

Editorial

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The current number contains four articles and five book reviews. The first article is by H.A.E. (Hub) Zwart. In “Biotechnology and naturalness in the genomics era: plotting a timetable for the biotechnology debate,” Zwart argues that much of the problem with debates about biotechnology in food production is that these debates are frustrating partly because of the ambiguities that they contain. To disentangle the ambiguities, Zwart argues, we must “broaden the temporal horizon of the debate.” Because “ideas about biotechniques and naturalness have evolved in various socio-historical contexts...their historical origins will determine to a considerable extent their actual meaning and use in contemporary deliberations.” To this end, Zwart develops a comprehensive timetable, beginning with the Neolithic revolution. This revolution resulted in the emergence of what the author calls the “Common Human Pattern.” The concept of nature developed under the CHP differs both from the traditional philosophical concepts of nature and “the scientific view of nature conveyed by the contemporary life sciences.” “A clarification of these different historical backdrops will allow us to understand and elucidate the conceptual ambiguities that are at work in contemporary debates on biotechnology and the place of human beings in nature.”

In the second article in this issue (“Reflections on the Growing Influence of Good Agricultural Practices”), is by Yuichiro Amekawa. Amekawa argues that EureGAP “gives a financial edge to powerful large farms and exporters while diminishing opportunities for smaller growers and exporters to remain in the profitable agricultural export sector of the Global South.” EureGAP was developed by a consortium of major European retailers and provides a private standard to enforce “codes of conduct that address issues of health and safety for producers and consumers, as well as working conditions and environmental management on the farmland.” Amekawa then “examines the evolving nature of a new trend in the

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fresh fruit and vegetable sector, i.e., the rise of public GAP standards. Promoted by some governments in the Global South, these GAP standards emphasize support for horizontal partnerships among value chain stakeholders, farmer participation, and less capital-intensive agricultural innovations.” Amekawa argues that “within certain limitations, these GAP standards have the potential to be the major alternative GAP approach by encouraging a much broader inclusion of small-scale producers towards the attainment of various social, economic, and environmental benefits.” The author then situates his discussion within a theoretical purview of ecological analysis in social theory to show the ethical implications of private SPS measures. To do this, the author provides a critical analysis of three perspectives from environmental sociology: ecological modernization, risk society, and green socialism.

The third paper is by Franck L. B. Meijboom, Nina Cohen, Elsbeth N. Stassen, and Frans W. A. Brom. In “Beyond the prevention of harm: animal disease policy as a moral question,” the authors “defend the thesis that in order to develop a sustainable animal disease policy other than economic assumptions need to be taken into account.” Current European “policy seems to find its justification in a ‘harm to other’ principle. Limiting the freedom of animal keepers—e.g., by culling their animals—is justified by the aim to prevent harm, i.e., the spreading of the disease.” The authors argue that “the harm-principle is no longer a sufficient justification for governmental intervention in animal disease prevention” because there are conflicting risks of harm, and the authors use “the interests and position of keepers of backyard animals as an example” of a risk that differs from the risk of economic harm.

The fourth article is by Jan Deckers. In “Vegetarianism, Sentimental or Ethical?” Deckers argues that the feelings of those who adopt vegetarianism are not merely sentimental but make sense. The charge that vegetarianism is only sentimentally based is pressed frequently by those who adopt moral absolutism, a position that Deckers rejects. Deckers first identifies three concerns that might motivate vegetarians to adopt their diet: a concern “with the human health and environmental costs of some alternative diets, a concern about inflicting pain on animals, and a concern with the killing of animals.” The primary focus in this paper, however, is to examine the question “whether a morally relevant distinction between the killing of plants and the killing of animals should be made.” Deckers provides “some evidence to support the claim that many share his view that it is more problematic to kill animals than to kill plants,” although Deckers thinks that the account given by either Singer or Regan on the ethics of killing nonhuman organism is unsatisfactory.