

Synthetic Biology in the Chthulucene

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Abstract

The contention that if there is to be a global bioeconomy, then there ought to be a global governance of synthetic biology is the starting point. Reviews of the present regulatory frameworks conclude that these frameworks cannot be relied on as adequate means of controlling risks for these emerging technoscience. A systemic approach to the regulation of emerging technologies that addresses its updated contemporary ubiquity, diversity, and uncertainties appears unexplored. This essay begins to address the question of the necessity for such a systemic approach to technology regulation in general, and synthetic biology in particular. It draws from the approaches of critical and feminist (reflexive) theories and ventures into a narrative for a regulatory concept of technoscience in the Chthulucene. In this instalment of the narrative, I reexamine our knowledge paradigms while questioning utilitarian approaches to regulation in technology using the uncertainties revealed by synthetic biology as a navigational beacon.

Cyberplasm is here to be designed, experimented with and explored. The debates about the utilitarian and ideological purposes of the sciences and technologies engendering synthetic biology are in full swing. The present discourses in the political, social, legal, economic, moral, technological, and scientific realms about global climate change, human rights, and sustainability, continue to emerge, proliferate, multiply, accelerate, and divide. These developments strain and stress not only notions of legitimacy, legal concepts, principles, established regulatory agencies but also those of what is humankind, nature, culture, society and politics. Last but not least, our own cognitive capacity seems challenged.

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