

3-31-2000

# Food for Thought on Cognitive Scripts and Genetically Engineered Food

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## Recommended Citation

Editor (2000) "Food for Thought on Cognitive Scripts and Genetically Engineered Food," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 12 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol8/iss12/2>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Food for Thought on Cognitive Scripts and Genetically Engineered Food

Author: Editor

Volume: 8

Issue: 12

Date: 2000-03-31

Keywords: Biotechnology, Cognitive Scripts, Genetically Engineered Food

Abstracts. This article identifies some of the common thought sequences seemingly harbored by members of the sociopolitical opposition to the production and sale of genetically engineered food.

An analyst of sociopolitical opposition to the production and sale of genetically engineered food might marvel at that opposition's intensity in Europe. After all, sociopolitical opposition movements frequently are launched after behavioral examples of wrong--at times merely putative, at times very well-validated. In this case, there do not appear to be such examples of genetically engineered food harming humans. What the analyst may be missing, however, is that there are behavioral examples of wrong that do not directly harm the body but violate various belief systems. Belief that a violation of these belief systems has occurred, in turn, can directly induce harm to the body through psychosomatic stress reactions as well as mere psychological distress. The relevant belief systems often are termed cognitive scripts because they entail thoughts (cognitions) that follow a narrative.

The Natural Script. This script imparts the superiority of all things natural. It suggests that anything influenced by Homo sapiens is not natural and that somehow there is a way that homo sapiens can exist without influencing the world. (If not, then Homo sapiens does not deserve to exist.) The script also at least leaves open the notion that other living organisms and nonliving objects and processes can influence the world in some natural way while Homo sapiens cannot. (If not, then the universe should not exist.) Thus, instead of a reification or deification of man (sic), one finds a demonization, vilification, or lowering. The script also suggests that either the natural brings no ill or that such ill is less than that brought by the unnatural.

The Luddite Script. This script imparts that the old ways are somehow better than the new ways and that new ways must not be sought but instead must be impeded. This script seems to ignore the ongoing change that occurs regardless of intent to change any may even conceptualize unintended change as no change or good change and only intended change as good and bad change. The logical deduction from this script is that all life and even all universal phenomena from the first moment after the beginning of it all must be found wanting.

The Sure Thing Script. This script imparts that nothing should be introduced into the current ways of Homo sapiens unless there is no risk. The script suggests that there is such a state as no risk and seems to ignore that believers in the script otherwise engage in risky behavior. The script also suggests that any imagined catastrophe by virtue of being imagined presents risk and must impel an analysis clearly showing the risk is totally beyond probability. If the methodologies of rigorous analysis are not available, all must be put on hold.

The Other Than Human Script. This script imparts that not only human risk but risk to everything and anything else must be abolished before a new intervention may be deemed both moral and ethical--and effected.

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The Knowledge Script. This script imparts that nothing should be done unless what is to be done is understood by those who might be affected. This script seems to ignore that much of what members of the political opposition engage in during their daily lives are not understood by them or even their purveyors. One logical if little stated deduction from this script is that one should not follow God(s) without total understanding of God(s). The upside of this deduction is that if one does totally understand God(s) then one may be God(s).

Analysts of the political opposition and supporters for genetically engineered food might conclude that the routes to these political groups' development, support, and demise lie not through scientific analysis but a blind faith beyond such analysis. Will the Holy Wars of the 21st century bring as much or more calamity than those of the past? And to whom? (See Appleby, M. C. (1999). Tower of Babel: Variation in ethical approaches, concepts of welfare and attitudes to genetic manipulation. *Animal Welfare*, 8, 381-390; Goldberg, C. (March 27, 2000). 1,500 march in Boston to protest biotech food. *The New York Times*, p. A14; Hoban, T.J. (1995). The construction of food biotechnology as a social Issue. In D. Maurer, & Sobal, J. (Eds.). *Eating agendas: Food and nutrition as social problems* (pp. 189-209). New York, NY, USA: Aldine De Gruyter; Macer, D.R. (1994). Perception of risks and benefits of in vitro fertilization, genetic engineering and biotechnology. *Social Science & Medicine*, 38, 23-33; Scheibe, K. E. (1972). Five views on values and technology. *IEEE Transactions on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics*, SMC-2, 566-571.) (Keywords: Biotechnology, Cognitive Scripts, Genetically Engineered Food.)