

Talk-14

Science, Technology and Democracy: Distinctions and Connections

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Abstract:

This paper argues that despite considerable overlap, science and technology must be distinguished. Research aimed at understanding of nature is controlled by the community of researchers. This distinguishes it from activities aimed at the production of products under the control of organizations such as corporations and government agencies. Even where one and the same activity aims at both truth and utility, it is controlled in these two different contexts. This distinction is traced in the paper through the post-War history of science and society in America, through direct comparison of several cases and their implications, and through a discussion of the paradoxical structure of technology-society relations. These relations constitute an “entangled hierarchy” because social groups form around technical mediations which they in turn mediate and transform. The politics of science and technology differ in that the contribution of social groups to scientific change is far less direct than to technological change.