

The Ethics of Sustainable Thinking

A framework for making moral and ethical choices



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“If success or failure of this planet and of human beings depended on how I am and what I do... how would I be? What would I do?” (Buckminster Fuller)

Tags: Social - politics and influencing (social justice; environmental justice);
Economics - Shifting the global economy to sustainability - fair trade;
Whole system - Vision and purpose

Challenge:

Sustainable thinking and the drive towards a sustainable world will be strewn with difficult choices and dilemmas that may have no clear-cut or obvious right/wrong outcome. An ethical framework to support sustainability fundamentals of ecological and social needs helps in avoiding the sustainability thinking blunders across our path.

Solution:

Some choices are “right versus wrong” and most people only take a moment of reflection to come to the proper decision. Some choices are more complex and might be viewed as “right versus right”. From a sustainability perspective, there are six suggested categories, that can help guide our decision making

1. Individual versus community.
2. Global versus local.
3. Law versus truth.
4. Short term versus long term.
5. Toxic versus non toxic.
6. Justice versus mercy .

We can also consider the pros and cons of situations from the perspective of 3 principles that have been around for many hundreds of years.

1. Do what's best for the greatest number of people. This is “ends-based” thinking.
2. Act in accordance with whatever laws we would like other people to follow in similar situations. This is “rules based” thinking.
3. Do what you want others to do. This is “care based” thinking,, “The Golden Rule”

Reference:

Doppelt, B (2008) *The Power of Sustainable Thinking, Ch 8*. London, Earthscan

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