"The development of human cloning is inevitable," testified the controversial fertility researcher Panayiotis Zavos before Congress. His words a year ago seem strangely prophetic now that Advanced Cell Technology has claimed that its laboratories have produced the first cloned human embryos.

What was once a fantasy flowing from the ink pens of science fiction writers is on the verge of oozing from the pipettes of a few impetuous biotech entrepreneurs. The means to replicate genetically identical young copies - clones - of a human person may be very nearly, and perhaps irresistibly, within the grasp of existing technology.

Does the pronouncement of inevitability signify ethical finality? Whereas opponents of human cloning cite concerns about safety, the affront to human dignity, and the commodification and compulsory killing of human embryos who would be created and harvested expressly for their stem cells as reasons to prohibit cloning, are such discussions simply inconsequential in that human cloning is nonetheless bound to happen? Has the human cloning project crossed an ethical point of no return beyond which resistive efforts are futile? Not quite. The following three points are offered in response.

First, just because a certain technology is available does not mean society ought to choose to employ it. Neither is one obligated to go along with whatever may be inevitable. Death and terrorism are inevitable, but that does not render the choice of death rational or terrorists blameless.

Secondly, this language of inevitability appeals to the dogma of technological fatalism, which holds that if a conceivable technology (e.g. cloning) is scientifically possible, then one ought to pursue it as a moral imperative - or at least permit others to practice it - because in time it will be
That technological fatalism is a form of blind determinism is evident in that, by extension of its logic, even arguments in favor of human cloning would be irrelevant to the final outcome. In its overriding of choices with assertions of absolute destiny, technological fatalism squashes the distinction between judgments of "can" and "ought." Technological fatalism, although morally prescriptive, only masquerades as an ethical theory. In actuality it suspends ethical judgment, replacing human decision with an autonomous technology which exists as an end in itself and which treats human beings as a means to achieve that ruthless end.

To choose the path of inevitability wherever it may lead is to reject ethics and responsibility. Yet, yielding to the flow of determinism fails to absolve one of moral culpability. On the contrary, to bow to technological fatalism is to become morally complicit with its projects. It would be better to make informed and morally praiseworthy choices about the development and application of technologies such as human cloning.

Technological fatalism, furthermore, would ultimately fail to set limitations which nearly everyone would regard as reasonable and necessary. Once it were decided that human cloning is permissible, it would become difficult to find logical grounds for resisting further appeals to technological fatalism as justification for other applications of cloning technology held to be inevitable. The rhetorical declaration of inevitability shapes ethical criteria that too easily collapse merely into what is possible.

The assertion of inevitability, therefore, does not derive from ethics but is a veiled invitation to abandon ethics in permitting human cloning to proceed. Inevitability’s claim to philosophical right-of-way is no more than a bluff, which through intimidation aims to deprive the public of genuine choices.

One such choice is a comprehensive ban on human cloning. That human cloning will be practiced by someone somewhere may indeed be inevitable. Whether its practice will become routine and broadly accepted, whether federal research funds will be allocated, whether patents will be granted for human clone lines, whether human embryo farms will come into being, or whether eugenic agendas will succeed, however, is by no means set in stone . . . yet. A congressional ban on all forms of human cloning could effectively limit these evils and should be passed without delay.

Deterministic inevitability is oppressive. A world ruled by totalitarian inevitability would be a dreary place in which to live, as would be a world populated by redundant clones. Passionate participation in life demands a reality where individuals are created with special dignity, where choices matter, and where the future holds possibilities both good and bad.

Thirdly, not all inevitability is fatalistic. The Christian worldview illuminates a moral path more optimistic than the dead end of technological fatalism. Unlike the false claims of inevitability which, in resigning to what is foreseeably inescapable, dismiss free choice and hence ethics, the true inevitability in which lies the Christian hope invites ethics. Living before God entails making moral choices. Knowing God and his forgiveness enables one to choose the good. Trusting that good will overcome evil gives one reason to choose the good. Believing that existence is not just a series of accidents and collisions of necessity, but that life holds purpose, awakens the desire
to choose according to God's moral instruction. His instruction encourages people to treat others with compassion and to respect all human beings at all stages of life and development, for they have been made in the image of God.

Living faithfully to a moral Lawgiver requires at times choosing what is right and good even when the decision would be considered futile by worldly standards.

Such faithful living inspired Abraham and Sarah to conceive a promised son despite the "inevitable" infertility of their old age. Such faith led Moses to step into the Red Sea in the face of "inevitable" defeat by Pharaoh's army. Such faith enabled young David to hurl a stone at the giant Goliath who proclaimed Israel's "inevitable" conquest. Through such faith Israel's shouts brought down Jericho's stone walls.

The rationalizing pragmatist who cooperates with evil that good might result has misplaced his or her trust in a false and ultimately futile inevitability, whether this be blind fate or fallible human progress. The Christian claim of inevitability - that good will ultimately prevail over evil - awaits a bright future in eager expectation and places its trust in a loving, merciful, almighty God who became in Jesus Christ a vulnerable human person for the sake of humanity.

In an apparently futile sacrificial act at Calvary, the Messiah conquered futility. Wondrously, through the risen Lord, such futile creatures as human beings have access to infutility. The true moral inevitability may be found not in the repetitive drumbeat that ushers in the rigid march of cold fatalism, nor in the pestering bark of coercive intimidation, but in the symphony of creative redemption of the world by its heavenly Author.

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