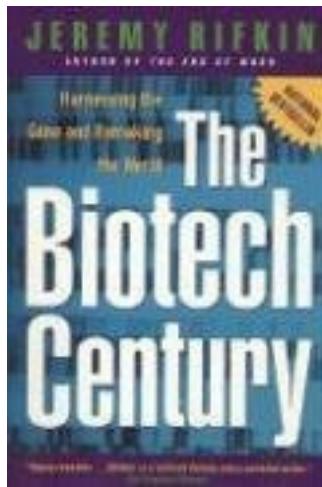


The Biotech Century



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著者:Jeremy Rifkin

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Amazon.com When two Scottish scientists successfully cloned a sheep in July 1996, the news sparked fierce scientific, ethical, theological, and philosophical debate, momentarily pulling biotechnology from the laboratories and thrusting it onto the front pages. With living proof that such advancements are no longer the stuff of science fiction, a whole new world of possibilities--and dangers--presented itself. Jeremy Rifkin is more concerned with the dangers of this technology, and in *The Biotech Century*, he presents numerous compelling reasons why we should be, too. Many of these dangers revolve around the seemingly inevitable commercialization of genetically engineered life forms that would come if corporations battled for the rights to patents on new or modified species of plants, animals, or even human beings. Rifkin warns that "designer" babies and genetically perfect humans, along with any other artificial creations, would wreak havoc with the gene pool and the natural environment. While he concedes that there are benefits to biotechnology, he makes it clear that the risks far outweigh the rewards at this time, urging for greater restraint and responsibility before opening what could be a

Pandora's box. From Publishers Weekly We are poised on the brink of a revolution of unparalleled real-life impact, argues Rifkin in this impassioned, erudite and well-reasoned study. Already, recombinant DNA techniques, computer gene-mapping and the globalization of commerce have begun to reshape life: the cloning of mammals for inexpensive pharmaceuticals is but one example. Though he does not dispute the promised benefits of biotechnology, Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends and author of *The End of Work* and many other trend-tracking books, warns that we must closely consider its possible (and often little-publicized) negative consequences. A technology that can find genetic sources of disease, for example, can also lead to widespread acceptance of eugenic practices; techniques for genetically altering crops and animals to improve food sources could just as easily be used to create customized biological weapons. ("Scientists say they may be able to clone selective toxins to eliminate specific racial or ethnic groups whose genotypical makeup predispose them to certain disease patterns," Rifkin warns.) Biotechnology has the capacity to deplete, rather than enhance, Earth's gene pool and irreparably damage ecological balance, according to Rifkin, and it may transform our conceptions of nature and of life itself. Just as the Industrial Revolution caused unexpected problems such as depletion of natural resources, overpopulation, economic injustice and pollution, so the Biotech Revolution will inevitably cause problems we cannot yet imagine, Rifkin contends, especially if we fail to educate ourselves about the nature of biotechnology and neglect to make careful decisions about how it should best be used. This wide-ranging and deeply intelligent analysis is an excellent first step. 50,000 first printing; author tour. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. See all Editorial Reviews

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