

Biology, precaution, and consumption

The volume level on the debate over genetically modified foods dialed up a notch earlier this year with Whole Foods' decision to begin voluntarily labeling GM food in all its stores as of 2018. Though the decision on a practical level is good for business because labeling tends to result in improved sales, advocates of labeling have also hailed the decision as forward-thinking and consumer-friendly.

As Anton Wohlers points out in his analysis of the Whole Foods decision, the commercial biotechnology food industry is not so sanguine about this development. Yet when considered in tandem with efforts underway in some 20 different state legislatures to pass laws mandating GM food labeling, the issue takes on a certain air of inevitability. Despite strong and consistent support for labeling in public opinion polls, Alaska is currently the only state in the union that requires GM food labeling.

From the federal government's perspective, GM food labeling is not considered necessary because court rulings have held that genetically modified foods are not substantially different from conventional food products; that is, they are *substantially equivalent*. The FDA does embrace voluntary labeling, however, which is precisely what the move by Whole Foods represents.

Underlying the wider discussion about GM foods is a precautionary principle that Nathan Dinneen in his illuminating essay describes as a concept used in public decision-making about environmental or health-related threats. Stemming from the work of Hans Jonas, the principle states that the lack of scientific uncertainty over a potential threat's magnitude should not prevent policy makers from taking measures to prevent harm. Compared to the E.U., whose regulatory approach emphasizes a high level of protection, Dinneen finds the U.S. regulatory system to be more tolerant of risk.

Just as the debate over GM foods has a biological and evolutionary basis, so do many other everyday consumer decisions, from deciding what to wear to selecting a mate, as engagingly told by Gad Saad in his colorful and wide-ranging exposition of his most recent book, *The Consuming Instinct*. Saad, who will be the keynote speaker at this fall's APLS meeting in Lubbock, makes a compelling case for understanding consumerism from a Darwinian perspective. This perspective is well worth the read.

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Biology and politics also receives a considered hearing in Nichole Bauer's integrative essay on the assumptions political researchers make about stereotype reliance in voter evaluations of female candidates. In comparing different research traditions, she argues that political scientists should look more carefully at the way social psychologists have studied stereotypes and empirically test (rather than assume) that gender stereotypes are automatically activated in judgments about female candidates.

Biopolitics as a field of inquiry is interrogated further in three commentaries on Laurette Liesen and Mary Walsh's essay on the competing meanings of "biopolitics" from the previous issue. Rebecca Hannagan, Patrick Stewart, and Amy Fletcher each engage the question from different vantage points, ultimately arguing for an expansive view of the field, while Liesen and Walsh reply with a final comment on embracing intellectual humility.

With this issue I am pleased to welcome Gregg Murray of Texas Tech's Political Science Department as the new contributing editor for book reviews. If you would like to review a book related to politics and the life sciences, or propose a review essay, please contact Gregg directly at g.murray@ttu.edu. Much appreciation to Brad Thayer for deftly handling these important duties for the past several years.

I am also happy to introduce three new members of the journal's editorial advisory board: Robert Gilbert of Northeastern University's Political Science Department, whose research on the presidency and illness has been featured in the journal on more than one occasion, and Dominique Brossard and Dietram Scheufele of the University of Wisconsin, Madison—both superb Life Sciences Communication scholars.

The value of interdisciplinary research will be on full display at this fall's meeting of the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences on the campus of Texas Tech October 25–26. Look for updates on the APLS Facebook page (facebook.com/AssnPoliticsLifeSciences) as the conference date nears as well as a healthy volume of live Tweets as the panels get underway. Follow us @AsnPLS.

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