

Both/And & Either/Or

a bioregional spin

Gene Marshall-March 2001

Many people today quite appropriately recommend that we replace bigoted Either/Or thinking with Both/And thinking. In most conflicts, the issue is not that one side is all good and the other side is all bad. Rather, both sides usually have good elements that need to be integrated into a more inclusive view of what is good.

The ancient yin/yang symbol of China is a profound expression of the validity of Both/And thinking. If yin is nature and yang is humanity, this symbol tells us that we need to find the balance between nature and humanity--a mutually enhancing relationship. It is not that humanity is good and nature is secondary. And it is not that nature is good and humanity is secondary. Rather, each are part on one whole. The diminishment of either diminishing them both. Both/And thinking supports similar balances between feminine and masculine, thinking and feeling, contemplation and action, and so forth.

Yet the ancient yin/yang thinking also contains within it the presence of Either/Or thinking. We EITHER have a balance between humanity and nature OR we don't. In other words, balance is good; imbalance is bad.

What I am attempting to indicate is that our choice is not between Both/And thinking OR Either/Or thinking. Rather, we need to employ each in their appropriate contexts. We need BOTH Both/And thinking AND Either/Or thinking.

The truth about Either/Or thinking is that some things can be discussed as True OR Not True, I can be EITHER realistic OR in delusion. If I am living in delusion, reality will eventually catch up with me and make clear to me that my delusion is not working as an adequate approach to living my life. For example, if I am living in the hypothesis that I can fly by flapping my arms. When I jump off the building and flap my arms, my delusion is revealed to me when my nose hits the concrete sidewalk. All thinking is not equally true. In real life there is such a thing as true OR false.

How might Either/Or thinking apply to bioregionalism? Bioregionalism, properly understood, is a vision into plain ordinary reality, a reality that is the reality for everybody whether they now realize that or not. EITHER Earth is our home OR Earth is not our home. EITHER we are Earthlings, OR we are something else--ghosts with an Earth-suit perhaps--a species in movement to some other planet--whatever. These whatevers are delusions. We are Earthlings.

Our home is EITHER a continent of this planet OR it is not. Our home is EITHER a region of this planet OR it is not. The bioregional vision, properly articulated is a choice between realism OR delusion.

If we say that bioregionalism is just one of many possible perspectives and that all these innumerable other perspectives are just as good, we are avoiding our responsibility to stand up for the truth as we see it. Life, after all, is not a relativistic swamp where everyone gets to claim as true whatever whim they fancy. Our grasp of truth is always limited and always growing, but there is such a thing as REALITY beyond our current sense of reality.

Our vision of bioregionalism and its implications will continue to grow and improve. We cannot claim that everything any of us now believe is the final version of realistic thinking. Nevertheless, the vision of bioregionalism that we are improving is a vision of REALITY and an attack on delusion in ourselves and others. Either bioregionalism is a crucial truth needed for a fully realistic living of life by each and every human being OR is it not.

To do our work confidently, we need see this Either/Or quality in our bioregional vision. I do not think it is honest or effective for us to be wishy-washy about this commitment. We need to be able to confront people with this life-giving choice to be bioregionally realistic.