Social and Ethical Issues Surrounding Nanotechnology

Three Misconceptions about Social and Ethical Issues

• Too soon to tell
• The inevitable goodness
• Point of studying these issues is to secure public acceptance
Typology of Issues

- Social Context Issues
- Contested Moral Issues
- Technoculture Issues
- Form of Life Issues
- Transformational Issues
Social Context Issues

- Environmental Justice
- Substantially new manufacturing infrastructure

Where does the manufacturing go?
Social Context Comments

• Many of the issues have been researched
• Require immediate attention
• Significant to responsible development
• Requires remedying problematic features of the social contexts (location)
• Action may be taken
• Intersect with government functions
• Need input from social scientists and ethicists
Moral Context Issues

• Sanctity of life forms
Moral Issues Comments

- Not applicable to all nanotechnologies
- Determinate and immediate
- Involve conflicting world views
- Must consider moral implications
- Concerns regarding moral issues cannot be excluded from social and political conversation
- Issues are actionable
Technoculture Context Issues

• Nanotechnology as Techno-Fix?
Technoculture Issues Comments

• Immediate and determinate
• Highlight significance of individual and cultural attitudes or tendencies
• Intersect with social context issues
• Intersect with governmental functions and responsibilities
• Many aspects actionable
• Not necessarily applicable to all nanotechnologies
Form of Life Context Issues

• Virtual Reality and Sociability (social aspects of extended life, replacement of natural goods?)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Life Issues Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Impact on human situation likely substantial</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Issues will be diverse and profound</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Difficult to identify impacts in advance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Less determinate and actionable than others</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Not usually social problems</td>
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<td>• Intersect with government functions and responsibilities</td>
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Transformational Issues

• Transformational dimensions of radical human enhancement
Transformational Issues

Comments

• Less immediate and less determinate than others
• Should not take precedence over other social and ethical issues
• Should not be dismissed