CRISPR regulation can’t be left to scientists alone

This year, several leading researchers have sounded warnings about the risks of using the CRISPR gene-editing technique to modify human and other species’ genomes in ways that could have “unpredictable effects on future generations” and “profound implications for our relationship to nature.”

Concerns are coming from the silicon sector as well. Last year, the physicist Stephen Hawking proclaimed that rapidly advancing artificial intelligence (AI) could destroy the human race. And in 2013, former Royal Society president Martin Rees co-founded the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge, UK, in part to study threats from advanced AI.

But scientists also want to control the terms of engagement. The US National Academies, for example, will “guide decision making” by convening researchers and other experts later this year “to explore the scientific, ethical and policy issues associated with human gene-editing research”. Scientists also emphasize the need for more research on risks and benefits to “better inform future public conversations.”

The idea that the risks, benefits and ethical challenges of these emerging technologies are something to be decided by experts is wrong-headed, futile and self-defeating. It misunderstands the role of science in public discussions about technological risk. It seriously underestimates the democratic sources of science’s vitality and the capacities of democratic deliberation. And it will further delegitimize and politicize science in modern societies.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: CRISPR: Science can’t solve it