

Research, Controversy, and Engagement: A Proposed Method for Learning with Scientists

Dr. Brian Rappert

Department of Sociology & Philosophy

University of Exeter

In recent years, the continuing high public profile of ethical, social, and political issues associated with scientific research has renewed attention to long standing questions about its place in society. This presentation elaborates an empirical research agenda for engaging with practicing scientists regarding the governance of their work and their individual responsibilities. Substantively, the presentation considers the links between the life sciences and security. Post 9-11, the relationship between national security and research has been a topic that has received considerable attention. As part of this, questions are being raised regarding whether the knowledge and techniques generated through genomics, virology, immunology and related fields might facilitate the production of bioweapons; and therefore whether controls should be placed on what gets done, how, and whether information is widely circulated. In discussing the preparation for, the planning of and the conducting some 90 seminars with scientists about these issues, the presentation aims to propose a strategy of engagement for other areas of emerging controversy. Various tensions and lessons are recounted with a view to considering the choices made in efforts to promote responsive life science and social research.