

From the Editor

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The current issue contains 9 articles and six book reviews.

The first paper is by Siti Hafsyah Idris, Chang Lee Wei, and Azizan Baharuddin. In “Biosafety Act 2007: Does It Really Protect Bioethical Issues?” the authors focus on The Malaysian Biosafety Board’s recent approval of field testing for genetically modified (GM) male mosquitoes, supposedly in compliance with the Biosafety Act of 2007, which was passed in order to strike a balance between promoting biotechnology and at the same time protecting against its potential environmental and human health risks in Malaysia. However, the authors claim, “the 2007 Act fails to adequately take into account any bioethical issues in spite of the inclusion of a provision on socio-economic consideration.” So the authors attempt “to address the role and function of the Malaysia biosafety legal framework in governing bioethical concerns relating to Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) within the current biotechnology background in Malaysia.” They also “suggest that the ambiguity of the provisions contained within the 2007 Act in governing such concerns, representing wider societal interests and welfare, in some ways might defeat the balancing role that this act was originally intended to fulfill.”

The second paper, “Crop Biotechnology for the Environment?” is by Sven Ove Hansson and Karin Joelsson. The authors argue that biotechnology, if properly used, can have positive effects on the environment and on human health. “It can diminish the need for environmentally damaging agricultural practices such as pesticides, fertilizers, tillage, and irrigation. It can reduce the land area needed for agriculture, thus reducing the CO₂ effect of agriculture and improving biodiversity. It can produce energy in a CO₂-neutral way (especially if new technologies involving the cultivation of microalgae become successful.” It can also have positive effects on human health “by decreasing occupational and dietary exposure to pesticides,

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improving the nutritional value of food, and producing pharmaceuticals more efficiently.”

The third paper is by Mäkinemi, Jaana-Piia, Pirttilä-Backman, Anna-Maija, and Pieri, Michelle. In “The endorsement of the moral foundations in food-related moral thinking in three European countries,” the authors examine “how gender, political orientation, and country of origin are connected to moral foundation endorsement in food-related moral thinking.” They looked at responses from students in Finland, Denmark, and Italy, using “ethical food” and “unethical food” as stimulus words. The results showed the presence of five moral foundations, where Purity/Sanctity and Fairness/Reciprocity were the dominant ones. They found gender differences and differences between countries.

The fourth paper, “The endorsement of the moral foundations in food-related moral thinking in three European countries,” is by Lorenzo Del Savio and Bettina Schmietow. The authors first “analyze previous proposals that justify ethical traceability with arguments from sustainability and the respect for the autonomy of consumers, showing that they cannot ground a duty to inform.” Their claim is that there is a duty to inform consumers about the environmental impact of foods, and then they discuss what this duty entails and to whom it falls. The duty, they argue, “rests on the right of consumers not to be harmed, insofar as consumers have an interest in the morality of their own agency that is frustrated if they are not informed about the environmental impact of the production and transport of what they consume.” Their argument detaches the regulation of labeling from substantive theories of environmental ethics or perfectionist conceptions of citizens’ responsibility. As a consequence, they are able to defend “a case for labeling that is compelling also for those who take the role of the state to be limited to the prevention of harm.”

The fifth paper, by Helen Siipi, examines the claim that food’s naturalness is conceptually connected to its healthiness. She argues that two of the five meanings frequently attributed to the term “naturalness” are strongly connected to healthiness, two are not, and the fifth may be indirectly related to it. She also makes it clear what specific senses of “healthiness” she favors. These two are naturalness as nutritive suitability and naturalness as moderate need satisfaction. So, she concludes, “desire for natural food is not necessarily mistaken and misguided.”

In the sixth paper (“A Semiotic Approach to Food and Ethics in Everyday Life”), the author, Christian Coff, explores “how food can be analyzed in terms of signs and codes of everyday life, and especially how food can be used to express ethical concerns.” The author uses a semiotic conceptual analysis to “explore how food can be analyzed in terms of signs and codes of everyday life, and especially how food can be used to express ethical concerns,” arguing that the “semiotic approach to food ethics in everyday life is a conceptual framework that can be used to draw attention to certain domains and fields of food ethical behavior that otherwise would tend to remain implicit and unspoken.” This approach is then used to analyze the role of food as an expression of ethics in everyday life among families, friends, and colleagues and answer the following questions: “How do foodstuffs function as signs of ethics in everyday life? How is food used to send signals about care and concern? How are the signs of food ethics perceived?”

The seventh paper is by G.A. Albrecht, C. Brooke, D. H. Bennett, and S. T. Garnett. In “The Ethics of Assisted Colonization in the Age of Anthropogenic Climate Change,” the authors examine the ethics of moving threatened species when climate change has threatened them in their current environment. The claim examined is that in “order to avoid further animal and plant extinctions, or at the very least, their increased vulnerability to becoming rare and endangered; the systematic assisted colonization of ‘at risk’ species, “which is being seriously considered by scientists and managers of biodiversity, is desirable and ethically warranted.” While the more practical aspects of assisted colonization have been covered in the conservation biology literature; the ethical implications of such actions have not been extensively examined. The authors claim that their discussion of the value issues, “using a novel case study approach, will rectify the limited ethical analysis of the issue of assisted colonization of species in the face of climate change pressures.”

The last two papers are empirical studies of attitudes toward animal welfare concerns. M.B.M. Bracke, Carolien C. De Lauwere, Samantha M. M. Wind, and Johan J. Zonerland discuss their findings about the “Attitudes of Dutch Pig Farmers Towards Tail Biting and Tail Docking.” And Catherine M. Tiplady, Deborah-Anne B. Walsh, and Clive J.C. Phillips discuss “Public response to media coverage of animal cruelty.”