



Governing Molecules: The Discursive Politics of Genetic Engineering in Europe and the United States (Inside Technology)

Herbert Gottweis

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Scientists, investors, policymakers, the media, and the general public have all displayed a continuing interest in the commercial promise and potential dangers of genetic engineering. In this book, Herbert Gottweis explains how genetic engineering became so controversial--a technology that some seek to promote by any means and others want to block entirely. Beginning with a clear exposition of poststructuralist theory and its implications for research methodology, Gottweis offers a novel approach to political analysis, emphasizing the essential role of narratives in the development of policy under contemporary conditions. Drawing on more than eighty in-depth interviews and extensive archival work, Gottweis traces today's controversy back to the sociopolitical and scientific origins of molecular biology, paying particular attention to its relationship to eugenics. He argues that over the decades a number of mutually reinforcing political and scientific strategies have attempted to turn genes into objects of technological intervention--to make them "governable." Looking at critical events such as the 1975 Asilomar conference in the United States, the escalating conflict in Germany, and regulatory disputes in Britain and France during the 1980s, Gottweis argues that it was the struggle over boundaries and representations of genetic engineering, politics, and society that defined the political dynamics of the drafting of risk regulations in these countries. In a key chapter on biotechnology research, industry, and supporting technology policies, Gottweis demonstrates that the interpretation of genetic engineering as the core of a new "high technology" industry was part of a policy myth and an expression of identity politics. He suggests that under postmodern conditions a major strategy for avoiding policy failure is to create conditions that ensure tolerance and respect for the multiplicity of socially available policy narratives and reality interpretations.

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