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The central theme of this work, as the title of this collection of essays suggests, proposes a linguistic strategy for public debate at the intersection of genomics and democracy. The edited volume consisting of fourteen papers began as a proposal by a multidisciplinary team with the Center for Society and the Life Sciences research program on the Social Aspects of Genomics in the Netherlands. The Center arose following a decision in 2001 by the Dutch government to invest a half billion Euro in genomics research.

In the introduction, editors Harry Kunneman and Peter Derkx provide details about the evolution of the project and inherent challenges in their proposal. Three key premises are integral to the work. First, although genomics is grounded in science, its normative and epistemological dimensions extend beyond narrowly objective or reductionist understandings of science. Second, collaborative dialogue is necessary to facilitate democratic ideals in genomics research. And third, because democratic societies require public debate and collaboration on the politics, funding, and potential benefits of genomic research, the use of specialized, technical language in discussions about potential enhancements in health, food production, and cultural evolution implicit in genomic research is problematic.

The volume is organized into three sections: (1) Complexity Theory, Social Constructionism, and Hermeneutics; (2) Ethics and Worldviews; and (3) Corporations, Governments, and Democracy. These chapters most clearly achieve what the title suggests. Essays address emerging collaborative approaches that have attempted to bridge social, cultural, and political aspects of genomics research.

An essay by Alle Bruggink begins the section with a discussion of the shifts that have occurred in scientific research and development. Drawing upon his own experiences in the Netherlands, the author discusses tensions and dilemmas that arise during initial attempts to forge government, academic, and corporate partnerships. Anders Nordgren follows with an essay on direct-to-consumer marketing of DNA testing. Personal empowerment as a strategy for marketing these products is one of the central issues explored in this essay. Nordgren concludes his essay with remarks on ways in which deliberative democracies can provide a robust response to genomics research when appropriate tools are employed effectively.

In the third essay in this section, Michiel Korthals uses nutrigenomics to discuss fundamental uncertainties about genomics research in deliberative democracies. A discussion of both verbal and nonverbal tools influencing the public debates on genomic research cites a classic philosophical paper on trust. Guido Ruivenkamp and Joost Jongerden provide a perspective on the industrialization of agriculture. The essay includes commentary on problematic aspects of patents and patent litigation. In conclusion, Ruivenkamp and Jongerden note many contradictory developments in genomics and observe that new ways of providing access to information—like open-access technologies—may lead to a restructuring of political forces that will subsequently strengthen societies.

In the final essay in this section, Marli Huijer discusses outcomes following integration of personal narrative within debates over whether to allow preimplantation genetic diagnosis of embryos carrying the BRCA genes associated with breast cancer to influence parental decisions. A selection of feminist theory perspectives provides alternatives to the foundational underpinnings of the public debate over genomics. The chapter concludes by observing that personal-experience storytelling can soften polarized perspectives on normatively charged topics.