

# Abortion and plain English

**M**ore than 50 years ago George Orwell wrote a trenchant essay on how language is misused and manipulated to, as he said, defend the indefensible. Calling his work "Politics and the English Language," he probably could not anticipate how truly his words could be applied today.

This month we face a grim anniversary, the 27th year since the Supreme Court somehow found a constitutional right to kill unborn children for any reason — or no reason. Because, without mincing words, that is the gist of what the court decided. By now arguments from both sides of the abortion debate are familiar to most, but there's one aspect rarely discussed: the way the pro-abortion side abuses and debases the language to justify its position. I deliberately used the term "pro-abortion," because the term "pro-choice" is their primary dodge. One is hard-pressed to find a philosophy more vacuous.

First, no political system short of anarchy elevates personal choice to an ultimate good, yet the so-called pro-choicers would have us think it trumps every other consideration, whether scientific, medical or moral. They know they can't win the debate on any of those grounds, so they hide behind pleasant-sounding words.

Second, they declare they don't advocate which choice to make, but it's clear which they mean. This rhetorical sleight of hand is evidenced by a recent action in Florida, where the state legislature approved a specialty license plate that features the logo "Choose Life." The state is being sued by the National Organization for Women because it apparently is advocating the "wrong" choice.

Such wordplay is not without cost. Our language, Orwell noted, "becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts." In his day, he commented that "political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness." Consider how true that is today. Abortion defenders defend choice but never want to talk about the specifics of what is being chosen. They'll refer to the unborn child as "the product of conception" or "a blob of tissue." Kate Michelman, president of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, even referred to the end result of abortion as "fetal

demise."

Then there is partial-birth abortion, a perfectly descriptive term they run from like scalded cats. Yes, they'll point out that there is no such medical term. It's really "intact dilation and extraction."

They won't tell you it's not taught in any medical school, or that the American Medical Association said the procedure is never medically justified. They don't suck out the baby's brains; according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, they "evacuate the intracranial contents."

Abortion defenders hide behind a clot of turgid terminology to avoid the truth. Orwell anticipated this, too. He wrote: "The inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all details. . . . When there

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is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink."

Let's look at that word "euphemism." It's been described as a verbal fig leaf. The metaphor comes from the biblical story of Adam and Eve, who, after sinning, instinctively hid their shame and nakedness with these leaves. God confronted them and asked, "Who told you that you were naked?"

Why do abortion defenders instinctively hide behind verbal fig leaves? What inner voice tells them that what they defend is shameful? That is a question they should ask themselves.

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