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Abstract: Reform of “industrial agriculture” is currently in vogue. But what is it? I show that the industrial food system can be understood as the confluence of two ethically motivated philosophical trends that have their roots in early 19th century thought. First, there was the promotion of industrial growth. Second, was concern about scarcity and population growth. Increases in the productive efficiency of food systems were judged to be morally good both in virtue of their ability to win a race against inexorable pressures of population growth and as contributing to an egalitarian leveling of life prospects. I will argue that many—perhaps most—criticisms typically leveled against contemporary food system practices continue to operate within this philosophical framework. As such, they miss many ethical arguments that would have been obvious to virtually anyone—including most philosophers—working before the advent of the industrial era.