

# Ethics & Agricultural Science

A scenic landscape photograph of a snowy field with a forest of bare trees and snow-capped mountains in the background. The title 'Ethics & Agricultural Science' is overlaid in red text at the top.

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A faint, stylized graphic of a leaf or feather in the bottom right corner, overlapping the text and the landscape image.











# The Conundrum of Consumption

A problem with no satisfactory answer

Limiting the consumer life to those  
who have it is not

Politically possible

Ecologically  
sufficient

Ethically defensible

# The Conundrum of Consumption

Extending the consumer life – style  
to all

Would hasten destruction  
of the ecosystem







How do we know what to do?

How do I know what I  
choose to do is the right  
thing to do?

# How do we know?

Empirical

Pragmatic

Skeptical



# How do we know?

Authority

Tradition

The Law

Revealed Truth

Reason

# Ethics

**What we all have  
and practice**

Societal  
Principles



# Ethics is not

A set of prohibitions

Ethics is not: Do Not Rules

Ideal, but Useless

Relative

Subjective

# Ethics and Morality

## Ethics

Deals with values - principles & beliefs we use to determine what is right-wrong, good-bad, etc.

## Morality

What people believe to be right-wrong.

Often synonyms



# **Ethics for Weed Science**

**We use ethical terms all day**

**good – bad**

**immoral - moral**

**right – wrong**

**just – unjust**

# **Personal Ethics**

**Marital sex**

**Voting**

**Church**

**Charity**

# **Social ethics**

**Murder**

**Torture**

**Pornography**

**Civil rights**

**Children**



# **Professional ethics**

**Don't fabricate the data**

**Give proper credit,**

**Honesty,**

**Report all results,**

**Plagiarism**

**Conflicts of interest**

# Goals

Justice

Peace

Prosperous

Democratic

Free of Prejudice

Humane

# **An ethic gone wrong is a prelude to:**

**Sweat shops**

**Mistreatment of women**

**Concentration camps**

**Child labor**

**Torture**



# **Ethical standards change**

**Sexual practices**

**Business hours**

**Smoking**

**Animal treatment**

**Is there an ethical  
position that  
characterizes  
agriculture?**

# **The central norm of agricultural science**

## **Productionism**

Producing food and  
fiber to benefit  
humanity

Is production a  
sufficient criterion?

Does it justify  
everything?



# Responsibilities

Sustainability

Pollution

Soil erosion

Harm

Habitat

Water

# **ETHICS FOR AGRICULTURE**

**And he gave it as his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.**

Swift, J. 1726. Gulliver's Travels ,Chap 6.

# **ETHICS FOR AGRICULTURE**

**There it is!**

**Is it adequate?**

**We have assumed  
it is!**

# Agricultural Assumptions

It is a moral good to feed  
people



## Wendell Berry, 2002

“We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world.....We have been wrong.....For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.”

# **ETHICS FOR AGRICULTURE**

## **Societal concern**

**Pesticide contamination**

**Soil erosion**

**Animal treatment**

**Loss of family farms**

**Corporate agriculture**

# ETHICS FOR AGRICULTURE

Are these just fringe concerns?

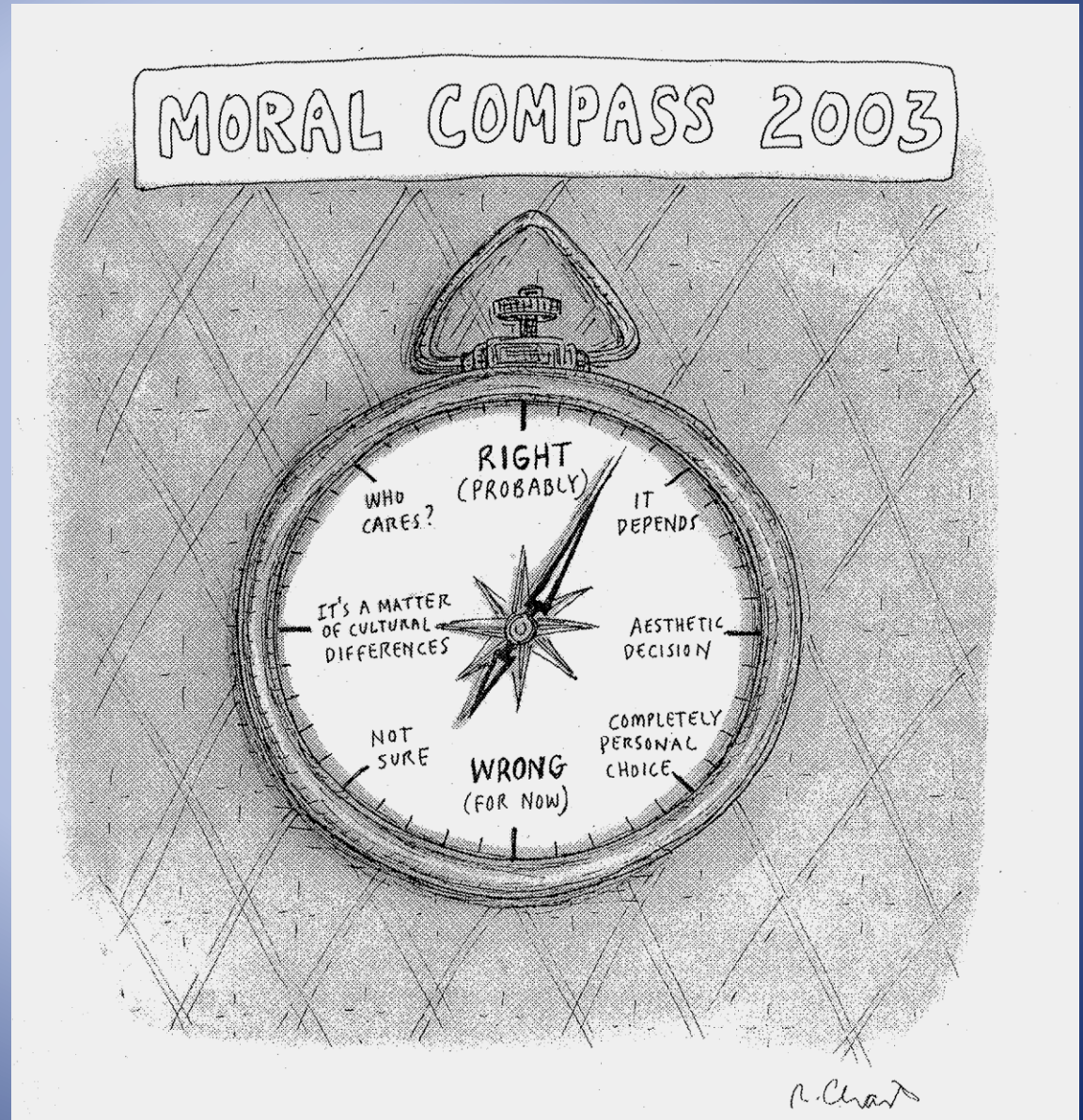
If they are societal  
concerns,

Agriculture has an  
ethical dilemma

# ETHICS FOR AGRICULTURE

Are there  
definite  
answers  
in ethics?

Common  
answer --  
No!





# **ETHICS FOR AGRICULTURE**

**Why?**

**Verifiability**

# **ETHICS FOR AGRICULTURE**

- 1. Standard of proof**
- 2. Proving vs. persuading**
- 3. Difficult questions**
- 4. Objective scientific ?**

# **ETHICS FOR AGRICULTURE**

**Agriculture the  
essential human activity,**

**Must have a firm ethical  
foundation**

**It's not just  
about results.**

# Three points about agricultural science

1. Those engaged in agriculture are certain about the moral correctness of what they do.
2. The basis of their moral certainty is not obvious to those who have it.
3. Agriculture's moral certainty is potentially harmful because it is unexamined.

# Moral Certainty and Debate

Foundational theories

Guides – not absolute rules

Invisible foundation

No single principle



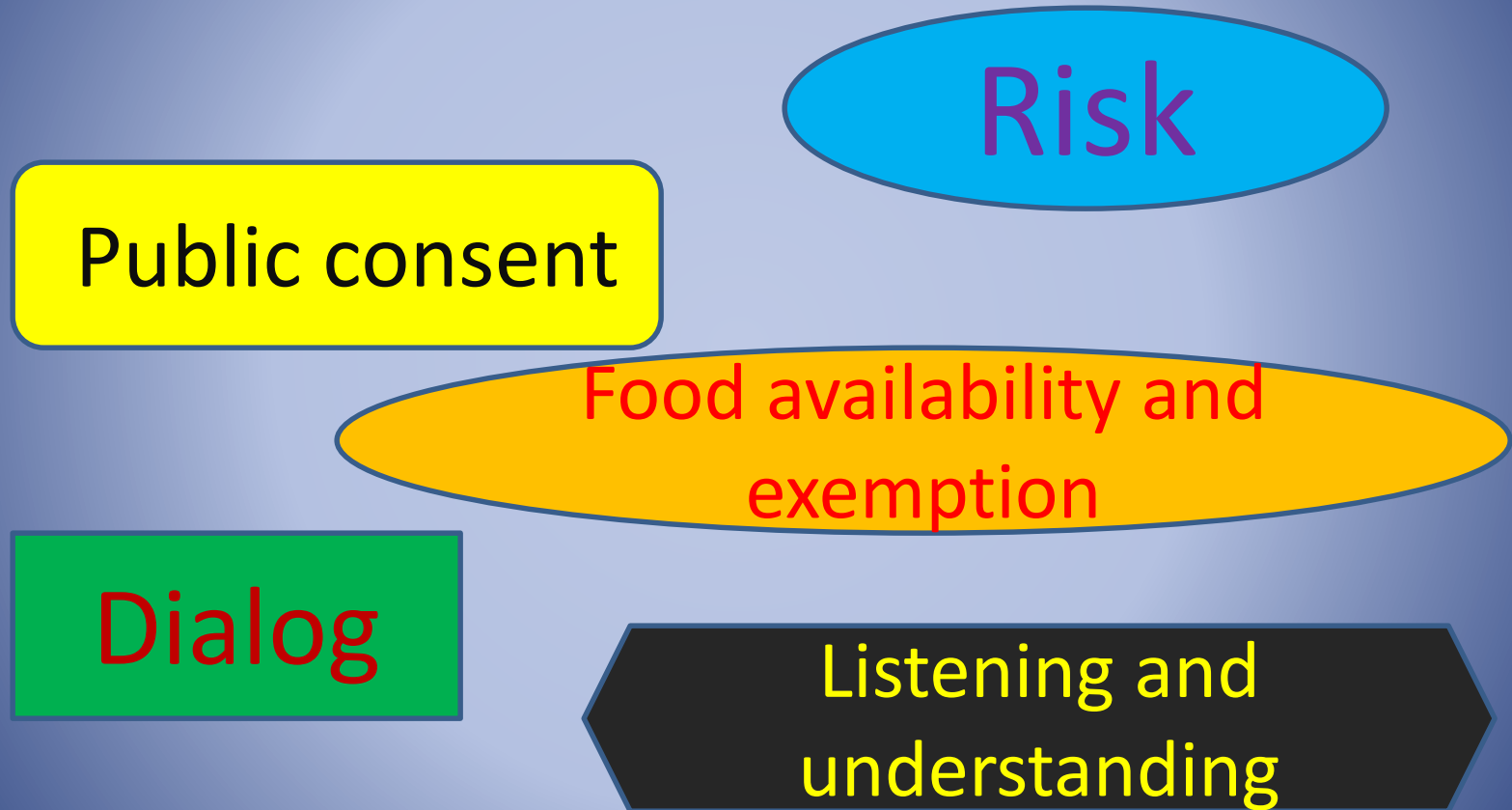
# The benefits and costs of modern agriculture

The greatest story never told.

A productive marvel

More land required

# Societal Values



# What is the Problem?

Is it food production?

But

Of Course it is!

Distribution

Waste

Poverty

# Social goals for Agriculture

Sustainable environmentally  
safe production –

Contribute to a just social  
order

# Environmental goals for Agriculture

Related to social goals

Sustainability

The land

Values

Science is value laden

In science the best data win.

In ethics the best reasons win.



# A Common Defense

## First defense

### 1. Denial

## Second defense

### 1. Expense

### 2. Trade

# Agricultural Scientists

Reluctant revolutionaries

Realists

Idealists

I  
want  
more

# Assumptions

We do not want our  
assumptions challenged.

We want to use them.

# Leo Tolstoy and Art

I know that most men – not only those considered clever, but even those who are very clever and capable of understanding most difficult scientific, mathematical, or philosophical problems --- can seldom discern even the simplest

# Leo Tolstoy and Art

and most obvious truth, if it be such as obliges them to admit the falsity of conclusions of which they are proud, which they have taught to others, and on which they have built their lives.

That this opinion may be false.



# Agriculture's many forms

Productive

Scientific

Environmental

Social

Economic

Political

Moral

# We live in a

Post industrial, information age society

We do not , and no one ever will,  
live in a post agricultural world

Our challenge is to make sure the  
agricultural foundation is secure.

# Agriculture. . .



**the largest and most important  
interaction between humans and  
the environment.**



# Paul Gauguin



# Questions

D'où Venons Nous?

Que Sommes Nous?

Où Allons Nous?

Where do we come from?

Where are we?

Where are we going?



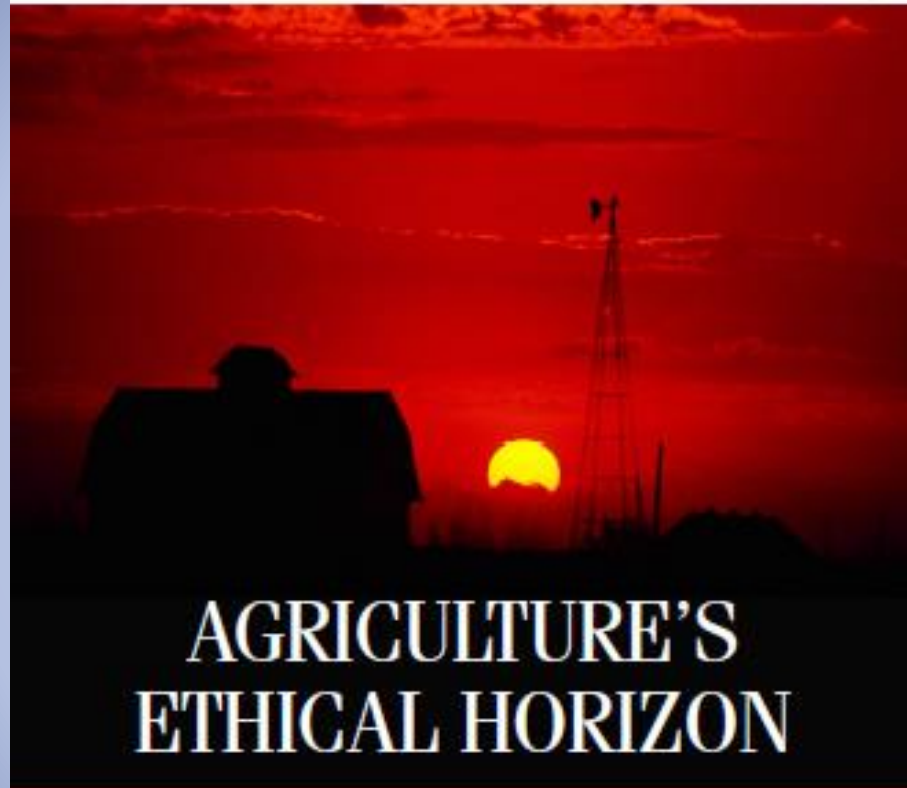


C. Brown

*"Good news—I hear the  
paradigm is shifting."*



ELSEVIER INSIGHTS



# AGRICULTURE'S ETHICAL HORIZON

SECOND EDITION

ROBERT L. ZIMDAHL



# Ethical Criteria for Agriculture

Equity

Environmental

Profit

Safety and Risk

# Ethical Criteria for Agriculture

Quality

Sustainable

Consent

Aesthetics





# Agricultural Abundance

When the values of the food  
production system –

ignore –

Protection of the land

Water quality

Biodiversity

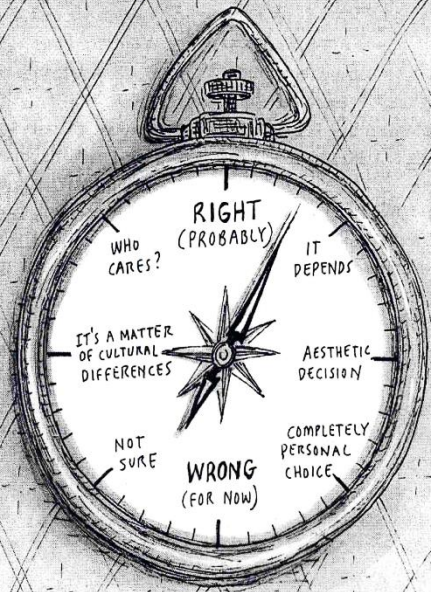
# Agricultural Abundance

Food as a commodity

Purchased by those with money

Then the ethics of the production system ought to be a matter of societal concern

## MORAL COMPASS

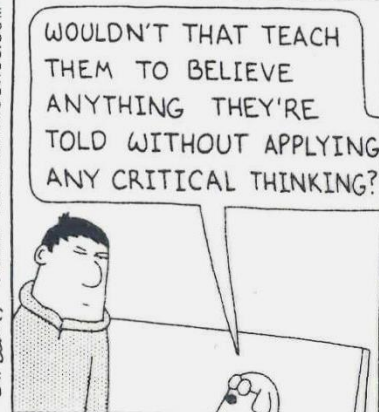


Two “popular culture” views of ethics.

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T



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*"Daddy works in a magical, faraway land called Academia."*





ASSUMPTIONS



