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Environmental Pragmatism and Bioregionalism

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Bioregionalism can strengthen environmental pragmatism by making it more critical of the status quo and even more environmental, without abandoning pragmatism's democratic aims. It thus answers important objections to pragmatism raised by Robyn Eckersley. Despite some apparent differences, bioregionalism is a form of environmental pragmatism, as it incorporates practical ethics and is committed to pluralism and democratic community. Bryan Norton's environmental pragmatism is already close to a bioregional view. After answering Eckersley, the paper concludes by raising the question of whether environmental pragmatists should be bio-regionalists.

Robin Eckersley criticizes environmental pragmatism for not being sufficiently radical or even sufficiently environmental.[1] This is due, she says, to its role as a mediator rather than an advocate in environmental issues, a role that weakens environmental pragmatism's democratic credentials because it is fails to empower marginalized groups and interests. Eckersley's criticisms should not be ignored. On the other hand, bioregionalism, or a bioregional environmental pragmatism, is not limited in the ways that Eckersley identifies. It can take a stronger environmentalist position while maintaining a commitment to pragmatism's mediator role. Despite bioregionalism's and environmental pragmatism's different histories – one a grass roots movement, the other a more academic movement – they have several important things in common. Both emphasize practical rather than theoretical concerns, and see theory as a tool for accomplishing concrete ends; both focus on local action by local communities; both value pluralism. Admittedly, bioregionalists do not usually refer to themselves as pragmatists, and many hold some non-naturalist views at odds with pragmatic naturalism. Nonetheless, I will argue that in terms of its core values, bioregionalism is actually a form of environmental pragmatism. More to the point, I will argue that bioregionalism can address Eckersley's criticisms while advancing pragmatism's goal of enhancing public participation.

The present paper first outlines the main ideas of bioregionalism. It then argues that bioregionalism – especially its ethics of reinhabition – is fundament-

ally a kind of practical ethics, which makes it a form of pragmatism. Next, discussion turns to two central commitments of environmental pragmatism – pluralism and democratic community. Bioregionalism grounds these commitments in local life-places. We will see that Bryan Norton's pragmatism, which emphasizes place-based community, is already close to a bioregional view. Finally, we will see how bioregionalism can overcome Eckersley's objections that environmental pragmatism is insufficiently radical or environmental. The paper concludes by asking whether environmental pragmatists should, then, be bioregionalists.

1. Bioregionalism and the Ethics of Reinhabitation

Because it is highly decentralized, both as a movement and a body of thought, a precise definition of bioregionalism is hard to come by. This may be for the best in a practiced-based and constantly evolving cultural movement. Better, says bioregionalist writer Jim Dodge, that definitions emerge from practice than be imposed dogmatically on the movement.[2] This is an admirable pragmatist sentiment. Despite lacking a clear definition, it is clear that bioregionalism is primarily concerned with the ecological health of local life-places and with sustainable ways of living that are adapted to those places. Bioregionalists may take on wider problems that affect other regions and the planet as a whole, but the starting place of concern is local.

A bioregion, etymologically, is a life-place. Normally we might define a region politically, economically, ethnically, or some other exclusively human activity. In contrast, a *bio*region is marked out in terms of biotic communities, watersheds and terrain. Or it may be defined by a few dominant species, by a mountain range, a drainage system, or any number of natural features. Bioregions can be identified at different scales, from a small river valley to a large biogeoclimatic zone. The boundaries of a particular bioregion are determined culturally as defining the life-place identified as home by the people living within it. While a bioregion is defined culturally by its inhabitants, it is done so on the basis of the natural features of place, especially those features most important to the local way of life. Significantly, the boundaries of a bioregion are not determined by outside scientists or experts.

A bioregion is a home, a place where human lives are lived. Ask a bioregionalist where she calls home, and she might say the Hudson River Estuary rather than New York City. The place where she lives is not the built environment, but the natural environment that persists under, in and around the built environment that dominates the landscape. As a home to human life, a bioregion is, in the words of Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann, both "a geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness."[3] It is both a physical place and a way of seeing ourselves in place. For example, as a result of ten years of research, the Mannahatta Project has produced a detailed online and interactive map of Manhattan Island as it was at the time of contact.[4] Users can discover

what their own part of the island was like in terms of terrain, plants, and animals at that time. This can give them a different sense of where they live, a different terrain of consciousness. The map's creators describe the aim of the project as follows:

> The goal of the Mannahatta Project has never been to return Manhattan to its primeval state. The goal of the project is to discover something new about a place we all know so well, whether we live in New York or see it on television, and, through that discovery, to alter our way of life. New York does not lack for dystopian visions of the future.... But what is the vision of the future that works? Might it lie in Mannahatta, the green heart of New York, and with a new start to history, a few hours before Hudson arrived that sunny afternoon four hundred years ago?[5]

By reconstructing a vision of the past and giving New Yorkers a bioregional sense of where they live, the creators hope to influence a positive vision of the future. What this vision might be like is left entirely open. This openness to possibilities of the future while carrying a sense of the natural history of the past is typical of a bioregional view of place. In my own experience of living several years in a large West Coast city, I located myself not on the grid pattern of streets and avenues, but in a small local watershed. I sought out places where that water still flowed under the streets and buildings, emerging sometimes into the open air. I learned about the indigenous plants, animals and human culture, and investigated the potentialities of living by means of what the local climate could provide.

Bioregional-*ism* asks people to base as much of their lives as possible, including their economies, their arts, and even their identities, within the natural boundaries and ecologies of their local bioregion. This runs counter to the increasingly globalized mass culture, with its economies, ideologies and identities completely detached from local life-places. Modern life is not without its local identities and celebrations, but these are usually centered on a local history, or the ethnicity of a local neighborhood, or perhaps on local cuisine or music. Bioregionalism's sense of place is the human connection to local ecologies, waterways, flora and fauna, and weather patterns. Those things, not one's street location, not the local architecture, and not one's ties to a culture rooted in a distant land, define a bioregional place-based identity.

Bioregionalism's focus on local life-places distinguishes it from most broad-based environmental movements and organizations, which are usually policy-based rather than place-based. Its basic principle is simply this: *All adaptation is local and particular; human adaptation is no exception.* While many of the environmental problems we face are global in scale, human adaptation must ultimately be to particular places. Adapting to a particular place requires developing intimate knowledge of and sensitivity to its biotic inhabitants. Without intimate connection there can be no actual adaptation.

Mainstream environmental groups might be concerned with specific places such as wildlife areas, but these groups are usually interested in protection rather than adaptation, and their members often live outside the area they wish to protect. For bioregionalism, environmental protection is part of a wider program of adaptation, of developing sustainable ways of living within one's home ecosystem.[6] Broad-based and mainstream environmental movements are valuable and necessary, but this should not distract us from adapting to our particular life-places.[7]

Robert Thayer, who has taught Landscape Architecture at UC Davis in the Central Valley of California for over 35 years, offers what he calls a premise of bioregionalism:

> Unless we humans can find ways to consider ourselves as residents of natural regions and to clearly *identify* with endemic dimensions, limitations, and potentials of land, water, and other life-forms, we will not be able to live sustainably, and we will continue to overestimate the carrying capacity of the regions we inhabit. It makes little sense to discuss "sustainable development" at the global level if no thought is given to the local places and scales where human life actually takes place. The first step toward a regenerative future for humans is to reassess where we are.[8]

A key word here is *identify*. According to bioregionalism, only by identifying with our local places will we care enough to develop the knowledge and feeling for the place that is required for living sustainably within a regional carrying capacity. Just as sensitivity to the needs of another human being requires identification with that human being, sensitivity to place requires identification of oneself with that place. According to pragmatist philosopher and social psychologist G. H. Mead, identifying with others and developing our self-identity through the eyes of others is fundamental to being human. What Mead did not say, but perhaps could have, is that this process extends beyond our relationships with other people. We can come to identify with other creatures and with a life-place as a whole. We can learn to see our actions from the point of view of other members of a biotic community. We might even say that a life-place has a "personality" or "character," and then see our own personality as tied to this wider character of place. This is being human in relation to our home region.

The ethical center of bioregionalism is *reinhabitation*, which is the effort to become native to a life-place. Reinhabitation requires first finding a place to live and then deciding to stay there. Bioregionalism considers staying put to be one of the more radical things an environmentalist can do. After deciding to stay in one place, reinhabitation requires "applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its exploiter."[9] This involves turning our habits of attention and consumption away from the global market and toward the local

ecosystem, forming concrete respectful relationships with local plants and animals. Reinhabitation advocates "a society based *in* rather than *on top of* life."[10] A society based *in* a life-place is a society where people are materially tied to the local ecology and where they identify with and are knowledgeable about their local life-place. The prefix "re" in reinhabitation refers to the fact that most places in North America were once inhabited by native peoples whose cultures were members of a biotic community, and whose identity encompassed their relations with the local plants and animals. These peoples have been decimated, and their inhabitory cultures have been seriously eroded, if not altogether destroyed. The "re" in reinhabitation keeps in full view that we, either as the descendents of earlier colonizing peoples or as more recent immigrants, must learn with new tools and under new and radically different conditions what previous local cultures had already established before colonization.

Bioregionalism is a cultural movement, not just a political movement. From its beginnings it has sought to develop educational programs and modes of cultural and artistic expression based on knowledge of local natural histories.[11] Bioregionalism originated in Northern California in the late 1960s and early 1970s by people who wanted to live more authentically connected to their local ecologies, though it should not be confused with the so-called "back-to-the-land" movement. Many bioregionalists are artists, musicians, thespians and writers, and many are city dwellers. As bioregional thought and art developed, it was given voice in newsletters and periodicals such as *Raise the Stakes* out of San Francisco, which connected emerging bioregional groups across the continent into a self-identified movement. This movement was further consolidated through bioregional congresses in the '80s and '90s. More than just networking events, they provided an arena for a diversity of cultural expression. They also produced a series of Proceedings that included statements of principles.[12] These statements were not taken to be foundational; they were seen as agreements from which further work could be done. Bioregionalism has come to incorporate feminist values, community development, consensus decision-making, appropriate technology, and a respect for cultural diversity.

2. A Practical Ethics

Bioregionalism is a form of environmental pragmatism because its ethics of reinhabition is a practical ethics, not an applied ethics. The distinction between practical ethics and applied ethics was first introduced by Bryan Norton to differentiate environmental pragmatism from other forms of environmental ethics.[13] Applied ethics, which is now of course a well-established branch of professional philosophy, starts with ethical theories and "applies" them to problems in areas such as medicine, business and the environment. The aim of applied ethics is to develop well-worked out ethical theories that have the widest range of application and that can withstand criticism from the proponents of other theories. Ethical theories are "tested" by seeing if they can deal with hard

cases in a consistent fashion. These may be actual cases but often they are hypothetical thought experiments. *Practical ethics* moves in the opposite direction. It starts with actual everyday problematic situations, and uses ideas and methods of philosophy as tools to help resolve those situations. The emphasis is on practice, outcomes, and reaching agreements, with theory being a middle term between problem and solution. To take this practical approach to environmental issues, using ideas as tools to resolve real environmental problems, is to be an environmental pragmatist. Any practical ethics is inherently pragmatic.

The ethics of reinhabitation is a species of practical ethics because it is a mode of practice growing out of actual problems of living in relationship to place. It is shaped to practical contingencies. Quoting Jim Dodge again, the theories and ideas of reinhabitation are rooted in the "palpable intelligence of practice."[14] Without that practice, theories lose their hold on reality and end up being diversions that deflect us from putting on our boots and getting to work. Doug Aberle, a historian of the bioregional movement, maintains that the "goal of the bioregional theorist has been to reflect on the needs and values of living-in-place, not to craft a seamless theoretical construction or utopian diatribe."[15] Theoretical and utopian constructions are likely to be intellectual importations that evoke a desire for an ideal theoretical consistency rather than practical workability in everyday situations.

Reinhabitation is not an "applied" ethic because it espouses no basic ethical principle other than becoming native to a place. Actually, this is not so much a principle as it is, says Dodge, "a notion ... an inclination, an urge."[16] Bioregionalists do not take up reinhabition merely because it seems to be a good idea, or because it is a way of achieving some other objective. They take it up because they are drawn to the biotic community in which they live. Reinhabitation is a name given to this urge or inclination. It is a pointer, a sign indicating a direction. It points to place. It says, "Start here." Like pragmatism, it says start where we are in the problematic situation. That problematic situation is experienced in a local place. Adhering to a preconceived set of ethical principles is not living in place. Place becomes, in that case, an instrument in the service of a set of principles rather than principles being instruments in the service of living in place.

3. Pluralism

Bioregionalism shares with other forms of environmental pragmatism a commitment to pluralism. Pragmatists have often argued against forms of ethical monism that seek an ethic built on one fundamental principle such as intrinsic value in nature.[17] A single fundamental principle is not likely to be useful across the diversity of actual problematic situations. And trying to insert monistic principles into actual debates about environmental policies and resource planning usually works against achieving agreement among the concerned

parties. Andrew Light and Eric Katz see environmental pragmatism as a call for moral pluralism that places less importance on debates about theory and more importance on reaching agreements about practical issues of policy. [18] Instead of trying to find some fundamental ethical principle, environmental pragmatists are interested in how the variety of ideas proposed by environmental thinkers can be of practical benefit to activists and policy-makers. They are also keenly aware that moving forward on policy often requires compromises with people that have contrary interests.

Pluralism is an important element of reinhabitory ethics. Rather than being founded on a monistic principle or view of nature, reinhabitation is, as mentioned earlier, more an inclination or urge. As such it is indeterminate, and its expression is as multifaceted and diverse as the places themselves. And as cultural anthropology shows, there are multiple ways to inhabit any one place. When we start with an emotional bond and felt commitment to a life place, intellectual ideas are subordinate to this commitment. Whether these ideas come from professional thinkers, or are tropes circulating in the wider society, they stand available as a variety of tools to be selected and used by reinhabitants. The broader the range of ideas that can be tried out in particular circumstances, the better. Furthermore, bioregionalism and a commitment to living in place have no ethnic restrictions. The stimulating cultural diversity often found in modern urban life provides a rich resource for an emerging reinhabitory culture. There is nothing, for instance, in the Mannahatta Project that favors any particular ethnic or cultural background. Bioregional pluralism is, however, not a completely open-ended relativism because not every value is consistent with living in place. For instance, climate and local flora and fauna set limits on clothing, diet, and associated cultural practices, shaping local reinhabitory values. Bioregional values acknowledge the realities of place.

Reinhabitory values are "situated" rather than "founded." They are situated within a web of practices and their consequences. To be effective and adaptive, the consequences of enacting place-based values need to cohere and be supportive of each other, and the outcomes of what we do today have to be consistent with what we did yesterday. This is a practical consistency of adaptation rather than a systematic consistency of theory; theoretical consistency should be in service of a practical coherence of values. Reinhabitory values are developed pragmatically in relationship to other values, and there is no single value or metaphysical principle that underlies all others. Individually, different bioregionalists might adhere to this or that ontology, but for the most part these are not essential to reinhabitation.

4. Local Communities

Both bioregionalism and environmental pragmatism emphasize the importance of local communities or "local publics" participating in policy decisions. A functioning democracy, in Dewey's view, requires informed and active publics

that coalesce around common interests and issues. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey emphasizes the necessity of local community for the formation of such publics. "Whatever the future may have in store, one thing is certain. Unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately resolve its most urgent problem: to find and identify itself."[19] He concludes the book by saying that "intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium." Dewey also emphasizes that for a public is to identify itself and become organized it must stay put. "How can a public be organized," Dewey asks, "when literally it does not stay in place?"[20] An organized public requires attachments, and attachments "are bred in tranquil stability; they are nourished in constant relationships. Acceleration of mobility disturbs them at their root. And without abiding attachments associations are too shifting and shaky to permit a public readily to locate and identify itself."[21] For a bioregionalist, those attachments include the local biotic community.

Norton emphasizes the importance of local communities and communal values for protecting natural ecosystems. In Norton's view, communal values emerge on a community scale and are not reducible to the aggregation of the values of independent individuals.[22] They are also not reducible to short-term economic values, or what he calls "economism." Communal values function on a longer time-scale than the life of an individual. They are based on an interest in perpetuating the community across generations. A community interested in its own inter-generational sustainability must be interested in sustainable relationships with its natural environment. It must have "place-based" values that transcend the individual and short-term economism. At the same time, sustainable place-based values require sustainable local communities.[23] This is because only in a stable community can "social learning" take place, where the community as a whole is able to learn and incorporate into its collective experience the knowledge and expertise necessary to preserve local ecosystems, and then pass this knowledge on to the younger generation.[24] A community is able to project place-based values into the future, and thus create a legacy for the benefit of future community members. The effort to establish ecological sustainability is almost guaranteed to fail if it does not transmit ecological values to future generations of the community,

Norton criticizes John Passmore who maintains that we do not have obligations to future generations because we do not know what values they will hold.[25] Norton replies that rather than accepting our ignorance about future generations, conservationists should take the responsibility to develop communities that will perpetuate their ideas and ideals. "The protectionist sets out to ensure, to the extent possible, that people of the future will share with us a love and caring respect for these same special places.... Nature protectionists, in short, see the protectionist effort as a process of community building."[26]

Place-based identities and sustainable communities are created by acts of collective self-definition and by choices about what to value. These choices

"cannot be separated from the process of building a culture," a culture that will involve "creating literature, arts and ideas that instill current actions with meaning."[27] There is, says Norton, a need to "perpetuate a place-based and natural sense of ourselves," where places are not loci of consumption but are "shrines" where people stay in touch with natural and cultural history."[28]

It is only a short step from Norton's ideas on sustainability, identity and place-based community to an ethics of reinhabitation. What bioregionalism and reinhabitation add is seeing one's identity in terms of membership in a biotic community. This is more that just living somewhere; it is settling in and becoming native to that place, and becoming a natural part of a region. According to bioregional thought, only this kind of rooted commitment to reinhabitation will create the communities of place that Norton envisages. If bioregionalism is right about this, and if Norton is right about community, identity, and place-based values, then pragmatists who agree with Norton should readily embrace bioregional values.

Adapting to place is a social affair. But what kind of social relationships are capable of being adaptive? Adaptation to a local environment requires integrated social relationships tied together in a web of mutual support. We can hardly expect fragmented or conflicting social relationships to be adaptive. This is another way of saying that human adaptation requires organized community and that reinhabitory ethics is a community ethics. Social relationships that lack integration, and thus lack the stability that comes with it, cannot be adaptive in the long run because there is no stable social fabric within which sustainable values can take root and flourish. People form a local bioregionally based community to the extent that they develop mutually supportive economic, educational, and artistic values that are grounded in a local place.

Commitment to place and community provides a basis for resolving land use conflicts in public planning processes. Agreements must start from somewhere; without a baseline of agreement, little or no progress can be made toward reconciling conflicting interests. Montana politician and bioregional civic leader Daniel Kemmis has found that in order to reach agreement, civic participation needs a tangible object. That object, he says, is the integrity of the local place itself.[29] Norton, consistent with Kemmis's bioregional view, advocates sustainability and the value of place-based community as the baseline for policy discussions. People committed to sustainability form what he calls a community of truth-seekers, a Peircean community of inquiry that moves toward stable agreements in the long run.[30] People with conflicting interests and viewpoints can form a community of inquiry if they agree to deliberate on the basis of sustainability.[31] Anyone not interested in sustainability is not actually interested in resolving environmental issues, nor are they interested in the long-term future of the community. Their interest is usually to win a battle for short-term economic gain. For bioregionalism, a commitment to sustainability is synonymous with a commitment to reinhabitory values, for only by endeavoring to live *in* a place rather than on it can we establish ecologically sustainable

practices. Any other approach is too disconnected from ecological realities and is insufficiently sensitive to achieve sustainability. If sustainability requires reinhabitory values, then reinhabitory values must play some part of the baseline agreement for democratic deliberation about local environmental issues. Some may argue that it is unrealistic to expect all parties in land use debates to accept bioregional values as baseline agreements. However, if sustainability is accepted as fundamental to a decision-making process, the door is open for people who have a reinhabitory vision to expand Norton's ideas in a bioregional direction.

The method that is used to make collective environmental policy decisions is important. Environmental pragmatists advocate community-scale grass roots democracy, but they have not said much about the actual process. Presumably, that is to be determined by the communities themselves. The bioregional movement has been more specific about method. It has used consensus decision-making almost from its inception. This is for good reason. Only through consensus can the required degree of cooperation be developed for long term sustainable community. And only through consensus can communities develop the degree of social cohesion required for human adaptation to their natural surroundings. A community rife with the divisions fostered by the usual antagonistic model of democratic decision-making is not likely to develop integrated and sustainable relationships with its natural surroundings. Sustainability and valuing place-based community provides the basis of agreements upon which consensus can be developed.

5. A More Critical Environmental Pragmatism

Robyn Eckersley raises important objections to environmental pragmatism that are notable because they come out of her support for pragmatism's own aim of enhancing the democratic process.[32] She distinguishes between what she calls "mediators" and "advocates," with environmental pragmatists taking a mediating role that is respectful of the diversity of views on environmental issues and is focused on practical problem-solving. Ecocentrists, on the other hand, are advocates who are critical of the status quo and are deeply committed to certain environmental values. Eckersley places more value in advocacy than she finds in environmental pragmatism.[33] While she is sympathetic to the democratic aims of pragmatists and the importance of the mediator role to those aims, she maintains that by holding strictly to the mediator role, environmental pragmatism limits itself in ways that are counter-productive to its environmental and democratic aims.

The first limitation described by Eckersley is that environmental pragmatism is insufficiently critical and emancipatory from the perspective of oppressed and marginalized groups and nonhuman species. Environmental pragmatism, she says, supports "a social and political philosophy of justice that is essentially proceduralist."[34] It is primarily concerned with identifying "conversational conditions under which citizens can begin to negotiate their

political differences."[35] Eckersley thinks that as a consequence of taking this approach, environmental pragmatism does not look at the big picture in which environmental degradation takes place. Instead, it works toward interest accommodation in the context of a system that is destructive of nature. Its respect for moral pluralism, she says, necessarily entails respect for traditions and cultures that do not value nonhuman nature. It prefers incrementalism rather than a radical overhaul of social institutions because such an overhaul is too contentious.[36] Eckersley insists, rightly, that making significant headway on environmental issues requires a critique of the dominant culture, a critique that she claims is missing from the purely proceduralist approach of environmental pragmatism.

Environmental struggles are not just a matter of competing values and moral beliefs about the natural world. Different groups not only have different values; they have unequal access to the structures of power and political authority. Treating all parties as equals ignores differences in economic and political power. Eckersley maintains that pragmatism's narrow focus on problem-solving between stakeholders tends to ignore these power differences and is thus insufficiently empowering for marginalized groups such as indigenous peoples, people of color, and environmental protectionists. Environmental pragmatism relies on the goodwill of the interested parties.[37] This goodwill is often not forthcoming due to vested interests and social prejudice against marginalized groups. Under these conditions, just giving a group a place at a negotiating table does not ensure that their voice will be adequately heard and that their values will be seriously considered. It may even function as a form of co-optation. Faced with this prospect, it is sometimes in the interest of marginalized groups to disrupt the apparently democratic processes that do not give them proper consideration and representation.[38] The struggles of indigenous peoples to gain a genuine hearing in decision-making processes provide ample evidence of this problem.

In answer to Eckersley, bioregionalism has a critical view of the big picture while it focuses on solutions in local regions. It fundamentally critiques the dominant society as being rootless and disconnected from place, and it takes a radical stand against the environmental destruction that is part and parcel of that society. Bioregionalism demands a fundamental shift in our values, and may require some basic lifestyle changes – most notably settling down and making a commitment to place a priority over a commitment to the market economy. Bioregionalism directly addresses the power imbalances between external economic interests and local sustainability by opening up the conversation to voices that usually are under-represented, such as indigenous peoples, those working to preserve endangered species, and to anyone interested in living in place who has developed an understanding of local conditions. In short, bioregionalism takes a more radical stance and encourages more environmental advocacy than is usually found in environmental pragmatism.

Eckersley contends that a move toward advocacy must entail a move away from pragmatism's mediator role.[39] But this is not the case for

bioregionalism, which can take an advocacy role without abandoning a commitment to pragmatism and participatory democracy. First, bioregionalism's use of consensus, which it sees as integral to living in place, supports pragmatism's commitment to democratic deliberation by allowing and encouraging all voices to be clearly heard. Second, bioregionalism does indeed set limits to pluralism and to interest accommodation by calling for reinhabitory values to be part of base-line agreements in resolving land management issues. But this does not mean moving environmental pragmatism away from its mediator role. No form of pluralism can afford to be without limits, just as no form of toleration can be tolerant of everything. The question is how and where these limits are established. Norton proposes that a commitment to sustainability can set the pragmatic limits on democratic deliberation about environmental issues. Bioregionalism agrees, but shifts the limits of pluralism in the direction of more local and radically environmental voices, and further away from outside interests. This more radical shift in limits is required if sustainability is to be taken seriously. Within those limits there still are many, often conflicting voices to be heard and interests to be negotiated.

Eckersley thinks that Norton's principle of sustainability does not steer policy deliberations toward environmental protection because it leaves open the question of what is to be sustained, for whom and over what time periods.[40] However, the prior question is who decides these issues and how? Bioregionalism answers this question directly. The regional community decides, based on bioregional values, and using methods of consensus with the long-term viability of the community in mind. Questions of what, for whom, and for how long, cannot be answered *a priori*, nor should they be answered by authorities outside of the local place-based community. They should only be answered through democratic deliberation among people who are committed to living in a place for the long term. Some advocates might be uncomfortable with leaving important environmental questions in the hands of people who just happen to live in or near a particular area. However, a commitment to sustainable place-based community and a pragmatic ethics of reinhabition is the best insurance against exploitation of local resources for the benefit of external and short-term economic interests.

Eckersley's second criticism of environmental pragmatism is that it is too instrumentalist. It closes off "non-instrumentalist democratic encounters" and filters out issues that do not address practical necessity. This is because instrumentalist issues – which usually means economic issues – are easier to bring into public deliberations and are easier to resolve than non-instrumental issues. They are certainly much easier to bring to the table than spiritual or aesthetic values, which are sometimes defended by environmentalists. According to Eckersley, by taking a strictly instrumentalist approach to deliberations between environmentalists and developers, environmentalists would always have to show that preserving and protecting nature is more instrumentally valuable than exploiting it.[41] Nature protection would always be

up against economic values. The conversation thus becomes one of merely competing utilities, with economic values the most likely winner. This is pretty much the case now. But as Eckersley insists, not all environmental conflicts ought to be reduced to questions of incompatible *use* of the environment by different interests or "stakeholders." Conflicts are often a manifestation of deeper social and political controversies concerning lifestyle, identity and cultural dispositions.[42] Practical environmental issues cannot be separated from these wider issues, and Eckersley believes that the pragmatic approach may not be adequate to address these wider issues. Parties to the conflict are unlikely to let go of their deeper commitments, yet it is just these deeper commitments that may ultimately have to change, and it is the deeper questions about our relationships to nature need to be asked.

Bioregionalism, though practical and pragmatic, is not merely instrumentalist. It does not view nature through the eyes of competing utilities. It is a cultural movement that involves artistic and spiritual values and personal and community identities. Becoming native to place is a broadly consummatory process. Moreover, its commitment to pluralism does not rule out the idea of intrinsic value in nature, though what "intrinsic" might ultimately mean is left open. A reinhabitory ethic can bring non-instrumental values to the planning table, so that the conversation is not reduced to merely competing uses. This opens up discussion about the deeper issues that are ignored in debates strictly over competing uses of nature by stakeholders. Bioregionalism certainly includes economics, but it asks economics for whom, for what end, and on what time scale. It favors local over outside economic interests, and is directed toward long-term sustainability of place-based communities. Local economies, if they are to be sustainable, must be circumscribed by local ecologies.

6. A More Environmental Pragmatism

Eckersley's third criticism is that there is nothing especially environmental about environmental pragmatism, and that it rests on liberal humanism rather than explicit environmental values. She claims that liberal humanism may not be pluralistic or inclusive enough for an environmental ethic. This is because it is anthropocentric. Liberal humanism is based on respect for individuals and their right to participate in the political processes that affect them. A democratic ecocentrism extends these principles to other species, as it sees no reason to restrict pluralism to the concerns of humans. Pragmatists, she says, usually rely on an empirical epistemology that finds it difficult to incorporate the position of other species in its deliberations. It understands ideas and beliefs through their consequences, but these are consequences for humans. Eckersley concedes that pragmatists do recognize that some cultures and individuals value nonhuman nature for its own sake, and that these must be brought into the conversation if stakeholders hold these values. However, inclusion of nonhuman values is only through particular human stakeholders. If a particular debate does not include

such people, then other species will not be represented and non-human values will not be recognized. The result is that pragmatism is not, practically speaking, sufficiently ecological. It is only sufficiently ecological by the accident of having people with ecocentric values participating in a debate. In contrast, ecocentric theorists seek ways for deliberative democracy to include the representation of other species as a matter of principle.

The bioregional answer to these criticisms is that the human community is an integral part of a wider biotic community, and that a reinhabitory human community includes sensitive relationships with other species. Since the welfare of these species is intertwined with the welfare of the human community, humans cannot reinhabit an area without being concerned about other species and the flourishing of the bioregion as a whole. We cannot reinhabit a place without taking the position of other species when making decisions that affect the local ecosystem. The biological community becomes part of the human community's identity. Other species are cohabiters of home; or more accurately, they constitute home. Some species in a bioregion can serve as indicator species and thus can "speak" for the health of the ecosystem as a whole. Thus it makes good pragmatic sense to give them some form of representation in democratic decision-making. In short, bioregionalism makes environmental pragmatism environmental in the sense demanded by Eckersley – it incorporates ecocentric values, but it does so as a necessary and pragmatic part of human adaptation.

7. Should Environmental Pragmatists be Bioregionalists?

To sum up, bioregionalism is a form of environmental pragmatism because its ethics of reinhabitation is a practical ethics, and it shares with other forms of environmental pragmatism a commitment to pluralism and community. It can strengthen environmental pragmatism by making it more critical and more radically environmental while furthering pragmatism's goals of resolving practical issues and creating informed and active publics.

Does all this mean that environmental pragmatists should be bioregionalists? One of the aims of this paper is to bring bioregionalism to the attention of environmental pragmatists and to show that environmental pragmatists *could* be bioregionalists without abandoning pragmatism. Whether they *should* be is a matter that can only be pragmatically determined in practice. Nevertheless, several arguments point in this direction.

First, to reiterate, all adaptation is local and particular, including human adaptation. This should not be a controversial statement. Adapting to particular places requires intimate knowledge of place and sensitivity to the local ecologies. Acquiring this knowledge and sensitivity is strengthened by identifying with the biotic community of one's home life-place. Identification with the local biotic community is the root of bioregionalism. So if we want to live in an ecologically sustainable manner we should work towards adopting bioregional perspectives and practices – whether or not we are pragmatists.

Second, Norton's environmental pragmatism already goes a long way toward a bioregional view, emphasizing the importance of place-based communities for environmental protection and sustainability. Truly place-based communities are bioregional communities that find their identities within and through their relations with their local bioregions. If Norton is right in stressing the importance of place-based communities, then environmental pragmatists should be bioregionalists, at least ideally.

Third, Norton proposes the principle of sustainability as being in accord with pragmatism and as a baseline agreement for democratic deliberations about environmental issues. Bioregionalism, with its emphasis on local adaptation, offers an effective path to genuine sustainability and thus can serve as an important part of Norton's baseline. Furthermore, with its commitment to consensus process it offers an effective and socially inclusive method of reaching democratic agreements.

Finally, bioregionalism can answer the concerns raised by Eckersley, concerns that I believe need to be addressed. She claims that environmental pragmatism tends to be conservative, take too much for granted, avoids critical inquiry into the "big picture," is too accommodating to entrenched interests, does not address concerns of marginalized groups and is too incrementalist. Bioregionalism is anything but conservative in the usual socio-political sense, and it offers a radical and thoroughgoing critique of the big picture that goes against the grain of existing structures and mainstream discourse. It does not take anything for granted, since it sees the sense of place to be greatly attenuated in most of the population. It facilitates interest accommodation only within a long-term view of cultural sustainability within particular life-places. All interests that accept local sustainability are included, especially interests that are often marginalized. True, bioregionalism does accept incrementalism, but this is because incrementalism appears to be the only practical way that its radical aims are going to be achieved. If it *prefers* incrementalism, it is because it is suspicious of any utopian vision, however ecologically appealing, being imposed upon a democratic citizenry. Bioregionalism values agreement amongst conflicting interests because ultimately it is required for forging the social norms necessary to make sustainability a reality. In short, bioregionalism puts the environment into environmental pragmatism while maintaining and even enhancing pragmatism's democratic and mediator responsibilities.

These are all reasons that I think environmental pragmatists should be, at least in principle, bioregionalists. But in reality, are bioregionalism and reinhabitation too radical for environmental pragmatism? That is, even though bioregionalism is based on practice, is it in fact too utopian, too visionary? Is it really possible to live bioregionally? Bioregionalism definitely has a utopian element, perhaps more so than other forms of environmental pragmatism. But in the face of the current environmental destruction and the overwhelming economic and social forces arrayed against any form of environmental activism, any significant change must seem utopian. Also, there must be a utopian element

in any imagined future if it is to inspire untiring commitment. On the other hand, there is something very down to earth and unremarkable about bioregionalism. The source of inspiration is not lofty but rather homely and mundane. It is simply the place that is under our feet. Bioregionalism requires that we pull our attention away from lofty abstract ideals and wishful thinking, and away from the external demands of what constitutes a successful career or "good life" according to the global market place, and instead focus on an expanded idea of home. Bioregionalism is a pragmatic utopianism. Pragmatic utopian thinking is grounded in practical problems, with imagined futures functioning as tools to guide, motivate and inspire present activity.

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NOTES

1. Robyn Eckersley, "Environmental Pragmatism, Ecocentrism, and Deliberative Democracy: Between Problem-solving and Fundamental Critique," in *Democracy and the Claims of Nature: Critical Perspectives for a New Century*, ed. Ben Minteer and Bob Pepperman Taylor (Lanham, Md.: Rowan and Littlefield, 2002), pp. 49–70.

2. Jim Dodge, "Living By Life: Some Bioregional Theory and Practice," in *Home: A Bioregional Reader*, ed. Van Andruss, Christopher Plant, Judith Plant, and Eleanor Wright (Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 1990), p. 8. First published in *Co-evolution Quarterly* (Winter 1981).

3. Peter Berg and Raymond F. Dasmann, "Reinhabiting California," in *Home: A Bioregional Reader*. First published in *The Ecologist* 7 (1977), p. 399.

4. See www.themannahattaproject.org. The project is directed by landscape ecologist Dr. Eric Sanderson working for the Wildlife Conservation Society at the Bronx Zoo. "Going back to 1609 allows us to see what NYC was before it was a city and to reimagine the city's development in a way that would incorporate more of the natural cycles and processes (such as the hydrological cycle) that made the island the ecological gem that it was. This is not merely an academic flight of fancy. Rather, in undertaking this exercise, we will discover ways in which we can restore some of the ecological processes lost to NYC in particular, and more broadly, we will learn how to create cities that are more "livable" for people. For instance, maintaining natural waterways like streams and incorporating more open space and tree plantings into city planning would increase a city's aesthetic value, water quality, and air quality for city folk. Making cities more pleasant and rich places for people to live will increase city folks' standard of living, attracting more people to cities and minimizing sprawl development between cities where the ecological gems, the "Mannahattas" of today, currently reside." (www.themannahattaproject.org/how-it-all-began)

5. www.themannahattaproject.org/mannahatta-map

6. Bioregionalism is not primarily protectionist, though protection of species or areas of land can play an important part in a bioregional approach to environmental issues. That is, preservation is not a value unto itself, but it can be an integral part of

adapting to place. Preserving native species and biotic relationships while living among them are an important part of respecting the integrity of the local ecology. In some cases, this may require setting aside an area and leaving it alone.

7. It is worth noting that with a few exceptions, climate change initiatives in the U.S. have come from cities rather than from the state and national level. While we must pressure national and state legislators to take regulatory action and to sign global agreements, the most we can expect from these efforts are short-term incentives, regulations, and policing. This does not generate the *desire* and the *will* to reduce emissions. Furthermore, achieving international cooperation and national legislation is proving to be difficult. It may be impossible unless there is a groundswell of local actions that demonstrate the popular desire to reduce emissions. One important source of the will and desire for action is the attachment to the biological integrity of local places.

8. Robert L. Thayer, Jr, *Life Place: Bioregional Thought and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 8. Emphasis added.

9. Berg and Dasmann, "Reinhabiting California," p. 35.

10. Peter Berg, "More Than Just Saving What's Left.," in *Home: A Bioregional Reader*, p. 13. Originally published in *Raise the Stakes* 8 (Fall 1983).

11. For example, see "Where you at? – A Bioregional Quiz," compiled by Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman, Victoria Stockley, in *Home: A Bioregional Reader*. Originally published in *Co-evolution Quarterly* (Winter 1981).

12. The *Proceedings* from the North American Bioregional Congresses (NABC) II, III and IV (San Francisco: Planet Drum Foundation, 1986, 1988, 1990). Resolutions from plenary sessions of these congresses as well as those from Turtle Island Bioregional Gatherings (TIBC) V and VI can also be found at http://biocongress.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/cbc_resolutions-i-vi.pdf

13. Bryan Norton, "Applied Philosophy vs. Practical Philosophy: Toward an Environmental Policy Integrated According to Scale," in *Environmental Philosophy and Environmental Activism*, ed. Donald Marietta and Lester Embree (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995). Also Bryan Norton, "Integration or Reduction: Two Approaches to Environmental Ethics," in *Environmental Pragmatism*, ed. Andrew Light and Eric Katz (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 107.

14. Jim Dodge, "Living By Life," p. 10.

15. Doug Aberley, "Interpreting Bioregionalism," in *Bioregionalism*, ed. Michael McGinnis (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 36.

16. Dodge, "Living By Life," p. 5.

17. For example, see Norton, "Integration and Reduction" and Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," in Light and Katz, ed., *Environmental Pragmatism*.

18. Andrew Light and Eric Katz, "Environmental Pragmatism and Environmental Ethics as Contested Terrain," in *Environmental Pragmatism*, p. 5.

19. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), p. 216. In *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), p. 370.

20. *Ibid*., p. 371.

21. *Ibid*., p. 372

22. Bryan Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 234, 240.

23. *Ibid*., p. 336.

24. *Ibid*., p. 243.

25. *Ibid*., pp. 329–332.
26. *Ibid*., p. 331.
27. *Ibid*., p. 339–340.
28. *Ibid*., p. 338.
29. Thayer, *Life Place: Bioregional Thought and Practice*, p. 65.
30. Norton, *Sustainability*, p. 279. Also pp. 104–105.
31. *Ibid*., p. 204, 279.
32. Eckersley, "Environmental Pragmatism, Ecocentrism, and Deliberative Democracy."
33. *Ibid*., p. 55.
34. *Ibid*., p. 52.
35. *Ibid*., quoting Mark Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue: Justice, Dialogue and the Politics of Pluralism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 26.
36. *Ibid*., p. 65.
37. *Ibid*., p. 57
38. *Ibid*., p. 58.
39. *Ibid*., pp. 56, 60.
40. *Ibid*., p. 62
41. *Ibid*.
42. *Ibid*., p. 60.

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