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Paper title

Affective implications of GM food on social and individual integrity:
an ethical approach

Abstract

Biotechnologies give rise to ethical questions of many kinds. Genetically modified organisms are a topic that touch people in many ways. Even if research is conducted away from lay people and hardly anyone apart from the researchers has access to biotechnologies as such, we all are to an increasing extent being faced with the products of biotechnologies. The gap between scientists' understanding of biotechnologies is contrasted with lay people's reserved reactions to the latest applications. How are we to deal with products that have been realised with biotechnologies? For instance genetically modified food is an issue which brings about many responses ranging from disgust and fear to rationalisations. After all food is relevant to everyone and the intimacy that is involved when one eats something, i.e. ingests something is bound to give rise to strong responses. I argue that emotional outbursts (or rationalisations for that matter) should not be directly dismissed as irrelevant or trivialised at first hand, rather they should be weighed and analysed whether they are morally relevant responses to the applications of biotechnologies. The criteria with which one makes such decisions has to be identified and critically evaluated. Moreover, it may well be that some individual responses based on some so-called intrinsic objections, for instance on unnaturalness claims, might not have any justified grounds per se, but the quantity of such responses make them something to be taken into account.

These relevant responses have to be considered and taken into account not only on a social decision-making level but also on an individual level. Social decision-making concerning GM products has to be carried out in such a way in which differences of gender, ethnicity, age, class etc. of the decision-makers and other people who are relevant are recognised and taken into account. Again, it is important to identify the criteria and justification for these choices for decision-makers and the relevancy of individuals to the issue. On what basis individuals are awarded a status of being relevant? Moreover, it must also be taken into account that not all responses are outcries which focus on the possible risks of the products and/or on lack of knowledge. Reluctance to consume GM food does not have to stem from ignorant emotional reactions (which can be soothed by increasing the reactor's knowledge of the issue in question). Thus it is crucial to think of the ways in which individuals' integrity is not undermined by the recent developments of biotechnologies. By integrity I mean here an individual's possibility to follow one's commitments and values when choosing the products one wants to buy. Social integrity refers to a society in which differences between different groups are identified and respected. In what ways the public should be taken into account in order to have a pluralist society in which on a personal level people have freedom of choice to deal with GM products?

Biography

I have completed Master's Degree in English Philology in 2004 and in Philosophy in 2006. I am currently a post-graduate and a researcher in the project "Genetic Democracy" at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Turku in Finland. My research interests are bioethics (and ethics in general), feminist philosophy and philosophical questions concerning addiction. I have studied extensively Women's studies at the University of Turku and I actively take part in academic events e.g. Disturbing Differences conference in May 2007 and a weekly post-graduate feminist study group. I have attended a summer school of practical philosophy in the Netherlands in 2005, been a visiting scholar in Iceland in November 2005 and worked for several projects related to bioethics such as the Gaia project commissioned by European Commission called

“Comparative analysis of NEC opinions produced by National Ethics Councils” and a local biobank project.
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