisms in Clark 1998) and self-organization can undoubtedly take a plurality of forms. Ultimately it will be up to the participants themselves to decide which forms of social organization are best suited to their own specific cultural and natural conditions. At the local level it is unlikely that there will be a "one-size-fits-all" political structure which would be adopted by all bioregional communities. Sale writes, "Obviously the institutions and processes within bioregions would vary as the lands and human experiences on them vary" (2001, p. 43). In *Human Scale*, Sale specifically indicates that a variety of political systems would be compatible with small-scale ecological communities (1980, p. 505).

The key tenets, in Sale's view, are that bioregions should be based on cooperative, self-sufficient economies, decentralized forms of political-decision-making, and forms of symbiosis between cultures and bioregions which allow for both diversity and a sense of community. Berg concurs:

There are opportunities for life-place political alliances at all the levels from a local watershed to a continent (and eventually with other continents' assemblies).

Only a fanatical mind-set would dictate that the basis for these should be to convert everyone else into a bioregionalist, and that would make a travesty of the terms for coalitions. (2009, p. 169)

Nonetheless, it seems possible that confederalism could be developed in a way which provides an institutional framework for operationalizing a communicative approach to ethics based on the principle that all of those who are affected by particular decisions and policies should be allowed to participate in the process by which such decisions and policies are formulated (Habermas 1990; 1993). This principle in turn forms the basis for a deliberative democracy which allows decisions to be made by citizens themselves through a process of public dialogue (see Baber and Bartlett 2005; Bohman 2007; Dryzek 2002). Normative decisions are not universal, but rather formulated at the appropriate level to govern the specific relations involved (e.g., within / between individuals, groups, and political communities), with a clear distinction being maintained between the private and the public spheres (*cf.* Biehl 1991; Bookchin 1995). Confederal principles can be applied to any level of political cooperation between different groups, from the local to the "national" and "international" levels. At each of the levels the bioregional model seeks sufficient convergence to allow problems to be jointly resolved and sufficient divergence to allow for a measure of personal and cultural autonomy, and for the uninterrupted evolution of new ideas and cultural forms.

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Unlike our present global system, which claims to foster democracy but in fact concentrates power in the hands of professional politicians and bureaucrats beholden to corporate interests, bioregionalism seeks to advance more participatory forms of

democracy which increase direct citizen involvement in the decision-making process (*cf.* Roussopoulos and Benello 2005). "Presently existing democracy" falls far short of the ideals of democracy, just as "presently existing socialism" (in its time) fell far short of the ideals of Marx. At present the so-called "democracies" of the world are moving further from, rather than closer towards, democratic ideals. The bioregional model is concerned with how our current system of representational democracy can be replaced with a form of direct democracy which better reflects the interests and the will of the people. It is also concerned with how direct democracy might work not only on a local, but also on a global scale through the employment of a confederal model of cross-cultural communication. In the remainder of this section we will attempt to answer several objections to direct democracy and political decentralization.

Is direct democracy even possible?

One familiar argument against direct democracy is that it is logistically impractical to bring everyone together into a single assembly so that they can be directly involved in the decision-making process—a problem that would only be exacerbated at the global level, of course. In the confederal model, however, it is not necessary to bring everyone together into a single assembly at the national or international levels. It is only necessary to bring everyone together into single assemblies at the community level. Issues which affect only local communities are decided by local communities, and with the devolution of a global economy, an increasing number of decisions would need to be made at the local, not the global level. Decisions that need to be made at higher levels must still be debated on and rendered at the local level. In a confederal system the higher levels would simply seek to implement whatever emerges as the majority will among the local units which comprise a given confederation. While it is true that decisions can be

made more efficiently through representative forms of democracy, it is also the case that the decisions reached often do not reflect the will of the majority, which means that they are by definition not democratic.

Can everyone reach agreement?

A second objection to implementing democracy on a confederal model concerns whether it would be possible for everyone to reach agreement on specific policies, given the wide range of opinions that people from a variety of different cultures and backgrounds would bring with them to the deliberative process. Norton (2005) addresses this problem by suggesting that agreement can often be reached on specific policy objectives even if the reasons for supporting those objectives differ. What unites communities in dialogue is not their respective cultures, but rather the common problems they face and the need to find common solutions. Dialogue can be seen as an open-ended and ongoing process which need not have a "single, ideal endpoint" (2005, p. 572). The crucial feature is that the dialogical process should be an inclusive one in which all points of view receive a fair hearing and decisions reflect the will of the majority, with proper safeguards in place to prevent majority opinions from suppressing minority rights. If deliberative democracy can help resolve conflicts among a plurality of perspectives *within* cultures, there is no reason in principle why it could not also be adopted as a means for resolving conflicts among a plurality of perspectives *between* cultures (see Bohman 2007; Crocker 2008).

Do citizens have sufficient knowledge?

A third objection to direct democracy is the Platonic argument that the masses are driven more by passions than by reason and hence are unable to make intelligent

decisions themselves; decisions should instead be made by informed "experts," which in modern industrial societies, means primarily technocratic elites. The difficulty with the Platonic view is that it conflates moral decision-making capacity with technical knowledge. Even though citizens may not be able to understand all the technical aspects of a given policy, they can still have a very intimate knowledge of the effects such policies have on their own lives, on the lives of others, and on the environment (see Fischer 2000). Information can be solicited from experts when necessary, but final decisions about policies can still be made by citizens themselves. In any event, it is commonly recognized that democracy cannot function in the absence of an educated populace which is well-informed about issues and morally sensitive to the implications of the policies they implement. Educators and experts have an obligation not only to disseminate technical knowledge, which in the context of the present system often simply socializes people into the goals and procedures of the capitalist paradigm, but also to stimulate reflective thought on the social and ethical implications of the knowledge they impart.

Will people make the right decisions?

A fourth and related objection is that even if adequate knowledge can be obtained by citizens, they may still lack the will to implement ethically sound policies. It is conceivable that even in decentralized communities people could "democratically decide" to pursue lifestyles which are socially unjust and/or environmentally destructive. Some theorists (Heilbroner 1974; Ophuls 1977; Ophuls and Boyan 1992) offer the Hobbesian argument that coming to terms with environmental limits and initiating a steady-state economy may necessitate authoritarian political structures to curb human selfishness. While these writers may express a preference for a future order based on small-scale

communities and democratic decision-making, they nonetheless think, given their essentially negative evaluation of "human nature," that Leviathan (i.e., a strong, centralized government) is a distinct possibility.

This view can be criticized on two grounds. First, humans are neither completely selfish nor completely selfless, but rather have the capacity to act in both ways, meaning that it is impossible to ground political theory on an essentialized view of "human nature." Second, it will indeed be necessary for present levels of consciousness to be transformed if we are to create an alternative new world order based on the values of ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being. Changes in political and social structures must go hand in hand with changes in individual consciousness and attitudes. The arid debate among activists over which should be given greater priority—changes in personal consciousness or changes in political structure—is based on a false dilemma.

On the one hand, it is clear that changes in how individuals interact with nature are meaningless in the absence of changes in how societies relate to nature since it is society which, to a large although not exclusive extent, structures individual human actions. On the other hand, it is also clear that changes in how society interacts with nature cannot be enacted unless individuals have also changed their consciousness to a significant extent to see why such structural changes are necessary. Since the relationship between the two is reciprocal, changes in consciousness and changes in social structures must occur in conjunction with each other. A revolution which transforms social structures but fails to transform human consciousness cannot succeed, just as a transformation of human consciousness which makes no changes in social structures cannot succeed. Radical social change can only come about when the ideologies which underpin current social structures are challenged and new ways of structuring society are

proposed. The political solution is, therefore, not to have a system in which only philosophers become kings but rather one in which everyone becomes philosophers—in which case no kings are necessary.

How would disputes between local communities be mediated?

A fifth argument sometimes raised against the bioregional model is that the emphasis on local autonomy makes it impossible to prevent local communities from seeking to maximize benefits within their own communities while externalizing costs to other communities. This argument is often used to support the claim, advanced by both liberals (Dobson 1992, ch. 5) and socialists (Pepper 1993, chs. 4 and 5), that power and policymaking authority must be delegated to centralized political bodies to settle disputes among their members. Bookchin responds to Brecher's objection that under a decentralist system there would be nothing to prevent one city from dumping untreated wastes into a river which another city downstream used for drinking water by suggesting that any society which was seriously moving towards decentralist principles and participatory democracy would probably not be inclined to cause harm to other communities (1990b, p. 1). To an extent this is probably true: since needs would be moderated and supplied from within the community there would be no need to plunder other communities; self-sufficiency implies the ability to handle both production (input) and wastes (output). Against centralists it could also be argued that under a centralized global system the ability of some communities to plunder the resources of others and destroy their environment is in fact easier, since local communities which are affected by such actions typically lack the power to oppose the centralized forces which commit them. It is only by empowering local communities that such actions can be prevented.

Nonetheless, in situations in which one community sought to impose itself on another, it would be legitimate for the community to defend itself from such actions and, moreover, for other communities to express solidarity with the offended community by joining in its struggle. The point is not that all forms of coercive power across communities should be prohibited, but rather that whatever forms of coercion are employed should be justified. In the bioregional model, however, coercion would be horizontal rather than vertical; that is, it would emanate from equal communities joined together in a common cause rather than from a centralized power. Confederal organizations could still, of course, seek to mediate disputes before coercive efforts became necessary. Sale (1980, pp. 467-71) argues that historically the existence of large nation-states has served more to exacerbate than to resolve cross-cultural conflicts and wars, and that local communities have historically often banded together confederally in the face of outside aggression. Effective diplomacy at the local level can be carried out in the absence of a centralized world government, in a fashion similar to Jefferson's "people-to-people" diplomacy (not unlike the style of "diplomacy" currently conducted by many NGOs). War is, of course, still a distinct possibility. No political system yet invented has a perfect answer to the problem of war, and bioregionalism cannot be criticized for failing to offer one.

Doesn't localism promote insularity?

Sixth, it may be objected that the emphasis bioregionalists place on localism might be construed as promoting insularity, ethnocentrism, and racism. Pepper claims that bioregionalism encourages "regional chauvinism and racism" (1996, p. 308). Olsen (2000) sees affinities between bioregionalism and the right-wing ecology movement of fascist Germany. Brennan criticizes a version of bioregionalism he calls "homely

bioregionalism" on that the grounds that it ". . . may lead to totalitarianism, collective masochism, and possibly a mediocre kind of society which would stifle human creativity and override basic rights" (1998, p. 216). Clearly such worries must not be taken lightly and point to the need for bioregionalism to develop a wider perspective which transcends a purely local focus and promotes greater cross-cultural understanding and cooperation.

Indeed, since self-reliance implies that communities are able to "go it alone," insularity is a distinct possibility, and perhaps would be chosen by some communities, such as indigenous communities which prefer to preserve a distinctive way of life or, for that matter, religious fundamentalists and bigots (self-imposed exile from the rest of the world may not be entirely negative in such cases!). While the parochialism of communities which chose not to join into confederations with others may indeed be undesirable, participation could not be forced; individual membership in a given community would be purely voluntary, as would community membership in a confederation. Provided that the actions of the community have no effect on other communities there would be no occasion for outside interference. Once communities engage in actions which have an effect on other communities, however, by definition the communities involved have entered into a relationship with each other, requiring some form of engagement between them. Confederal institutions would offer the most plausible forum in which such engagements could be conducted without resorting to coercion or war.

Bookchin (1990b, p. 4) suggests that the "interdependence of communities" is a necessary condition for interaction and that an "authentic mutualism" should be based on "shared resources, produce, and policymaking." In Bookchin's view, being obliged to count on other people to "satisfy important material needs and realize common political goals" is a crucial factor in linking people together and avoiding parochialism. This

perspective can be modified, however, by suggesting that too much dependency can be unhealthy for communities in the same way that it is unhealthy for individuals and that good relationships among relatively autonomous communities can be better maintained on the basis of free association rather than on the basis of mutual dependence.

Complete isolation from other cultures is probably not desirable in any event because it gives us a limited and culture-bound view of the world, which we remain captivated by and are unable to transcend. Isolation from other cultures can be just as counterproductive to continued cultural evolution as conquest or domination by other cultures. Cultures which isolate themselves from alternative ways of thinking easily stagnate and become myopic. Values are preserved not because they are "good" and have been arrived at through a process of conscious reflection and deliberate choice in the face of competing alternatives but simply because they represent the way things have always been done. While it can be agreed that cultures are never completely static and that internal processes of change, whether slight or significant, are always taking place within them, a healthy cross-fertilization of ideas across cultures gives us a wider sense of what it is possible for humans to achieve. Cross-cultural dialogue can be valued because it enables us to develop our own cultural potential more fully. Even if we do not want to adopt certain customs or ways of thinking of other peoples, we nonetheless gain a greater appreciation for the rich diversity of cultural life that is possible.

Parochialism is thus by no means a necessary feature of the bioregional model. Bioregionalism has the capacity to develop a wider perspective which transcends a purely local focus and promotes greater cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. Thomashow (1999; see also Meredith 2005) has called for a "cosmopolitan bioregionalism," which sees bioregions and the communities which inhabit them as being nested in larger natural and social systems, from the micro-region to the macro-region,

with various forms of interaction occurring between the different scales. A high degree of cultural diversity based on the self-reliant pursuit of distinct cultural goals is perfectly compatible with a high degree of international solidarity and the ability to join together with others in confederal arrangements which allow problems to be resolved at the appropriate level without sacrificing the right of local communities to retain final decision-making power on matters which directly affect them.

Respect for local communities is in fact not antithetical to, but rather complementary with, efforts to achieve greater solidarity across cultures against all forms of oppression. Marshall, who shares the social libertarian perspective developed here, writes:

Living locally need not be parochial in the narrow sense. In an ecological society, one would be rooted in a locality, belong to a community, and have a strong sense of place. But one would be able to travel in mind and body. Involvement with others would form a widening circle, rippling out across the earth's surface from home district and region to identify with the whole of humanity, other species and eventually the entire world. A genuinely ecological society would be internationalist and interplanetary. (1992, p. 460)

While power and control are local, our concerns can be global—an idea summed up in the familiar Green slogan, "Act locally, think globally."

Isn't democracy simply a Western idea anyway?

A final objection against the bioregional model is the charge that direct democracy, with its roots in ancient Greece, is itself a Western political ideal which has

limited applicability outside of the West. While the concept of democracy indeed has its origins in Western thought and culture, it can nonetheless be evaluated on its own merits, according to both its desirability and practical viability. In the same way that no idea should be accepted simply because it is part of a particular culture—*all* cultural ideas can be subjected to reflective criticism—so too no idea should be rejected simply because it is the product of a particular culture. Although different cultures may employ different decision-making processes, bioregionalism would propose the minimal (and hardly excessive) claim that decisions be made in ways which are as inclusive as possible and which do not allow some groups to dominate other groups or exclude them from the political process. As Sale writes, "Given coherent and limited populations, some forms of democracy would be possible, and even consensus might be a goal, but neither would be necessary as long as political arrangements were voluntary and place-specific" (2001, p. 42). It must also be remembered that current forms of democracy are far from reaching their fullest potential—there is much that can be criticized *within* the democratic tradition itself. The West cannot unproblematically set up its current form of democracy as a model for others to follow.

CONCLUSION

Instead of concentrating power in centralized institutions at the global level, bioregionalism seeks to disperse both political and economic power to the local level. In this model horizontal communication would involve all the members of a local community (not just elites) and vertical communication would be from the bottom up (from the local to the global). The communication process would thus be the exact opposite of the current situation in which most horizontal communication takes place

only between elites (in global institutions) and most vertical communication is from the top down (from the global to the local).

In its broad features the bioregional paradigm is consistent with the trend towards more localized forms of economic and political decision-making. Rather than simply accept globalization as "inevitable," there needs to be a much wider debate among all citizens about the kind of society we would like to create, both within and between cultures. Economic and political decentralization does not mean that there would be no opportunities or need for cross-cultural dialogue. As has been demonstrated, isolationism is not a necessary component of the bioregional paradigm. An increased appreciation for cross-cultural exchanges helps us to break out of our cultural mindsets and explore a wider range of what it is possible for humans to achieve, while simultaneously enabling us to work together on problems which cross national and cultural boundaries.

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