

# George Orwell, language and the pro-life cause

I don't know what George Orwell, author of "Animal Farm" and "1984," thought about abortion, cloning and stem-cell research and, not knowing, I'm not enlisting the British novelist and essayist, who died in 1950, in the pro-life cause. But I do know what he thought about the abuse of the English language. Based on that, I find him highly relevant to this debate.

In an essay called "Politics and the English Language," Orwell wrote:

"A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."

That was said in 1946. And the human life debate? Consider some recent items pertaining to the number of abortions, drug-induced abortion and human cloning.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, a Planned Parenthood affiliate in New York, the number of U.S. abortions fell to 1.2 million in 2005. Although 1.2 million is a very large number, it's a notable improvement over the 1.6 million in 1990. Pro-lifers were understandably pleased.

But wait. Late January also brought news that abortions by RU-486 (misoprostol in conjunction with mifepristone) have become, in the words of The Washington Post, "increasingly common" since this killer drug went on sale in the U.S. in 2000. The reason is said to be that this kind of abortion is "less clinical and more private." The report cites a Guttmacher Institute estimate that, of the 1.2 million abortions in 2005, possibly 150,000 were done this way.

Stop and think. If RU-486's appeal for some women lies in being "more private," then that 150,000 figure is at best an educated guess. Furthermore, as Colin Mason of the Population Research Institute points out, misoprostol by itself has uses

besides ending pregnancies and isn't hard to obtain, making it, as Mason says, an unmonitored source of "one-pill, one-day 'homemade'" abortions. Thus the number of abortions by whatever means may be considerably higher than we're told, and the underestimating seems likely to grow with time.

Finally, there's cloning. In mid-January scientists with a La Jolla, Calif., outfit called Stemagen said they'd created what the Post called "the first mature cloned human embryos from single skin cells taken from adults."

Whether that's true or not isn't the issue – although media hype about stem cells is an established fact of life, so that we're treated to the announcement of some new, epochal breakthrough in this field every couple of weeks. For present purposes, however, what's significant is a remark attributed to Samuel H. Wood, Stemagen's CEO. Disavowing any interest in cloning humans, he said: "It's unethical and it's illegal, and we hope no one else does it either."

Alas, that noble sentiment clashes with the fact that cloning humans is exactly what Wood's company has apparently done.

Wood evidently is implying that cloning human embryos and destroying them before implantation in the womb isn't cloning. But unquestionably it is. The argument can be stated very simply: a cloned human embryo is a cloned human embryo. Period. Killing embryos before implantation doesn't alter that. If anything, it merely makes matters worse.

George Orwell held that overcoming careless habits in the use of language enables one to "think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration." But some people don't want regeneration. Confusion suits them fine.