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Chapter 5

Morality and the good farmer

The many theorisations of the good farmer detailed in Chapter 4 illustrate how the concept of the good farmer has been used as an analytical tool by a variety of researchers and in a variety of ways. However, many of these theorisations – being targeted at specific research questions – do not attempt to present a complete picture of the good farmer him/herself. This differs from the concept of the good farmer as it appeared historically. Then notions of family, community and morality were integrated within the good farmer to a far greater extent than is the case today – the good farmer was 'good' not only because of his/her ability to optimise agricultural production, but because he/she was morally an upstanding individual around whom communities were formed. In contemporary professionalised and specialised western agriculture, farming has been framed mostly as a profession, implying a separation between professional skills and more general morality. However, two main dimensions of the 'good' remain intertwined in the 'good farmer'. First, 'good' is an evaluative term to describe a high level of competence in the performance of professional farming activities. This dimension has been at the core of the recent 'good farmer' literature which has focused mainly on activities of cultural significance. The second dimension is an evaluation of whether the behaviour of the farmer – in this case reaching beyond simple farming activities – is valuable for or harmful to society. This places the farmer in a wider social evaluative framework – it is not only his/her position in the peer group he/she is concerned about but also the role of farmers collectively in society. From this perspective, morality is a fundamental feature of farming.

In this chapter, we want to reintegrate this moral dimension into the scientific 'good farmer' conceptualisation by locating it in a discussion on the environmental impacts of farming. Indeed, nowadays many issues centre around the environmental "morality" of agriculture, such as the conflict between the farmer's role as food providers for a growing population and the need to keep greenhouse gas emissions to a minimum, the role of agriculture in supporting rural communities, farmers' moral responsibility as stewards of the environment, farmers'

moral responsibility for maintaining the welfare of their livestock and/or, increasingly, the morality of providing economic support to farmers in the form of agricultural subsidies.

While moral issues permeate contemporary agriculture, we use this chapter to interrogate the existing good farmer literature for moments of tension when a hegemonic understanding of 'good farming' has been challenged by external threats (such as policy or economic change) that force a rethinking of the morality of agriculture. To that end, we first describe the issue of morality in agricultural practices. Second, we examine the good farmer literature to question what is 'good' about good farming – for the farmer, the farm, and the wider environment. Third, we engage in a dialogue between the good farmer literature and some of the recent literature on the social science of morality. In particular, we present Bell's (1994, 2018) natural conscience, Abend's (2014) moral background, and Justin Farrell's (2015) work describing moral orders as a means of providing us some theoretical language to address morality issues and conflicts within the 'good farmer' concept. We conclude by revisiting the good farmer literature with these new tools for understanding moral choice in agriculture.

The morality of agriculture

Attempts to claim the moral high ground in agriculture using the notion of the good farmer have been around for centuries. In the earliest English literature, as noted in Chapter 2, the good farmer was embedded within a religious context and, consequently, behaviours such as the fair treatment of servants, wives, family and others in the community fell into the core moral framework of the 'good farmer'. The next moral claim to the good farmer came from the improvers in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Wars around Europe (and corresponding food shortages) combined with rapid urbanisation made agriculture across Europe an increasingly nationalistic endeavour, if not a necessity. Production needed to be dramatically enhanced for wider society to survive. At the time, agriculture in Britain was dominated by small tenant farmers following customary practices and wealthy landlords focused only on rent generation – both of whom stood increasingly accused of immorality in failing to produce the food necessary to feed the country. This was exacerbated by rapid technological and scientific advances which made the gap between what could be produced and what was being produced ever wider. With a population regularly short of food, this growing disparity was easily

portrayed as an issue of morality and the moral imperative of production was consequently driven into the 'good farmer' definition by those who controlled the debates.

A rapidly growing global population, continuous technological improvement, regular wars, and periodic famine have meant that the moral imperative of production is still part of the good farmer definition today as farmers continue to justify their practices as part of their duty to "feed the world" (e.g. Stuart & Houser, 2018). However, a shift occurred in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s when it was recognised that the intensive agricultural practices necessary to optimise production were causing considerable environmental damage. The necessity of focusing only on production was further bought into question by an oversupply of agricultural produce in the 1980s – the development of butter mountains, milk lakes, and so on, meant that the justification of productivism on the basis of moral duty was lost. Instead, farmers found themselves in the position of receiving subsidies from the state to produce agricultural goods no-one needed while, at the same time, causing increasing damage to the environment and lowering welfare standards. The agri-environmental and multifunctionality policies introduced to Europe at the end of the 1980s represented another attempt to define the morality of the good farmer – replacing the farmer producer with the farmer steward and community services provider (e.g. recreation, accommodation). Some fought against this, presenting arguments such as "farmers are not foresters" (Williams et al., 1994) and reinforcing the moral imperative of feeding the world as a justification for potentially damaging intensive agricultural practices (e.g. pesticide use – Duram, 1997; Stuart et al., 2012).

Agricultural and agri-environmental policies are often based on unexamined and unreflexive concepts of what is socially and politically meant by 'good farming' as they look to uphold certain farmers as good while excluding others as bad. Nonetheless, conflict over what is a 'good farmer' impacts how policies are written, what kind of farming is supported and engendered, what is seen as legitimate in farming communities, farmers sense of self, and what is considered worth researching. Ultimately decisions about what a 'good farmer' is – where farmers are positioned on issues of morality – affects the success of such policies. Thus, the boundaries between who is considered a good (and, by extension, also bad) farmer becomes highly relevant not only for individual farmers and farms, but the wider field of farming as well as agricultural policies struggling to respond to a warming planet.

Today's agriculture is much more fragmented with farmers having numerous and different moral imperatives with which to anchor their farming and, consequently, many debates ensue about what the moral 'good farmer' should do. This chapter is about this conflict – of the times when symbols of what it means to be a good farmer are challenged both personally and collectively by people who hold different notions/symbols of the moral imperatives in agriculture. This could mean organic farmers, those who do not adhere to conventional methods, or new entrants that value outcomes that are different to those traditionally valued in a region, among many other possible examples.

What fosters changes in the definition of the 'good' in farming often revolves around economic changes in the region and the industry as well as the changing needs of wider society at the national level. While some authors have hinted at a moral basis of some of these changes and contradictions, academics have yet to engage fully with the social science of morality to explore what the 'good' in 'good farming' means.[1] As noted above, for a few decades most of the moral discussion around farming, notably in European countries, has revolved around environmental issues. Riley (2016a, p. 63) following Bourdieu makes clear the idea that the 'good farmer' is a useful way to understand the relationship between "farmers and conservation" and the resistance met by external pressures to alter what should symbolize good farming practices (such as agri-environmental schemes – Burton et al. 2008; Burton & Paragahawewa, 2011; Forney et al., 2018; Stock et al., 2014), as they undermine individual and collective autonomy to establish or maintain 'good farmer' symbols. In other words, while other moralities exist, the moral dimension of the 'good farmer' cannot be discussed in the current context out of its relationship with environmental considerations.

Constructing the 'good' in the good farmer

As with the other elements of the concept, the moral dimension in the good farmer is essentially about social and symbolic interactions. Narratives and practices expressing the 'good' are boundary making processes that develop along the separation between what is me or us, a self, and what is not, the Other. However, to be a good something refers also to a shared definition of what it is to be this something – it is not possible to understand what is 'good' in farming

[1] It is important to emphasize, that studying moral differences between people - as the social science of morality does – does not require taking a normative stance. A researcher, by studying moral conflicts, does not necessarily support a specific moral norm as correct or right.

without referring to what is farming itself. To integrate this idea of a functional good, we briefly present the idea of the functional farmer as inspired by the work of MacIntyre (1984).

A conflictual 'good': The Self and The Other

As noted above, the recent good farmer literature – with the exception of a few papers (including Riley, 2016b; Stock, 2007; and Sutherland, 2013) – has largely avoided addressing the centrality of moral issues within the concept of the 'good farmer'. The existing conflicts are well recognised, but usually focus on the tension between farmers and non-farmers, represented in policies, as exemplified by the following quote:

> Within modern agricultural landscapes there lie meanings developed through the performance of everyday farm tasks by members of the farming community that to the farmers speak of their toil and personal victory over the land yet to us may represent the excesses of the agricultural industry – of pollution, industrialization and the degradation of the countryside aesthetic. (Burton 2004b, p. 197)

This approach is consistent with the objective of demonstrating the existence of a shared repertoire of symbols and values among farmers. Arguably, however, it supports a binary conceptualisation of moral conflict by emphasising the important role of non-farmers as the main 'Other'. This binary of Self and Other has its origins in the symbolic interactionist school of sociology typically associated with George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman. In brief, to understand oneself as a unique person with an identity, a Self, one has to be aware of Others. I am myself because I am not that Other over there.

The consequences for our understanding of the 'good farmer' are directly related to the symbols and practices that define who is and who is not a 'good farmer', e.g. 'I am myself a good farmer because others recognise my choices, represented through the symbols of my farm practices, as emblematic of being a good farmer.' These are shared symbols and practices. We examine an extension of this theoretical line of thought later in Michael Bell's work and then look at how conflicts arise when the Self and the Other are at odds or in disagreement. For our purposes here, what is most striking is that because farmers share a rural sensibility of what is good – which is somewhere at the core of the good farmer concept – there is a tendency to look at

moral conflicts essentially as falling between 'farmers' (as a uniform group) and non-farmers (urban bureaucrats, environmentalists, etc.). This has the effect of simplifying the notion of morality in agriculture, negating the moral conflicts that exist within the farming communities themselves and, in particular, failing to address the role of morality in the multiple, diverse and shifting notions of the 'good farmer' (see Chapter 7). Within the 'good farmer' literature there is an opportunity to open up this binary concept to a more nuanced analysis of the various fault lines exhibited through certain practices and symbols indicative of certain moral frameworks.

Following Lowe et al. (1997) and Bryant and Garnham (2018), we view these competing moral value systems as both reinforcing the position of the Self (as a 'good farmer') and enabling the identification of the Other (as a 'good' or 'bad farmer', or 'non-farmer') – beyond the performance and competence dimension.[2] The concept of the 'good farmer' revolves around shared assumptions of what is good about a farmer or the outcomes of specific farm practices articulated through observable symbols. Often, in the use of the 'good farmer' term by farmers and social scientists (see Chapter 1) there is a presumption of a dominant style of farming that is deemed to be good. Yet, trends in farming belie this presumption. Within the last thirty years there have been significant debates on whether farming is becoming more multifunctional or neoliberal, more organic or more conventional, or less or more cooperative. Just these simple dichotomies indicate that what is 'good' is often both contested and unstable. Introducing diverging farming moralities is particularly important because policy solutions are often based on the assumption that major issues such as alleviating global hunger or addressing climate change can *prima facie* be addressed through technological solutions (Stock, 2015) based on the assumption that farmers constitute a single group of like-minded economically rational decision-makers who respond to policy in the same way. Yet Gasson's (1973) work identifying the different goal structures of farmers, Ploeg's (1994) 'farming styles', Morris and Evans' (2004) description of 'agri-cultures', Burton and Wilson's (2006) finding of multiple and layered identity structures, and many other studies that have looked for structure in farming communities, all indicate that farming communities are infinitely more complex.

The articulation of a position of the Self and the identification of the Other in moral conflicts allows also us to integrate a dialogical and dynamic perspective in the understanding of farming

[2] Naylor et al.'s (2018) contribution to the good farmer literature offers an update to the theory of planned behaviour with an emphasis on social identity theory and self-categorisation theory that attempt to measure the potency of one's identity as a farmer in given contexts.

moralities, where the role of the Other alternates between other farmers who are engaged in different practices and non-farmers expressing moral judgement over farming. Saunders (2016) and Sutherland (2013) both refer to identities being fragmented or under stress based on the changing contexts. As the field of farming changes over time – changes which, as we observe in Chapter 3, can be considerable – the notion of what it means to be a good farmer also changes as well reflecting what Saunders (2016, p. 395) calls "disjointed norms". For example, Sutherland (2013) observes the existence of pragmatic organic farmers – conventional farmers who witnessed the financial stability of organic farmers and were persuaded to change some practices to follow suit. Similarly, Saunders (2016) describes how farmers will make changes even at the cost of some practice-based identity in order to remain economically viable. In another example, Coughenour (1976) observed that social processes involved in specialised commodity production played an important role in the development of social and moral norms for Australian sheep farmers. When an economic crisis hit the wool sector, some farmers converted to beef cattle production nevertheless – with the likelihood of conversion determined in part by the extent of identity commitment to sheep.

Within different forms of farming there are distinct sets of rules (norms/repertoires) and farming practices that, when applied, generate symbols of 'good farming'. However, when conflicting moral beliefs are attached to environmental management behaviours, the understanding of these practices and symbols may lead to inconsistency in response. What was once deemed environmentally good may become environmentally bad and thus morally bad. Belonging to a group helps shape these moral beliefs. When those beliefs are challenged a tension emerges between a desire to hold on to one's beliefs or to one's group. This can then result in a break of some sort – either in the person's sense of self (e.g. a self-identity as a sheep farmer is difficult to maintain when raising cattle) or in the person's group membership (e.g. a conventional farmer who converts to organic would have difficulty socialising with conventional farmers as a result of holding a different set of values and beliefs consistent to their new identity).

Moral philosophers sometimes refer to the good farmer to help illustrate a point they are making (Foot, 2001; Murdoch, 2001). After a discussion of the relationship between a watch and a good watch, MacIntyre (1984) extends the thinking to a farmer who gets a better yield for his crop per acre than any of his neighbours, has a very effective program of soil renewal and wins all the first prizes at the agricultural show with his cattle. MacIntyre claims that it is

valid to say that this man is a 'good farmer', because he does well what a farmer is supposed to do. If a watch can be defined as an object that gives the time, a good watch will give it in a better (more precise, for longer, etc.) way than others. For MacIntyre, the concept of the farmer is a functional concept as it defines a farmer, as with a watch, in terms of the purpose or function we attribute to a farmer (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 58).

A functional approach to the 'good' is therefore useful to overcome some of the limitations of a purely interactionist perspective that could reduce the 'good' to a process of boundary making between us and them. By referring to a fundamental definition of what it is to be a farmer it reminds us of the ontological dimension of the 'good farmer' concept.[3] In a discussion on the moral connection between the 'good farmer' and the environment, this functional definition of the 'good' contributes to expanding the discussion beyond stating diverging moral positioning around nature. It emphasises the fundamental relationship between the definition of the 'good farmer' and an ontology of farming. To put it simply, following MacIntyre, disagreements about the practices and symbols that make a 'good farmer' always imply a wider discussion about what are the functions and purposes (as well as outcomes) of farming itself.

The Good in Recent Social Science

The 'good farmer' concept was initially based on farmer-defined notions of what it means to be a good farmer with the symbols of 'goodness' indicating factors such as competence, proper decision making, increasing yields, and profitability. The literature has addressed the clashes between these notions and others – for example, those implied by the development of agri-environmental schemes (and related programs) that utilize measures of ecosystem health to indicate 'good farming' practices. As Burton et al. (2008) observe, healthy natural ecosystems are inherently complex or even chaotic, whereas farmed landscapes are generally dominated by order and regularity. This discrepancy is a common reason for farmers resisting enrolling in such voluntary programs. These developments also both hint at externally driven notions of what a good farmer is and does and suggest tension between competing definitions of the 'good' – which emerge both as material outcomes and moral entanglements. To disentangle these ideas we turn to key social science of morality developments that have emerged in parallel with the good farmer literature. Three key theorizations are central to developing our

[3] For a wider discussion of the importance of ontology to what it means to be good farmer see Campbell (2020).

understanding of 'good' in 'good farmer': Michael Bell's natural conscience (1994, 2018), Gabriel Abend's (2014) moral background, and Justin Farrell's (2015) moral orders.

The Natural Conscience, the natural self, and the three Natures

US rural sociologist Michael Bell (2004, 2018) offers a significant body of conceptual work on the morality of ruralness with a focus on agriculture. For our purposes, it is important to put our wider discussion of the good farmer concept in dialogue with Michael Bell's work as the two have developed in parallel without much direct connection. Part of the reason for this stems from the more Europe-centric focus of the good farmer literature as opposed to Michael Bell's more America-centric work. Most importantly, however, Bell provides some theoretical concepts that enable us to develop a wider theoretical lens around the 'good' in the 'good farmer'. Drawing primarily on a sociological theoretical tradition, Bell brings Emile Durkheim's collective conscience and Mead's symbolic interactionism to bear on our contemporary understandings of the relationship between morality and the environment related to farm practices.

The 'natural conscience' is what Bell (2018, p. 72) describes as "a basis for moral thinking we believe to be free of society and all its politics and constant play of interests and ambitions". Bell uses the phrase as a companion to Durkheim's collective conscience. The natural conscience is based on the belief of the existence of a pure and authentic nature that would pre-exist the social – what Bell refers to as "first nature". Bell related this natural conscience to the interactionist theory of the Self. The natural conscience emerges from the co-constitutive notions of the natural me and the natural Other, both thought of as pure, real and true. As Bell (2018) puts it:

> Thus we feel the natural me as a more authentic and valid self than what society creates, sees, and guides. The natural me [Self], then, we imagine as a non-political self, as opposed to the self that emerges from society's constant tussle and scuffle of interests and ambitions. (p. 73)

The reference to a notion of nature as pure, the unspoiled and uncorrupted by the social and its politics create a sense of a fundamental goodness of the natural Other and the natural Me. The idea of the natural being not only first, but fundamentally 'good' refers to what Bell names

"second nature" or "nature as moral good"[4]. For this precise reason, as Bell continues, we see the natural conscience as being a "more sure basis for the moral" (p. 73). From the natural Me and natural Other also derive the collective self "a sense of non-political community derived from a natural other" (p. 138), and notions of a natural We and a natural Them, that are essential in the politics of morality. The natural We builds on the idea that some others are "similarly constituted to me" (p. 226). The hidden politics of the 'natural' appear again in the tensions and conflicts that might appear between a natural We and a natural Them. The supposed goodness associated to the natural Other and natural Me expands to the natural We in opposition to a natural Them, as a way to legitimate and protect common advantages. This is what Bell terms as the "use of nature in nonpolitical politics" (p. 226), highlighting the generally bounded and hierarchical dimension of the natural We that serves to defend unbalanced power relations, domination, or other advantages, by placing them in the different nature of the natural Them.

Bell's works on the moral basis of first nature provides useful elements to think through the moral conflicts in farming. First, the concepts of natural conscience and natural Me highlight how moral values – for instance in relation to farming and the environment – are deeply rooted in the way people (e.g. farmers) understand goodness in relation to who 'they truly are'. This offers an interesting echo to the ontological dimension of the 'good farmer', described above as inspired by MacIntyre's notion of a functional concept. Second, the intimate conviction of a natural Me/We being fundamentally good resonates with Silvasti's (2003) observation of Finnish farmers genuinely believing that acting according a 'good farmer' script could not be harmful to the environment. Finally, the non-political politics contributes to the understanding of how a sense of moral legitimacy and justice can be developed by promoters of diverging definitions of the good farmer, by drawing on 'natural' and innate qualities, positive for them or negative for their opponents.

[4] Bell also develops a third conception of nature, "nature as a moral bad", or nature as the seat of desires (and therefore politics) that should be controlled and tamed (p. 141). The opposition between second nature – the idea of a good nature – and third nature – opens up two developments that we will just mention here. The first relates to the internal dilemma about what should guide our actions, or in Bell's words: "Should we strive only to commit 'natural' acts or should we resist demon nature?" (p. 142). The second replaces these two concepts of nature in two opposite moral positions towards natural processes, ecosystems and the environment in general: one sees them as unquestionable good; and another consider human action to control, tame, or improve natural forces as something inevitable, needed, or even as a moral duty.

This phenomenology of farming (where the practice of farming is both shaped by moral ideas and shapes what is understood to be 'good' at the same time) that integrates tensions and a never-ending struggle for meaning (Bell, 2004, p. 121-122) allows us to address morality and identity in relation to the good farmer. However, Bell (2018), in his wider-lens work on the 'good' in relation to our understandings of the environment offers a significant caution for those seeking to understand the good in people and things, namely:

> The moral philosopher in all of us wants to find a sound basis for the good. On the whole, this is a welcome desire. But the sociologist in all of us should also recognize that we need to tread carefully with eyes wide open, and with mouth and ears ready to give and receive critique. The good, when we treat it as an absolute, is so seductive we may hardly notice when we are using it to do quite bad things—what I call the conundrum of the absolute. (p. 224)

In other words, Bell invites us to welcome and combine both a moral and absolutist approach to the good (like moral philosophers) as a necessary guidance for action; AND a more relativist and critical stance (like social scientists) that ponders power relations and manipulations of the good in the politics of, in our case, farming. Recent work on the 'good farmer' develops some of this critical realization of changing contexts/boundaries (Riley, 2016b; Saunders, 2016; Sutherland 2013). While Bell's natural conscience, natural Me/We, natural Others/Them, and interpretations of 'nature' help us clarify some of what might be considered good farming, Gabriel Abend's work on moral backgrounds helps to clarify some of the moral foundations that make such judgments socially and culturally significant.

First and second order Morality and the Moral Background

Abend (2014), drawing on examples from US business ethics, makes a distinction between first and second order morality and the moral background. First order morality comprises the behaviours and actions taken on behalf of those making ethical choices. These actions are then judged to be good or bad by others — and it is the act of judging the morality of others that comprises second order morality. This can be illustrated through an example from agriculture. In New Zealand dairy farming one farmer might choose to put up fencing to keep cows out of the waterways while another might choose not to put fencing up (Haggerty et al., 2009; Tall &

Campbell, 2018). The choice to put fencing up or not, for Abend, is part of the first order morality sometimes called ethics. Farmers' judgements about each other's choices and the judgments of all others comprise second order morality. We can conceptualise morality in relation to the good farmer as a situation where effects on the environment are involved in those judgements – as in the case of Bell's third interpretation of nature as a moral 'bad'. Abend (2014, p. 53) furthers our understanding by describing the moral background that "facilitates, supports, or enables morality". Specifically, the moral background is "a particular collection of para-moral elements" that include what is or is not able to be morally judged, the cultural repertoires available, and how moral judgments are shared and debated along with metaphysical assumptions (Abend, 2014, p. 67). Obviously, moral background as well as first and second order morality vary according to cultural and geographic contexts.

Abend (2014, p. 37) argues that social actors have access to a repertoire of moral concepts which "enables and constrains their thought and speech, their laws and institutions, and importantly, the actions they may undertake". In farming, these repertoires typically play out in embodied enactments of what is culturally agreed upon as 'good' given the farming culture a farmer finds themselves within, moreover, they point to what is visible and included and what remains invisible, overlooked or ignored in this process (Abend, 2014, p. 55 fn 53; Carolan, 2011). For us, Abend's key observation is that moral backgrounds shape farm practices in pursuit of what is 'good' in farming by helping establish the boundaries of judgment based on cultural repertoires.

Competing Moral Orders and Moral Devaluation

Farrell's (2015) work offers a framework for analysing competing notions of what is 'good' with a specific emphasis on place and the environment. Farrell, in his exploration of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem in the western United States, developed the concept of competing moral orders based on his analysis of competing understandings of what it means to live a moral life in the US West. In doing this he introduces an important concept that partners well with Abend's and Bell's work, namely the questions of conflict, moral disagreement, and the politics of morality. For Farrell (2015, p. 10), drawing on a sociology of culture (especially Wuthnow, 1989), moral orders "are an interpersonally and institutionally shared structure of moral beliefs, desires, feelings and boundaries that are derived from larger narratives and

rituals". In the same way as judging one farmer's actions as bad and another's good (second order morality for Abend) moral orders help shape and reinforce who the Other is, while reinforcing self-belief about what is 'good' in one's own actions. With an emphasis on the moral being indicative of something right, good, worthy and just, Farrell argues that these moral orders orient actions toward each other in workplace, family, public, and political engagements. He further contends that they help give "narrative coherence around an individual's life" (p.11). The coherence aspect shows similarities with the good farmer literature as it ties one's success as a good farmer to the strength and dynamism of one's identity as a farmer. In the context of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem, Farrell argues that the environmental conflicts at the heart of the major disagreements come down to conflicts over moral orders. Thus, as participants in favour of re-wolving the West gather evidence to support their beliefs, they also aim to devalue not only the beliefs of those who oppose wolf reintroduction, but their opponent's selves. As moral orders orient our personal narratives and self-worth, these conflicts at the level of belief undermine the opponents' self-worth – with the process of moral devaluation making compromise nearly impossible.

The concept of moral order is useful to express variations in the definition of good farming – which depends on environmental factors such as place, water availability, climate, topography, but also social aspects like technology, tradition, networks, infrastructure, or diet, among other things – in moral terms. Farrell's definition of moral order also helps to highlight that conflict over farming practices might be related to moral framings (notably for non-farmers) that are broader and largely unconcerned with how agriculture is actually practised. Moral orders help orient people's lives towards teleological goals. There is a specific point to one's life; life has a purpose and, with the concept of moral orders in mind, helps to relate the good farmer to this fundamental (but variable) moral dimension of farming – to feed the world, to keep the land in 'good heart', to pass the farm on to the next generation. Finally, the process of moral devaluation again emphasizes that, in conflicts over the morality of farming practices and over the definition of the good farmer, what is at stake is not only the ambition of being an excellent farmer, it is mainly about self-worth and moral legitimacy.

Yet, disagreements over what is considered a good farmer occur (Sutherland & Darnhofer, 2012; Kessler et al., 2016). So how do the concepts of natural conscience, moral background, and moral order help us to understand contradictions in one's farmer identity (e.g. "I believe

I'm a good farmer, but why are the waterways so polluted") and between farmers with different understandings of what is good?

Incorporating Social Science of Morality into the Good Farmer

As observed in the previous chapters, the existence of good farmers and specific farming cultures can be read from the symbols and landscapes they produce – symbols that, while they may provide evidence of moral behaviours to those within the peer group, may be read as something entirely different by those outside. Lowe et al. (1997) suggest that when farming cultures come under attack – whether from outside or from a competing sub-cultural definition of what a *good* farmer is – then a process of moralization takes place that reinforces the existing culture (drawing the group together to resist the Other) while also altering it (making farmers question and re-establish the morality of their actions). Lowe and colleague's example describes how dairy farming in Devon (England) went through a process of industrialisation in the 1990s. To that end farmers (and rural neighbours) grew to accept that some amount of water pollution (from fertilizer, manure, etc.) was necessary. By adapting the symbols of good/bad farming in this manner, even farmers that polluted to a certain extent were able to think of themselves and be thought of by others (using their second order morality lenses) as a good farmer.

Being considered a good farmer reconciles what it means to be a good person with what it means being a (good) steward. The conflicts that Lowe et al. (1997) observe, can be described as competing groups with differing moral orders – the farmers (as a culture) and the encroaching outsiders (more urban, non-farming environmental groups, and changing government policies) – which offer different perspectives on the relationship between productivism and stewardship. For farmers, who were previously thought of as 'good' no matter what (due to a natural virtuosity inherent in the profession of farming), the reality was that making a living as a farmer necessitated high levels of production – in Bell's words, a concession to the economy that was not enough to contest the goodness of a 'natural We'. Outside agriculture, growing environmentalism accompanied by decreasing belief in agricultural exceptionalism has led many to view farmers as naturally 'bad' rather than naturally 'good', based on the extent of environmental damage caused by polluting agricultural practices. This parallels Farrell's (2015) idea of moral devaluation, i.e.

> [increasing public sentiment towards the environment] was leading to growing intolerance of the problems farmers faced. On this issue, therefore, farmers' personal sense of worth (in the stewardship ethos) faced social rejection, and inevitably this reinforced their feeling of isolation and alienation. (p. 202)

While the Devon dairy farmers were able to retain a sense that what they were doing was indicative of being a good person, at that time, farmers in England felt under siege from the changing moral perception of agriculture.

> For farmers, *the morality of farm pollution concerns the morality of the deed* — whether the pollution was deliberate or accidental. Their sense of personal worth, responsibility and circumstances all come into play around the morality of farming and the morality of pollution (Lowe et al. 1997, p. 204, emphasis original).

An example of this moral devaluation can also be seen in Harrison et al.'s (1998) work on the Wildlife Enhancement Scheme in East Sussex which looked at farmers' and local resident's notions of conservation in agriculture. Here the observation that farmers were being paid to manage land in a manner that appeared destructive led many local residents to "question their original understanding of most farmers on the Levels as benign custodians of nature" (p. 316). They also drew a distinction between 'good' farmers who respected their land and wildlife, and 'bad' farmers – progressively seen as a 'natural Them' – who were driven by greed and disregarded nature and, as a result, considered that only some farmers could be trusted to deliver conservation. Farmers, on the other hand, invariably constructed themselves as active stewards of nature.

These examples illustrate how changing moral boundaries of good farming in a given region can create tension between farmers and the public, different kinds of farmers, farmers and the regional political structure, and farmers and the extant policy. Many authors, for example, Kessler et al. (2016) and Lowe et al. (1997), highlight the inherent contradiction of farmers seeming to simultaneously seem care for and pollute the land. Saunders (2016, pp. 402-403) argues that this tension might well indicate change happening in the field of agriculture:

> While it seems clear that the habitus of some farmers is still firmly aligned with productivist notions, which may retard prospects for rapid change, this does not rule out prospects for a more gradual change as these farmers circumspectly position themselves in relation to a multifunctional agriculture.

Given that the considerations above emphasise how deeply morality can be rooted in identity and self-worth, is it possible to become a different kind of good farmer? Riley (2016a, p. 65) quotes Bourdieu to emphasise that changing habitus in farming might need a "form of radical conversion" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 78). Riley (2016a) incorporates a parallel literature on knowledge cultures which contends that negotiations between farming knowledge cultures and those of outsiders are infused with moral judgements (see Tsouvalis et al., 2000) and suggests that policy makers need to be aware of the moral sphere of those who consider themselves good farmers. Looking at different knowledge cultures in the development of agri-environmental schemes in the UK, Morris (2006, p. 125) reveals that "the porosity of the boundary between state-led and farmer approaches to knowing nature" that facilitates knowledge negotiation. On this basis, she suggests:

> The opportunities that exist for productive interchange and negotiation between the knowledge cultures brought to bear on the environment by farmers and AES is a significant finding. It suggests that farmers views and understandings are being respected and accommodated and in this situation more effective environmental management is likely to ensue. (p. 126)

Bell's (2004) work on the organisation *Practical Farmers of Iowa* describes the relationships between farmers that engendered a shift in farming practices. This change – termed an epiphany by Bell — often follows a crisis of some kind, whether in farming when the rules change (Riley 2016a: 65; Johnsen 2004) or in their self and their sense of what is good. Linking to the broader concept of the good farmer, this thinking pays attention to the 'rules of the game' – but is useful in acknowledging that "rules, norms, and values are themselves not given but prone to contestation and reconstruction by members of the group or when challenged by 'outsiders' (Tsouvalis et al., 2000, p. 912). The key issue here is that in order to meet others' moral expectations of what is 'good' in farming, farmers do not readily change their identity but,

rather, find new "systems" to make what they were already doing coincide with their own identities of goodness (Riley, 2016a, p. 71).

Bell and Farrell illustrate how competition plays out. There is significant difficulty in moving from one group of good farmers to another – or what Bell would describe as becoming a different Self and joining a different group of Others. Initially, the shift has considerable social costs as "failure to display symbols of group belonging can result in social disapproval, leading to a sense of loss for the individual and a corresponding decrease in self-esteem" (Burton, 2004b, p. 198-199). This sense of loss and disorientation was also observed in farmers exiting from a productivist paradigm in Iowa in Michael Bell's ethnography of the practical farmers of Iowa – abandoning productivism and adopting sustainable practices was accompanied by a palpable feeling of social isolation (Bell, 2004, p. 118). Similarly, Bell observed that farmers who lost their farm during what is referred to as the '1980s Farm Crisis' lamented both the loss of status in the community (and of the farm itself) and, for many male farmers, a blow to their masculinity. Bryant and Graham (2018) similarly observe that farmers accepting packages to exit from farming in Australia experience it as a moral event, laden with judgements, recriminations and blame that revolve around these repertoires, natural consciences, and second order morality as "to accept a package transgresses codes of conduct in the ordinary ethics of farming communities." (p. 63) They suggest that moralising by the wider farming community "creates a moral distance between the self and Other" (p. 66) which reinforces their ability to view themselves as 'good farmers'.

This can be seen by examining contemporary literature from a moral perspective. In one of the earliest papers, Silvasti (2003) explored Finnish peasant farming using the concept of a 'cultural script' – an embedded cultural construct similar to Bourdieu's habitus (see Chapter 4). In Silvasti's (2003, p. 148) data there is an emergence of challenges to productivism within the peasant cultural script, but not enough for organic farmers to "put themselves apart from other farmers". In this case, organic farmers were reluctant to accuse non-organic farmers of polluting the environment because to do so would be "fouling their own nest" – in other words, while they recognised the position on the environment was different to their own, they still saw themselves as falling within the overall farming community, a same 'natural We'. The difference between peasant farmers' interpretations of the environmental risks of farming and those of the scientists was, Silvasti asserts, one of the most fascinating themes of the research.

The strength of the farming culture is also illustrated by Sutherland's and Darnhofer's (2012) paper on organic farmers and the process of change related to the concept of the good farmer. While interviewing 'pragmatic' organic farmers (those that converted for primarily economic rather than ideological reasons) they found that organic farmers helped shift the dialogue around who was a good farmer and what that meant without viewing the organic farmers as having a different farming habitus – they were in the same 'field' in Bourdieusian terms. There exists a constant re/negotiation between the Self and the Other as farmers struggle to maintain a sense of identity among shifting policies, fads, and technological changes. While often still dismissed by conventional farmers as 'not real farming' or 'pretend farming' (Silvasti 2003), the organic farmers in Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) respected the conventions of farming enough to not "foul their own nest". Yet, the dramatic changes and upheavals to farming in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries towards the environment as a core moral concern had clearly changed what had been stable "rules of the game."

The disruption to the feel for the game also opens up the potential for farmers to adopt different interpretations of what it means to be a good farmer (Haggerty et al., 2009, p. 769) – innovating creatively in response to major disruptions (such as BSE) while still considering themselves to be conventional farmers (Sutherland & Darnhofer, 2012, pp. 235-236). Whereas Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) and Silvasti (2003) witnessed an attempt to integrate change through the development of competing definitions of what is to be a good farmer thanks to a shared reference to a singular farming culture under duress, others articulate more fundamental breaks and interpret them as fragmentation into multiple farming cultures with an emphasis on plurality and the opposition between multiple ideas of what a good farmer might be (Bell, 2004; Johnsen, 2004; Haggerty et al., 2009).

Haggerty et al. (2009) explicitly discuss how changing contexts (particularly policy regimes) influences farmers' subjectivities and thus their understanding of what it means to be a good farmer. Here we can see Bell's ideas coming into play. Where Silvasti describes, "The peasant-oriented farming style is self-evidently thought to be ecological" (2003, p. 149) we see the natural conscience (Bell, 2018) at work. That farmers are reluctant to "foul their own nest" confirms that the "Denial of agro-environmental problems is consistent … with the cultural script of good farmerhood" as Silvasti (2003, p. 149) concludes. Farmers are reluctant to adopt

a critical stance – a second order morality – against largely consensual farming practices as it could undermine what is culturally representative a good farmer, and by this undermine the moral goodness of farming in general. Rather than organic farmers pressing a dialogue on what is a good farmer (even though most conventional farmers see organic as pretend or not real) (Silvasti, 2003, p. 146) to highlight these contradictions, the Others that challenge this denial are those coming from a different environmental morality, natural Others.

These observations represent only a fraction of the moral boundaries that serve to define what it means to be a good farmer. While here we focus on environmental boundaries, as we noted, other moralities in agriculture such as the conflicting moral imperative to 'feed the world' offer other avenues for exploration. Moral boundaries that define different sub-cultural notions of the 'good farmer' and the moral boundaries that divide farming and non-farming populations offer other possibilities. Some work on this already exists. Researchers have described differences between different farming cultures and sub-cultures (Bell, 2004; Naylor et al., 2018; Shortall et al., 2018; Stock, 2007) while others describe instances where farmers fall afoul or their rural neighbours (Lowe et al., 1997; Naylor et al., 2018). Carolan (2020) takes a further step towards incorporating morality and agriculture by theoretically connecting ethical or good consumers and the good farmer literature via a moral economy framework. By incorporating the social science of morality as suggested here we can better theorize the boundary zones between different good farmer identities and thus explore changing common sense notions of what it means to be a good farmer. An improved understanding will help us to both understand farmers' reactions to externally imposed policy measures (such as agri-environmental schemes) and assist in the development of effective policies in the future.

The importance of morality or what is good in farm practices has received less attention than the actual practices that represent a cultural consensus on what is a 'good farming'. Yet, as we have seen in this chapter, from the earliest times the issue of morality (or multiple moralities) has played an important role in determining who is a 'good' farmer. The addition of theoretical tools for interrogating what is meant by 'good' or moral in the phrase 'good farmer' provides a useful extension to the good farmer concept – offering us language and concepts that enable us to better identify the moral aspects of changing farm practices that are affecting farmers and agriculture worldwide. The chapter thus better positions the good farmer concept and scholars to be able to address the tensions of injustice, inequity, and conflict related to farm practices choices and identity formation. This issue is important for the next chapter where we seek to

understand the role of marginalised 'Others' in the 'good farmer' concept – focusing, in particular, on gender and sexuality. How do alternative moralities contest inequalities that are reproduced by dominant cultural definitions of agriculture? What happens when marginalised groups challenge the moral boundaries and moral assumptions of who is a 'good farmer'?

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