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Penultimate draft

## **Ethics of agricultural landscapes and food production**

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### **Introduction**

The most obvious area for ethical thinking about landscape and food is agriculture. Here, the ethical issues have typically revolved around food being equitably shared or at least relieving famine, being safe and accurately described, produced without oppression or harm to those working in its production, sensitive to land rights and ownership, and, latterly, protecting animal welfare and produced without harm to the environment – or at least sustainably, where harm is minimised and future potential production protected (Zimdahl, 2012). These are important issues for food ethics and will be covered in general terms. Concerns regarding agriculture and landscape as scenographic or place redolent, as opposed to simply the site of agricultural production, have featured in discussions of aesthetics (Brady, 2006; Carlson, 1985; Brook, 2013). However, an ethics of landscape and food suggests that producing food is also about producing meaningful landscapes, ecologies, and human communities. With the growing appreciation of terroir (see Chapter 36), local sourcing, slow food, terra madre, local distinctiveness (see Chapter 35), and landscape character as concepts, rather than just lived experience, there is a need to articulate an ethics of agroecological landscapes that could guide action and enhance appreciation.

### **Normative ethical frameworks**

Normative ethics, the branch of ethics that is about how we should live our lives and the kind of things it is right or wrong to do, has traditionally been focused on placing constraints on our behaviour towards other humans (Sterba, 2001). The three major ethical theories of *virtue ethics*, *deontological ethics*, and *consequentialism* place a reasoning human being at their centre and, particularly the latter two, have extolled core principles as the means of adjudicating right from wrong (Mizzoni, 2009; Benn, 1997).

The most significant form of deontological ethics, Kantianism, has the categorical imperative: 'act only in such a way as you could will your act to be a universal law.' It focuses on one's duty to behave in particular ways, such as truth telling, and is connected to the idea of humans as bearers of rights that should never be overridden. The most significant form of consequentialism, utilitarianism, has the core principle: 'act always such that your actions bring

about the greatest happiness (or diminishment of suffering) of the greatest number.’ Its focus is on the outcomes of actions and bringing about the best consequences without necessarily having regard for particular individuals. Both of these approaches require the decision maker to adopt the position of a detached onlooker to see their action in a wider perspective and ensure that it is unbiased by, for example, personal attachment. With virtue ethics the focus is more on the character of the individual and the kinds of qualities they need to have to be a good person, for example: courageous, honest, and caring. Which qualities are most valued depends, to some extent, on the particular context of that person and the situation of their wider community.

We can see how these forms of ethics fare in a key food-related ethical problem situation: inequality and famine.

### **Feeding the world viewed from three ethical frameworks**

A major ethical issue of food is its fair distribution. We could see the idea that everyone should have enough to eat to sustain life as a basic premise of a rights based view (Chapter 31). This is enshrined in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. This states that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Part two of this article also speaks of mothers and children needing additional care. The gendered language is of course part of the norm for a document crafted in 1948 and the key driving force of the whole document (just after the horrors of the second world war) was the equality of peoples of different nations and creeds and respecting the dignity and freedom of the individual. Stating a right does not mean that it will be respected – as continuing poverty and recurring famines in many parts of the world shows (see Chapters 20, 21 and 22) – but it does place the signatories to the declaration and those they represented (that is, most of us) as having a duty to one another such that it would be ethically wrong to contribute to another’s hunger or poverty. The assertion of a right implies a corresponding duty but for most deontological ethicists this can be interpreted in a strong or weak form. For example, I have a strong duty not to cause harm to another but a rather weaker duty (if I have one at all) to prevent everyone from being harmed. The focus of duty ethics is on whether my own act is right or wrong as judged by whether I could will that such an act should always be done.

Utilitarianism as an ethical theory does not recognise the concept of rights as such and places its moral weight on the principle of utility. The situation with famine would be that we all should act to bring about the diminishment of that suffering. In a seminal paper by the

controversial philosopher Peter Singer 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality' (1971), he sets out the moral case for helping to prevent bad things happening if we can do so without sacrificing "anything of comparable moral importance" (2007: 614). Singer questions the status quo of public opinion; where it is a good thing to give to charity but no moral blame attaches to those who do not. For him, if we can prevent suffering we should do so and in affluent countries there are many things that we could easily sacrifice in order to help those in a famine situation. In the paper he also clearly articulates that, for the utilitarian, distance is morally irrelevant. We would not, he says, ignore the plight of a neighbour's drowning child when we could easily save them, so we should not ignore the plight of a child starving in another part of the world when we could so easily save them. Thus distance is irrelevant as is whether our action is one where we are the only person who can help or where we are just one of many who, together, can help. How much one should contribute will depend on what is needed and how many contribute, but a situation could arise where one should make sacrifices in order to contribute to famine relief to what Singer calls "the point of marginal utility" (2007: 615). This is where to give more would put us in a situation that would be worse than the situation of those we are trying to help. This is a striking demand when compared to our usual understanding of ethics, but it does follow logically from the principle of utility.

Can virtue theory help us here? Can it present a way of thinking that does not make our actions bad if we do not make sacrifices to the point of marginal utility? One difference is that with virtue theory motives matter. What matters with regard to giving is that we demonstrate the virtue of generosity not out of a moral duty or a moral principle but just because it comes naturally to us, it is part of who we are. What matters with regard to the suffering of others is that we feel empathy for them and our actions arise from that quality of character. Virtue theory is also generally regarded as not imposing a universalising principle on us (Hursthouse, 1999; Darwell, 2003; Sandler, 2007). What matters is our familial and local connections and contributing to our own communities first and foremost. Also, it does not expect the same of everyone; the virtues are demonstrated by actions within our purview. A small child might demonstrate caring on the family farm by remembering to take a snack out to older siblings who are helping in the lambing shed, whereas the farmer might demonstrate caring by going out all night in a storm to bring a few lost sheep in to safety. As we will see later, with the examination of ecofeminism and the ethics of care, doing the right thing does not always come about through reasoning alone; feelings and emotional bonds can be relevant ethical guides rather than hindrances to ethical behaviour. Does this mean that virtue ethics has nothing to say about wider world issues such as famine? It does not seem as immediately applicable as utilitarianism but it is applicable in the sense of developing qualities of character in people and in communities; qualities such as a love of fairness and anger at injustice, gratitude, and avoidance of greed. In this sense virtue ethics is about transforming and developing the inclinations and attitudes of everyone such that inequalities would not be tolerated.

## Is agriculture inherently ethically good?

One of the reasons that agriculture ethics, as a philosophical area, is relatively new is the sense – common to farmers – that their task is inherently good. Providing food for people is often seen by agriculturalists as an undeniably good thing and thus no further ethical theorising about it is necessary (Dundon, 2003: 427). When we dig beneath the surface of that ‘good thing’ there is a long history of agricultural work seen as ennobling: the labour of land and animal husbandry is seen as developing traits such as patience, humility, and general strength of character. This view is often linked with Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) as a proponent of the morally improving nature of working the land (Holowchak, 2011) although his emphasis on the ethical, as opposed to the democratic and pragmatic value of agrarianism, can be questioned (Thompson and Kutach, 1990: 135). The view struck a chord – agrarianism instilled the virtues and farming communities were seen as peaceful and incorruptible in comparison with urbanites. Jefferson’s appreciation of the rural life as morally improving builds on the same view from George Washington (1732–1799) and his view draws on a similar one from the Ancient Romans (Morrison, 2009). An eloquent proponent of this view in contemporary writing is Wendell Berry whose poetic/spiritual writings are steeped in the sense that virtues such as humility and respect for nature are instilled by working within the limits of, and communing with, the land (Berry, 1997, 2009). Such writing, and indeed most of what could be called agricultural ethics, is not explicitly engaging with specific normative theories. They are articulating the values of social and landscape structures of traditional farming that are in danger of being lost (Dundon, 2003: 435).

It seems clear that a form of virtue ethics is at play here. The critique of focusing on feeding your local community is usually made from a utilitarian perspective of needing to feed the world. From the mid 20th century ‘Green Revolution’, which also introduced industrialised and mechanised forms of agricultural production into developing countries (see Chapter 9), to the current controversies with genetically modified (GM or bioengineered) crops, the technological trump card has always been – *this will feed people who are currently starving and to do otherwise would be wrong*. However, we are now becoming aware of the problems that Western industrialised agricultural models are creating (Glaeser, 2011; Kimbell, 2002; Shiva, 2016; Chapters 16, 25, 31, 32 and 33).

## Expanding ethical considerations to the land itself

A key problem with industrialised forms of modern agriculture is the mind-set that sees food production as something to be extracted from the land almost as if one is mining what is in the ground. This is mitigated or solved in some agroecological approaches (see Chapter 10). Agroecology attempts to encompass the scientific discipline of researching food production within an ecologically aware framework. It puts this together with a politically participative approach that honours indigenous knowledges and tackles practical, real-world, problems for the benefit of people not multinational corporations (Shiva, 2016; Gliessman, 2015; Levidow et

al., 2014; Altieri, 1995). The extractive industrial approach is most extreme in ecosystem clearance, for example rainforests, where complex ecosystems are cleared and the land used for pasture until depleted, then more forests need to be destroyed (see Chapter 17). The 'destruct and move on' strategy is a different approach from making sensitive changes to a landscape to allow for crop production. In rural areas dominated by agribusiness the picture is less extreme than rainforest destruction, but the soil is treated as if it is an inert growing medium; synthetic fossil fuel based fertilisers are introduced for each round of cropping, pesticides and herbicides protect the crop at the expense of the wider environment, multiple passes with heavy machinery compact the soil and what was a complex living system eventually does become a lifeless growing medium. From an agroecology perspective what is needed is a shift in our thinking about land and to return to, or to newly develop, a sense of partnership with the landscape. New ways of thinking about ethics towards the land itself were developed in the 20th century, but, with one exception, they did not initially have much to say about farming.

With the rise of environmental ethics in the 1970s how we should behave was re-examined and in some cases ethical obligations broadened to include living entities and/or communities such as ecosystems or species (animal ethics will be addressed in a later section) (Callicot, 1989; Devall and Sessions, 1985; Rolston, 1989). This marked a radical shift away from humans – now viewed as the problem – towards nature and valuing nature particularly in its most natural state – the wilderness. The philosophical work was often focused on finding reasons to preserve wilderness areas that did not rely on any of the numerous use-value reasons we might have. It was seen as necessary to forge an ecocentric position in order to redress the problems caused by anthropocentric views: that see the human being as the only entity of importance. Growing awareness of how much damage humans had done to the Earth led to the message being framed as protecting nature from humans, particularly nature that had any kind of pedigree of pristineness (Elliot, 1982).

As the field developed, that radical stance was tempered by other thinking, such as William Cronon's influential 1991 paper 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Kind of Nature'. Here he questioned the idea of wilderness being 'untouched'. These landscapes were changed by their indigenous populations so this Western environmental wilderness discourse was in fact engaged in a quasi-colonisation of this land to serve its own Romantic imaginings. The focus on 'wilderness' had also left other landscapes unprotected and outside of environmental concern. It didn't begin to address the issues of the environments where we do live, where we do source our food, and so on (Zeunert, 2013). The wilderness discourse was seen as driving us too far from being able to address how humans could live in a responsible way that took account of the environment. Early philosophical environmental thinking was often from the 'new world' of North America and Australia where the wilderness discourse made more sense, but in the 'old world' of European cultural landscapes, the world did not look quite like that stark division of wilderness and built environments (Artzen and Brady, 2008). Cultural landscapes were already valued for their historical synthesis of human

and land relationships. Moreover, there was a long cultural history of nature writing such as found in the works of Wordsworth, Ruskin, Rousseau, and Clare that extolled the value of these farmed landscapes and the human work of their shaping and maintenance.

A precursor of the new philosophical environmental thinking about valuing the environment in a different way was that of the North American ecologist Aldo Leopold (1887–1948). His essay ‘The Land Ethic’, part of a collection of nature writings called *A Sand County Almanac*, was published in 1949. Leopold was writing for an audience that included farmers and those shaping the land within their own homesteads and he brings to this his background in wildlife ecology and conservation. He wants to see a broadening of the sympathies that we hold for other humans with the addition of the biotic community to our ethical considerations. He presents this as a code which says: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (Leopold, 1981: 224–225). In his writings he is drawing the reader’s attention to the interlocking nature of the ecological community and the way we should be, as he says, not a conqueror, but a plain member and citizen of that community (ibid.: 204). What emerges here – radical for its time and place – is a critique of the use value or economic conception of land as purely a resource for humans. He certainly pointed out the long-term self-interest in behaving differently, and in many ways he anticipates ideas of sustainability and even regenerative design (see Chapter 16). However, in couching his approach as a land *ethic* he was entreating us to undergo a shift in attitude and way of being toward the land, to, as he says, develop an “ecological conscience” (ibid.: 207). He makes the case that we should extend the love we hold for our nearest and dearest to the biotic community. In this way the farmsteader who pollutes the river or causes erosion through aggressively logging the slopes or eradicates wolves, is seen as morally flawed rather than as an upstanding local citizen.

What is interesting about Leopold is not just how early he was making these pronouncements, but how he was blending a respect for wild nature with a practical farmsteading outlook. He talks of respectful management of land as well as preserving some land in a natural state.

### **Human environment synthesis and the local**

The productionist paradigm of industrial, and particularly intensive, agriculture separates humans, as the consumers, from land as the provider. Traditional ethics posited that human needs and the reduction of human suffering were paramount and so could be seen as supportive of an exploitative approach to land use. Getting the maximum from it, by any means, became the right thing to do. Three major developments have called this approach into question. One is pragmatic and linked to better agricultural science recognising effects such as: compacted, degraded, and eroding soils; inefficiencies and declining yields; and pest problems inherent in agri-business style monocultures (Nawaz et al., 2013). The second is the political shift from assuming a benign market economy working with nation states to provide food, to seeing big business providing for shareholders and the globalisation of an agribusiness model as

the problem (McMichael, 2006, 2015; Pretty, 2002; Shiva, 2016; Chapters 16, 31 and 32). The third is the growing public perception of nature as something to care about for its own sake, regardless of any benefit to humans. Thus we could see, for example, the protection of, or return of, hedgerows in the English landscape as serving all three impulses. A reduction in field size (and thereby large soil compacting machinery) brings about an increase in crop diversity and farmer autonomy; the hedgerows and field margins increase biodiversity with birds and small mammals assisting in pest control. By making a space for nature, richer synergistic relationships begin to build. The understanding in biodynamics of the farm as an organism was a very early expression of that working with nature from the local to the cosmic scale (Hurter, 2014; Chapter 10).

Those synergistic relationships include the farming community and those who live within these landscapes. A focus on local conditions and growing what works well in the area, both in terms of climate and cultural needs, creates landscapes with meaning and unique qualities. This is what helps to make one place different from another. The concept of place is connected to a large body of literature with its underlying values based argument of preserving or creating the characterful nature of places and resisting the forces of homogenisation that result in placelessness (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1996; Beatley and Manning, 1997; Hough, 1990; Brook, 2012; Seddon, 1997; Cresswell, 2004). Large-scale agribusiness is seen as one of the drivers of placelessness and thus a return to the smaller scale local farm is seen as a way of protecting and building biodiversity and cultural diversity as well as employment opportunity and thus communities (Berry, 2009). The attractiveness of this can be seen in the rise of interest in local food, from the community supported agriculture schemes (Janssen, 2010), the 100-mile diet (Smith and MacKinnon, 2007) and rise of locavores (Gray, 2013) to the growing attention to and gourmand interest in terroir (Chapter 36), specialist food producers, and the Slow Food movement (Chapters 5, 6, 7, 31 and 35). This brings together an appreciation for local, caringly produced food and savouring the experience of eating as a socially, culturally, and politically nourishing activity (Lotti, 2010). The local goes beyond the landscape of traditional farms as can be seen by the rise of demand for allotments, community orchards and gardens (Chapter 30), and urban agriculture in a surprising range of spaces, including rooftop market gardens and integrated fish and vegetable aquaponic systems (Ladner, 2011; Chapters 12, 13 and 22). These developments point to a desire for engagement in growing, in landscapes, and with preparing and relishing our food (Chapters 37 and 39). This indicates caring about where things come from and how they are produced and consumed (Chapters 35 and 36). There is an increasing understanding that every decision and particularly every purchase is a political act where we endorse the production methods of the article we buy (Bray et al., 2011; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006; Chapter 16).

The political and ethical import of an emphasis on the local and the shift from agribusiness is seen in a radical form in the 2007 Nyéléni declaration on food sovereignty (Chapter 31), which states:

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems [ . . . ] It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal-fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Embedded in the Nyéléni declaration is a rejection of the kind of bio-technological fixes that agribusiness proposes as a response to the perceived need to increase yields (or at least yield per unit of labour) (Shiva, 2000, 2016) and the trade deals that serve governments and business but not farmers or the Earth. In the rights language we can see a drive for fairness for all as a form of universalising, but one that attempts to be place specific by endorsing cultural diversity as well as ecological biodiversity.

## **New ethical approaches**

Many of the ethical questions that involve landscape and food can over-stretch the applicability of traditional philosophical ethical approaches. Particularly the reorientation of human beings towards the Earth, as something of intrinsic value that we should care about, calls for a new type of ethical relationship. Following are four developments in ethics that could provide food for thought and even food for people.

### **Animal ethics**

The focus of this collection on landscape and food precludes an exhaustive treatment of the well developed and complex area of animal ethics. However, an overview is necessary to note some changes that have occurred within and beyond philosophical ethics. Along with the rise of concern about environmental issues the 1960s–70s also marked a watershed in thinking about our relationships with non-human animals. The burgeoning intensive farming industry sparked concern about the treatment of these animals. In 1965 Ruth Harrison published her book *Animal Machines*, which brought to wider attention the conditions in factory farms. This text contributed to the 1976 European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes. The general thrust of this convention has been developed further into what are called the five freedoms that guide contemporary animal welfare (Webster, 2008:6). These are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst, by ready access to water and a diet to maintain health and vigour.
2. Freedom from discomfort, by providing an appropriate environment.



3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease, by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour, by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and appropriate company of the animal's own kind.
5. Freedom from fear and distress, by ensuring conditions and treatment, which avoid mental suffering. (FAWC, 2009:2)

For the development of foundational ethical arguments in this area a seminal text was Peter Singer's, 1975 book *Animal Liberation*. Here Singer applied the principle of utility to all entities capable of experiencing pleasure or pain. Quantities of pleasure or pain are the ethically relevant aspect so not to include non-human animals in the calculation would be, as Singer says, speciesist. Thus it is unjustifiable to prioritise the wishes of human beings. The production of food from animals inevitably involves some suffering. For Singer, pleasure should never trump the alleviation of pain. Thus, for Singer, the times when consumption of animals is justifiable are very rare.

The most influential approach to animal ethics from a deontological perspective was Tom Regan's, 1983 book *The Case for Animal Rights*. For him, some non-human animals are rights bearers based on them being 'subjects-of-a-life', as evidenced, according to Regan, by their possession of a psychophysical identity over time (Regan, 1983: 243). Although the kinds of animals included would be fewer than the utilitarian criterion of 'ability to feel pain' such animals as a rights bearer should never be used for food. To deny their freedom and life is to infringe their rights and this would be as ethically wrong as we generally consider it to be to do this to a human being.

Both the utilitarian and the rights positions have certain logical problems, not least what we as ethical agents should do about natural predation (Sagoff, 1984: 299) or the fact that farm animals often have a less painful life and death in the context of a farm than they would in the wild (ibid.: 303). However, the work of philosophical campaigners such as Singer, Regan, and Richard Ryder (who coined the term speciesism) were important in constructing supporting arguments to bring about changes in attitudes and practical changes via legislation in the welfare of animals reared for food. This can be seen in the growing popularity, in the west, of vegetarianism and veganism (Morgan, 2016). For some this choice is based on an animal ethics position and for others an environmentalist position. Animal production is seen as a wasteful use of agricultural land that could produce much more plant-based food, and farm animals are a significant contributory factor in the production of greenhouse gas emissions (Bland, 2012).

### **Permaculture ethics**

It is interesting that ethical language is central to one of the more recent innovations in growing food; recent under the name *permaculture* (Mollison and Holmgren, 1978; also see Chapter 10), but of course linking back to and using many traditional techniques. Likewise, the ethical

ideas claim to be grounded in those of traditional cultures with a respect for the Earth as a living being. The tripartite mantra of permaculture is Earth care, people care, and fair shares (Holmgren, 2011). Placing the Earth at the beginning clearly denotes that this is not about enlightened self-interest but a placing of the planet, all life forms, and particularly the living soil at the centre of the ethic. People care is what ethics has a long history of promoting but here it particularly emphasises caring for one's self, friends, and neighbours and building resilient communities (Macnamara, 2012). Fair shares is about sharing the abundance of nature and not hoarding food or taking more than we need, and ensuring we return nutrients to the Earth. The examples often given create the sense of a homespun philosophy of being a good person in one's local situation and endorse a positive outlook and the idea of living in balance with nature. Indeed they are said by one of the founders of permaculture to be "simple and relatively unquestioned ethical foundations for permaculture design within the movement and within the wider "global nation" of like-minded people" (Holmgren, 2013: 7).

The twelve principles of permaculture (Holmgren, 2002) appeared before the ethics had been articulated, but those principles could be seen as emerging out of an implicit ethos that later became articulated. For example, the first principle is about working with nature not against it. The principles are closest to a virtues approach as can be seen by the idea of doing the best you can and through that improving as well as accepting personal responsibility rather than blaming others. The focus on those nearest to you and your community also sits well with a virtues approach. The idea of global justice appears in permaculture but it is seen as contributed to by living lightly on the land and moderating your own desires. One of the critiques of permaculture is about the problem of scaling it up to agricultural size projects (Ferguson and Lovell, 2014). However, this could be seen as a lack of vision about how it could be done, or indeed, whether it should be done. Yield, the holy grail of agribusiness, can be very high with the dense planting and synergistic multi cropping of permaculture. Moreover, the crops produced are – or should be – desired. This does not fit the business model of mainstream agriculture: it calls for a completely different understanding of markets and supply chains, but it could feed people and protect the environment.

### **Ecofeminist ethics**

Since its beginning in the mid-1970s *ecofeminism* has become a large but diverse movement, encompassing thinkers from a wide range of perspectives from within the feminist movement and the environmental movement. Although ecofeminism is diverse, there does seem to be one core shared premise: that there is a link between what is understood as the domination of nature and the domination of women. Sometimes this is expressed as the view that oppression of women and the natural world are 'twin' oppressions, stemming from the same cause.

Ecofeminists reject ethical approaches that rely solely on or emphasise reason or that work on abstract principles such as justice, with the implication that they can apply to all people everywhere (Warren, 2000; Gruen, 1993). The problem they see with these approaches comes from the claims of universalisability; whether in the form of a universal law such as Kant's

categorical imperative or the idea of an ideal detached observer or applying utilitarian calculations that would be the same no matter who calculated them. It is the impersonal or detached aspect of this that the ecofeminists see as working against how we actually are and how we should behave ethically in the world. An engaged ethics is one that arises out of the personal, the emotional, and is exemplified when we care for another or a place or nature. Thus an ethics of care is seen as recognising our interdependence and that some people are affected by our decisions. It brings ethical thinking closer to home, and makes it more contextual and nuanced. As with permaculture this ethics of care approach is closest to, or a development of, virtue ethics. Here we can see that caring is not an abstract principle that must be applied in the appropriate circumstances. As Nell Noddings explains:

One might suggest as a basic principle: always act so as to establish, maintain or enhance caring relations. A carer, however, does not refer to this principle when she responds to a person who addresses her. The “principle” is *descriptive*, not prescriptive. The behaviour of carers is well described by this principle, but their motivation arises either spontaneously (in natural caring) or through deliberate reflection on an ideal of caring that has become part of their character.

(2002: 30; *emphasis in the original*)

Similarly, the farmer with a caring approach to land and animal husbandry does not care because a rule or maxim dictates it, they care because they are in a *relationship of care* with the land and the animals.

### **Responsive cohesion**

Responsive cohesion is an approach developed by Warwick Fox in answer to the basic ethical question: ‘how should we live?’ Unusually for an ethical theory, responsive cohesion is based on the qualities of structure or form of organisation. Things, anything at all, can be organised or disorganised – in Fox’s terms, have *cohesion* or be *discohesive*. If something is organised then it can be organised by having a rigid structure or by the way its various parts respond to each another; in Fox’s terms have *fixed cohesion* or *responsive cohesion* (Fox, 2006). Which is better: discohesion, fixed cohesion or responsive cohesion? We already know which we value the most. As Fox points out, if we take any realm of endeavour or any entity and ask considered judges what makes a good ‘X’ the answer, regardless of how it is couched, will be directly translatable into ‘the one with the most responsive cohesion’. For example, we could ask about the best political system, would it be the discohesive lawlessness, the rigid dictatorship, or the responsive democracy that we value? When we investigate why a politically informed person would prefer democracy it is going to have something to do with how the parts have to respond to one another. Democracy only works if there is an answering to and an accommodation between the parts (the people, the parliament, the judiciary, a free press, access to education, and so on) rather than a rigid form. The democracy hangs together by virtue of that flexible but structured answering to each other. Fox points out we can run the same ‘what’s the best?’

question with any human endeavour and get the same answer. Let us take farming and ask what the best farm would be. The answer will always be one that is not a rigid fixed pattern, for example, a vast monoculture with minimal relationship to the local community, employing few people, and selling to a single client who could go elsewhere. Nor will it be a farm that is disorganised, for example, a farm often left untended such that cattle could break in to crops and harm both the plants and themselves, or weeds left to seed and rain water wasted rather than diverted to where it is needed, where no long-term, but flexible, planning takes place, and so on. A good farm will be one where the various parts and activities will answer to each other. The following points just serve as examples. If there is livestock the balance of animals to arable land will be such that animal manure is a boon rather than a hazardous waste product. Crops can be rotated to ensure the best replenishment of the soil. Food is produced that suits the soil and climatic conditions and local markets found for it. There is a diversity of produce to cope with difficult weather conditions or fluctuations in demand and the ecological affordances of synergistic relationships are enhanced. Local people are employed or co-create the farm and it plays a role in the local community such as farm visits for schools (see Chapter 33).

Responsive cohesion is offered as an ethical gauge. For any ethical problem situation we just need to work out what will bring about or preserve the maximum amount responsive cohesion and this will inevitably bring about the most valuable situation. Obviously there is rather more to this theory than set out so far. For our purposes, of reflecting on our ethical obligations regarding food and landscape, a particularly important element is the theory of contexts and the requirement to prioritise responsive cohesion in the widest context (Fox, 2006). Fox outlines three broad contexts: (1) the biophysical realm (ecosystems, Gaia), (2) the socio/cultural realm, and (3) the human constructed realm. These are nested one within the other and it should be clear (3) is dependent on (2) and (1), and (2) is dependent on (1). That is, you don't get the rice paddy fertilised by food fish stocks without the socio/cultural realm of human culture and ingenuity and you don't get human ingenuity in shaping the landscape without a landscape to be shaped and, moreover, a planetary situation that has brought about and supported life in the first place.

Thus in any situation to do with cultural landscapes, or indeed most things, we need to be attentive to responsive cohesion in the broadest context, then the next broadest to ensure that the 'direction of fit' for our creation or preservation of responsive cohesion is right. For example, a problem of insect damage to crops can be solved with a pesticide, but this ignores aspects such as the role that the insect plays in the local ecosystem and the follow on effects of pesticide residue in the crops to be eaten and the impact on rivers and downstream ecosystems. Being mindful of the wider systems, and seeing all of these as part of the situation we need to consider, means that the most immediately effective solution to the crop damage is not necessarily the right one, as it could destroy more responsive cohesion than it brings about.

This could suggest that farming – or any changes to naturally occurring ecosystems – is wrong, but this is not the case. The moral imperative that arises from the theory of responsive

cohesion is that “in living *your* life” (Fox, 2006: 302) you protect or create more responsive cohesion and, of course, the wider the context the more responsive cohesion you create. The “in living *your* life” formulation allows for the fact that we need to build shelter and source food. Also it allows for the fact that we are not psychologically capable of caring for everyone, let alone every aspect of nature impartially. A normative ethical theory should not impose something that is impossible to do. We, human beings, as living organisms are examples of responsive cohesion. Our socio/cultural systems and our material creations can also exhibit responsive cohesion. And by living in dialogue with nature we can bring ourselves into a more responsively cohesive relationship with the wider biosphere.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that thinking about ethics, landscape and food presents some highly complex issues that need to be brought to the forefront of agriculture as an academic discipline and food production as a practical endeavour. Of the three main approaches in traditional ethics – virtues, deontology, and utilitarianism – we saw that it was virtue ethics that possibly allowed for a nuanced way of dealing with that complexity. However, it does not issue in clear directives or guide us by generating rules to follow. The partiality of responding to our nearest and dearest is a more comfortable place to be, but how do we, as a society, nurture those virtues that will stretch our empathy to encompass others and the biotic community?

The social and ecological critique of industrial methods and agribusiness market models has alerted us to a need to rethink the simplistic idea that food production *per se* is a ‘good thing’ and therefore ethical. The development of agroecology as an approach has been helpful in creating a more holistic way of thinking about food production. Aspects of agroecology, with its respect for local knowledge and ecological sensitivity, could be seen as a reinvigoration of the traditional idea of husbandry of the land as a noble and morally improving activity.

Early developments in environmental ethics paved the way for thinking beyond seeing the Earth as there to provide services for humans. The four new developments outlined – animal ethics, permaculture ethics, ecofeminist ethics and responsive cohesion – explore the implications of that ethical thinking and help to make sense of care and relationality as well as practical applicability (also see Chapter 34). We flourish in relationship with our communities and through engagement with the world around us. Environmentally sensitive food production is one of the ways in which this flourishing is seen at its best.

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Open Food Network [www.facebook.com/openfoodnetaus/](http://www.facebook.com/openfoodnetaus/)

The Orchard Project [www.theorchardproject.org.uk/](http://www.theorchardproject.org.uk/)

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