

Is biotechnology 'natural?' Depends how you define nature

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It seems that we are definitely heading towards the bio-based society, a new way of interacting with the environment where fossil fuels won't be needed anymore and "*more natural*" processes for producing energy, food and materials will prevail. Remarkably, this bio-turn often involves highly advanced biotechnology and strict competitive targets, both facts that challenge our general understanding of what a "*more natural way of doing things*" is. Politicians, scientists, and companies are well aware of this apparent contradiction but, are they willing to clarify the meaning of this tricky jargon (naturalness, sustainability, circularity...) within the so-called Bio-based Economy? A fascinating debate is open.

The fact is that people tend to have an Aristotelian concept of nature, that is, we usually conceive nature as everything that exists without human intervention. That's why we are quite a skeptic about considering as "*natural*" those processes involving sophisticated technology and the modification of the building blocks of living systems. Traditionally, we have considered nature and technology as opposites, the latter playing the role of a relentless consumer of natural resources with the only target of making a profit out of them. Yet nature is now presented in a different way. Biotechnology experts interpret their intervention in nature as an act of mimicry, rather than as the exploitation of natural resources.

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