

our humanity.” He favors a legal ban on the cloning of humans.

President Bill Clinton agrees. Human cloning, he said in June, “has the potential to threaten the sacred family bonds at the very core of our ideals and our society.” He is backing his National Bioethics Advisory Committee’s recommendation for legislation “to prohibit anyone from attempting, whether in a research or clinical setting, to create a child through somatic cell nuclear transfer cloning.”

These alarms may turn out in the end to be false. Cloning humans by the method used to produce Dolly may be impossible, the *Economist* (Mar. 1, 1997) notes. The transplanted DNA may need to be “reprogrammed” before it can work. In a sheep’s embryo, the DNA does not start controlling

the new organism’s development “until the egg has divided three or four times.” In humans, the DNA must take control much sooner—after the second cell division. This may not allow enough time for the transplanted DNA to be reprogrammed.

If human cloning should be at all possible, however, it “cannot be prevented” from being done somewhere in the world, argues James Q. Wilson, author of *Moral Judgment* (1997). Cloning’s major threat, he writes in the *Weekly Standard* (May 26, 1997), would be to the already besieged two-parent family. If cloning were allowed only for two married partners, and the mother, in normal circumstances, carried the fertile tissue to birth, then, he thinks, the gains (“a remedy for infertility and substitute for adoption”) would outweigh the risks. But that, of course, is a big if.

The Left’s Creationists

“The New Creationism” by Barbara Ehrenreich and Janet McIntosh, in *The Nation* (June 9, 1997), 72 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011.

In anthropology and certain other academic redoubts these days, it is fashionable to dismiss the idea that human beings share a common, biologically based nature. The very notion is declared unpardonably “reductionist” and treated with irate contempt in seminars and lectures, and wherever feminist and left-wing scholars gather to denounce the patriarchy and the outrages of late capitalism. Ehrenreich, a leading feminist writer, and McIntosh, a graduate student in ethnology at the University of Michigan, protest the current trend in the name of biology and of common sense.

“To set humans apart from even our closest animal relatives as the one species that is exempt from the influences of biology,” they write, “is to suggest that we do indeed possess a defining ‘essence,’ and that it is defined by our unique and miraculous freedom from biology.” This outlook, they observe, is “eerily similar” to that of the fundamentalist creationists now waging war on the theory of evolution.

The “new creationists,” as Ehrenreich and McIntosh call their misguided friends on the left, profoundly misunderstand biology and science in general. “Biology is rhetorically yoked to ‘determinism,’ a concept that threatens to clip our wings and lay waste to our utopian visions, while culture is viewed as a

domain where power relations with other humans are the only obstacle to freedom.” But in fact, they note, biology is not so deterministic—“genes work probabilistically, and their expression depends on interaction with their environment.” And human cultures are not as easily remolded “to suit our utopian visions” as many new creationists assume.

Ironically, the authors point out, in rejecting “any biologically based human commonality, secular creationists undermine the very bedrock of the politics they claim to uphold,” because if human beings are just “pure products of cultural context,” then understanding or communication between cultures becomes impossible. If there is no human nature that is not socially “constructed,” observes Barbara Epstein, of the History of Consciousness Program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, “then there is no basis for social criticism and no reason for protest or rebellion.”

As things stand in the academy today, however, Ehrenreich and McIntosh conclude, “it takes more than a nuanced mind to deal with the interface of culture and biology. It takes courage. The climate of intolerance, often imposed by scholars associated with the left, ill suits an academic tradition rhetorically committed to human freedom.”