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The Environmental Ethics of the Corporatization of Agriculture and Crop Genetic Engineering

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Abstract

The corporatization of agriculture has resulted in significant implications for the environment and consequently environmental management. In particular, corporate application of genetic engineering (GE) has resulted in increased and unnecessary environmental risks through inappropriate applications of GE and increased pesticide use. GE technology has in turn allowed for the agriculture industry to become further corporatized. Current environmental management procedures with regard to risk assessment and the regulatory processes of GE crops have proven inadequate in light of such corporate involvement.

The research aim of this thesis was to establish whether the corporatization of agriculture, and the consequent corporate application of GE crops, results in breaches of environmental ethics, as defined by the worldviews of biocentrism and ecocentrism. This aim was achieved through the application of a structured literature review, using an interpretive approach within the paradigm of hermeneutics. The literature analysis was carried out on peer-reviewed journal articles from the last 10 year period, within which selected articles were asked a series of interview questions in order to fulfil the research objectives, and consequently the aim. The extracted information was critically considered within the framework of environmental ethics and the contrasting worldviews of anthropocentrism, technocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism.

The key issue identified was the lack of consideration of biocentric and ecocentric values in the arguments made by corporations and proponents of GE crops as a result of a dominance of anthropocentric and technocentric worldviews. The lack of such values on the part of corporations ensures that both sides of the debate are arguing from different perspectives and as such it seems unlikely that they will ever be able to reach a resolution. This thesis concludes that for progress to be made in the debate on GE agriculture and corporatization, and for appropriate precaution to be employed with regard to risk assessment, the worldview held by agrochemical corporations and proponents of GE needs to shift towards a biocentric and ecocentric understanding of the environment. However, as a complete shift of worldviews on the part of corporations is unlikely, this thesis recommends that attention be shifted away from the polarized controversy in favour of a discussion on coexistence.

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