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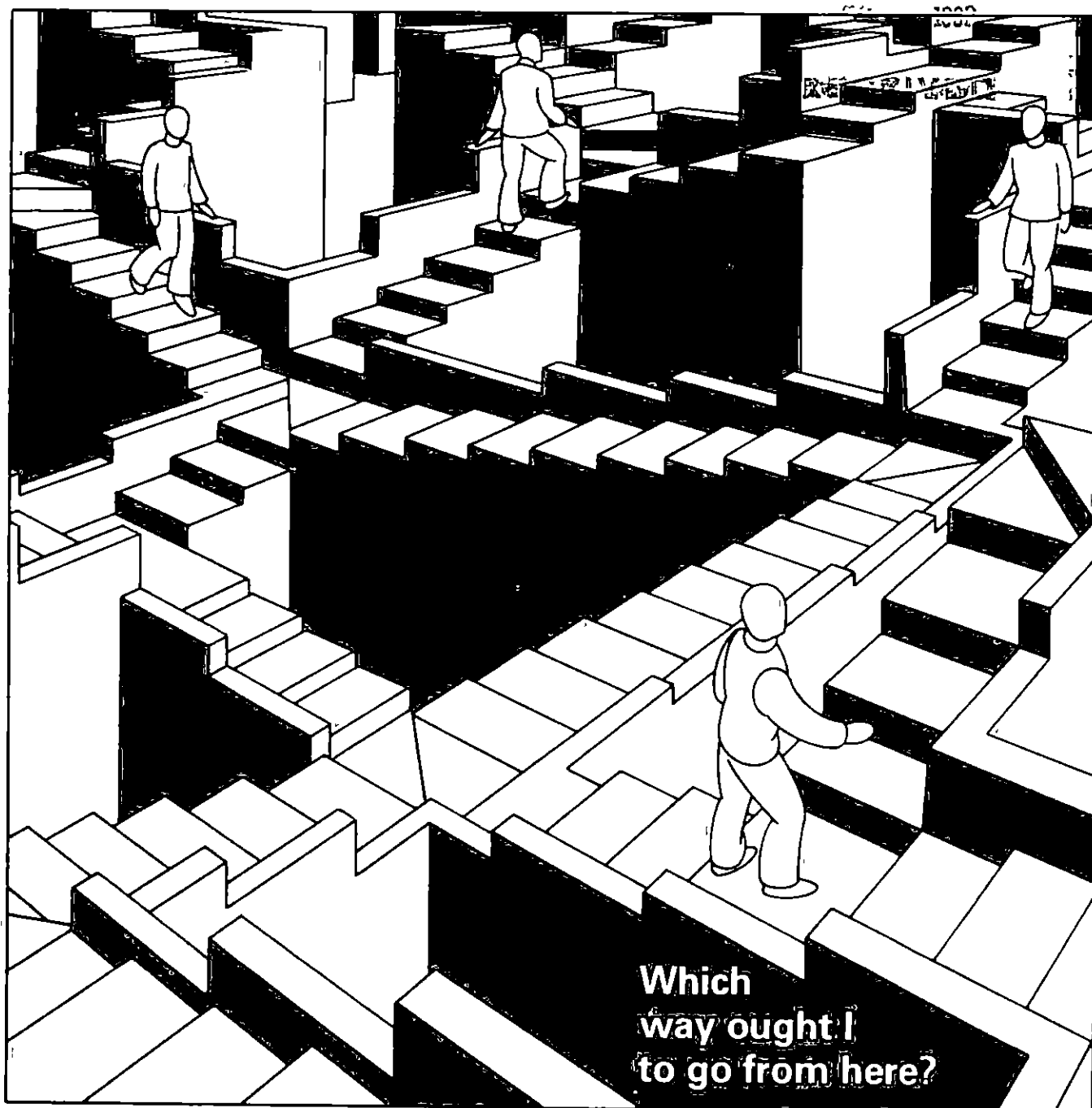
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Readers interested in a chronological bibliography of materials in Agricultural Economics Research from the first issue in 1949 through the second issue in 1980 should write Ann Bassett, Staff Assistant, ESCS/EDD, U S Department of Agriculture, Washington, D C. 20250

COVER IDEA Our appreciation to M C Escher for his visual perceptions of the logical paradox implied in the pursuit of truth—which we also seek

IN THIS ISSUE

The pursuit of truth, according to John Dewey, is accountable to nothing and to no one not a part of that pursuit itself. For researchers in agricultural economics, this means that they are not obliged to account for their procedures and findings to just anyone, but it also means that they are held responsible for explaining their results to certain people—people who are a part of the pursuit.

When we use data and theory to deal with a problem and we reach particular conclusions which we claim to be true, to whom are we—as researchers—accountable? Gunnar Myrdal warned that the individual cannot be “left alone to manage his rationalizations as he pleases, without interference from the outside. His valuation will, instead, be questioned and disputed.”

Who can dispute us and ask us questions about procedures and findings that we are obliged to answer? Some who have thought about this question are clear about what goes wrong when we act as if we were accountable to those who are not a part of the pursuit of truth. We are not obliged to be slaves to the logic and theories of what John Maynard Keynes called “some defunct economist.” Michael Polanyi warned against accepting conclusions imposed by authority—it is not so that “might makes right.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel said “the simple tendency of the naive mind is to accept with trustful conviction the truth which is publicly known.” John Locke warned that to retain credibility we must not put “passion in the place of

reason”—we cannot go off on our own merely concluding what we want to believe.

When we ask which of several roads might lead us to the truth we are not unlike Alice who, in her journey through Wonderland, looked up at the Cheshire Cat on a bough of a tree and asked “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” “That depends,” said the cat, “a good deal on where you want to get to.” Alice said she did not much care—as long as she got somewhere. She knew she wanted to get home but did not know where that was. Similarly, we often know we want the truth but do not know what it is. The Cheshire Cat was not a part of Alice’s search and did not try to influence her decision. But agricultural economists are often not so lucky. We are too often given advice by—and held accountable to—people who are not a part of that pursuit itself.

The articles in this issue question how we can know whether our research is leading down the path toward truth. Kost, in the first article, which examines a net foreign trade model, recognizes that validating a model is a subjective process—we have confidence in a model that somehow, intuitively, feels right. Another researcher working on the same problem is in a legitimate position to raise a question about validity if, to that researcher, the proposed model subjectively feels wrong.

Rodriguez and Kunkel, in the second article, which examines a model of the agricultural sector of the Philippine economy, mention a

number of economic development models which simulate competitive markets. Another researcher working on the same problem might judge that competitive markets are not functioning in the public interest and that purposive government intervention needs to be modeled instead. Such a researcher is in a legitimate position to raise a question about the social values implied in the competitive model.

Authors of the first two articles make their main appeals for validity to data. They claim their models track the historical data well. Another researcher who finds that Kost’s or Rodriguez and Kunkel’s conclusions differ from other empirical evidence can legitimately question the empirical foundations of the models.

Baron, in an article on farm tenure agreements, and Salathe, in an article on the food stamp program, appeal to logic and economic theory for evidence that their conclusions are true. Each has reformulated economic theory in a manner which raises questions about the truth others have seen in the logical conclusions of earlier formulations.

The articles in this issue illustrate that pursuers of truth are accountable to those who are a part of that pursuit and who can, therefore, raise legitimate questions about the data, theory, value judgments, and subjective feelings which the proposed models draw upon.

CLARK EDWARDS

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