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Etieyibo, E. (2023). **A Case for Environmental Justice**. Rowman & Littlefield.

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In a time marked by monumental environmental crisis and unjustified paralysis, *A Case for Environmental Justice* is a brilliant proposal for a pressing justice consideration for the environmental devastation in our world, one that must, as a matter of obligation, be swiftly considered. In this book, the prominent African philosopher, Edwin Etieyibo, amplifies his voice on pertinent environmental issues by first analyzing the precariousness of our world due to the cumulative human activities that have aggressively pushed our ecological footprint beyond biocapacity. The implication, he suggests, is that we are eating faster into our ecological reserve deficit, thereby raising urgent concerns about environmental sustainability and environmental justice.

Before making his case clear, he dismisses the population argument by appealing to global data. He argues that “consumerism” is a bigger challenge to our ecological reserve than the population argument. Of course, I think the population argument was an effort to turn the blame on developing countries that have large populations as the ones responsible for environmental degradation. Etieyibo refutes that claim and directs his “consumerist argument” at developed countries as the source of ecological deficit or resource depletion. He argues that developed countries are obligated to keep an eye on their population and curb consumption. This obligation must be taken seriously, considering its justification is premised on the twin demand of environmental sustainability and environmental justice (Etieyibo, 2023: 35).

In addition to placing blame on developed countries through his consumerism argument, Etieyibo introduces what he calls the “redistribution argument.” He emphasizes the moral duty of developed countries to share their amassed resources with developing nations, given their disproportionate consumption of global resources. Sharing accumulated resources with developing countries is neither required as a matter of compassion nor motivated by the willingness to provide aid, but one necessitated by the concern for global justice in general and environmental justice in particular (p. 137). His suggestion that the consumption solutions be combined with four proposals for the redistribution of resources under what he calls “fair economic transfer proposals” that include the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and know-how, financial assistance, fair trade agreement and the local transfer of resources being the fourth is appropriate. While his fair economic transfer proposal sounds good, he

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fails to underscore its feasibility rests upon so many complex and complicated agreements in a world that is yet to agree on an effective governance regime.

The latter part of the book focuses on the existential problem of climate change and how it can be addressed as an environmental justice issue. As with other authors before him, Etieyibo suggests that climate change solutions have been hindered by the “tragedy of commons” a situation where a binding collective agreement or course of action do not mediate collective ownership or interest. In a like manner to his earlier arguments, Etieyibo contends that developed countries are the culprits here again because they have chosen not to cooperate with previous binding agreements on emissions reduction. Instead, they continue their free-riding behaviour of burning fossil fuels that exacerbate the onslaught of harmful greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

The most insightful argument in the book is presented when Etieyibo expresses deep concerns about framing the obligations of the developed countries to address climate change in the current United Nations framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreement. He argues that these obligations are framed in the language of “obligation of beneficence (OOB)” which lacks the motivation to act. Rather, he suggests that these obligations should be framed as “obligations of justice (OOJ).” He argues that what makes OOJ distinct is that it is underscored by the “compulsion principle” which stipulates not only incentives for the performance of obligations but also outlines putative measures to ensure compliance with agreements rather than encourage a passive egoistic approach to addressing climate change that the (OOB) supports.

From the book’s first to the last chapter, Etieyibo presents a compelling and coherent case for environmental justice obligation on the path of developed countries. In fairness, Etieyibo has made a brilliant case for environmental justice that puts developed countries on moral trial if we follow it through. Etieyibo did a superb job not only in exposing the complexity of our environmental crisis but also in opening up another vista to the argument for environmental justice, one that environmental ethicists, activists and policy experts must pay attention to if they must influence the current direction of our liquidating environmental relations. The deftness of his argumentative move from OOB to OOJ must be commended, and I think UNFCCC and other climate policy experts must take a cue from such crucial requirements to address climate change in a just and equitable manner.

Although the book expresses concern for halting the destruction of the environment, redressing wrongs, and searching out forms of solidarity that do not exclude the weaker countries as demands of environmental justice, it does not foreground what justice is. This normative task remains as crucial as ever, even for environmental philosophers. Like so many other theorists before him, it is unlikely that Etieyibo’s case will provoke any major shift from the “business as usual” scenery that is seen at the yearly UNFCCC and beyond. Etieyibo’s compelling case faces the monumental task of achieving a different result, not because of its limitations. It should be clear that our world is not devoid of revolutionary political and ethical theories that can plausibly address the environmental crisis we face. The real problem, as Alexander Stoner and Andony Melathopoulos suggest, is that our world is characterized as one “in which revolutionary social theory exists without revolutionary practices” (Stoner and Melathopoulos, 2015: 74). The suggestion here is that what needs to be improved in addressing the problem of climate change is not the abundance of brilliant theories like that of Etieyibo but a dominant willpower to act.

Perhaps, the next UNFCCC at United Arab Emirates later in 2023, will present climate experts, policymakers and activists with yet another opportunity to be persuaded by Etieyibo's call to take environmental justice seriously. Heeding this call is important, not just because it is a benevolent one but because it is tied to a reversal in the unfortunate future that most developing countries face, one with increasing vulnerability to starvation and diseases, uncertain energy supply, loss of biodiversity and an existential threat to life, all because some countries have failed to act right by taming their appetites towards environmental plundering at the beginning and now deferring to take responsibility for their harmful actions to the environment. There is a serious obligation of justice on their path, which must be embraced and acted on.

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