

## Genomics, Obesity and the Struggle over Responsibilities

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# Genomics, Obesity and the Struggle over Responsibilities

*Edited by*

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# Preface

This volume addresses the overlapping aspects of the fields of genomics, obesity and (food) ethics. It is unique in its examination of the implications of genomics for obesity from an ethical perspective. Genomics covers the sciences and technologies involved in the pathways that DNA takes until the organism is completely built and sustained: the range of genes (DNA), transcriptor factors, enhancers, promoters, RNA (copy of DNA), proteins, metabolism of cell, cellular interactions, organisms. Genomics offers a holistic approach, which, when applied to obesity, can have surprising and disturbing implications for the existing networks tackling this phenomenon and for fundamental ethical notions, strategies and practices. In the book several strategies to match genomics, obesity, society and ethics are studied, and a happy match is proposed based on a pragmatist ethical framework. The ethical framework presented is inspired by the interaction between a procedural perspective emphasizing the necessity of consultative and participatory organizational relationships in the new interfaces between (nutri)genomics, medicine and food, and a substantive perspective that both cherishes individual autonomy and embeds it in socio-cultural contexts.

The research for this study was done partly in 2003 and 2004, and partly in 2008 and 2009, due to severe work overload and other duties to be done in the interim period. The contributors were so kind to update their chapters, so the delay in publishing has, as far as I can assess, not lead to outdated pieces of information, but on the contrary enabled to cover a broad temporal window.

Working with this team of contributors was quite a delight, and I am very grateful to the many comments and interesting insights that were exchanged during our interactions on this subject and that illuminated me in writing the chapters, outlining the general structure and scope of the book and doing the editorial work.

Wageningen, The Netherlands

Michiel Korthals



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**Jozef Keulartz** (1947) is Associate Professor Applied Philosophy at Wageningen University and Research Centre, the Netherlands. He has been appointed special chair for Environmental Philosophy at the Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He has published extensively in different areas of science and technology studies, social and political philosophy, bioethics, environmental ethics and nature policy. His books include *Die verkehrte Welt des Jürgen Habermas* [The Topsy-Turvy World of Jürgen Habermas, 1995], *Van bestraffing naar behandeling* [From Punishment to Treatment, 1996, 4th ed), *Struggle for Nature – A Critique of Radical Ecology* (1998), and *Werken aan de grens – een pragmatische visie op natuur en milieu* [Boundary-Work: A Pragmatist View on Nature and Environment, 2005]. He is editor of *Wilhelm Dilthey: Kritiek van de historische rede* [Wilhelm Dilthey: Critique of Historical Reason, 1994] and co-editor of *Foucault herdenken* [In Memory of Foucault, 1995], *Museum Aarde* [Museum Earth, 1997], *Pragmatist Ethics for a Technological Culture* (2002), and *Legitimacy in European Nature Conservation Policy* (2008). Keulartz is a participant in ALTER-net, a 'network of excellence' funded by the EU's 6th Framework Programme. He is a member of the Scientific Council of The European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC). He is also a member of the Netherlands Commission on Genetic Modification (GOGEM).

**Michiel Korthals** (1949) is Professor and Chair of Applied Philosophy at Wageningen University. He studied Philosophy, Sociology, German and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam and the Karl Ruprecht Universität in Heidelberg. His academic interests include deliberative theories, American Pragmatism and bioethics, and ethical problems concerning food production and

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**Tsjalling Swierstra** (1960) studied in Groningen and Amsterdam. He graduated *cum laude* in philosophy in 1987 and *cum laude* in political science in 1988, both at the University of Amsterdam. He received his PhD in 1998 at the University of Groningen. His dissertation, *De sofocratische verleiding* [The sophocratic temptation; nominated for the biannual prize for best dissertation in political science] defends the thesis that dominant conceptions of practical reason still bear the imprint of by now out-dated (empiricist or rationalist) conceptions of theoretical reason/science. In 1996 he joined the philosophy department of Twente University, where he teaches ethics and social philosophy. In 2009, Tsjalling Swierstra has been named Professor by Special Appointment of Philosophy and Ethics in the life sciences, from a humanistic perspective at the University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Science and in 2010 followed his appointment as Professor of Philosophy at Maastricht University. He researches philosophical, ethical, questions concerning technology in general, and concerning medical biotechnology in particular. He has received several grants. In recent years he published articles and books on cloning, new reproductive technologies, genomics, technology ethics in general, and on the ethics of New and Emerging Science and Technology (so-called NEST-ethics) in particular.