



The Kulas Kronicle



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July 2013

“Doubting” Thomas Changed His Mind

His name turned out to be Thomas, but because he changed his mind completely in just minutes, I was the “Doubter.” Let me explain.

He approached me at the JFA Poll Table which asks, “Should Abortion Remain Legal?” He signed, “Yes.”

As it turned out, his pro-choice view was not as deeply entrenched as are the views of many other pro-choice advocates. He was more measured. He thought the unborn was human and was opposed to abortion in most circumstances. Still, there were two circumstances in which he thought abortion should be broadly legal, even until birth. Thomas wanted to know if I agreed with him that abortion should be an option in a situation of rape or if the child would be deformed in some way. It was very clear that I must Trot Out the Toddler (TOTT). TOTT is a helpful technique in which the pro-

life person applies a justification for abortion to a born child, a toddler.

For example, if a pro-choice person argues that abortion should be permitted for the sake of the woman’s privacy, then the pro-life person would apply the same circumstance to a child outside the womb. The pro-life person could ask, “Imagine a mother has a two-year-old. Should she have the right to kill her two-year-old in the privacy of her own home?” A more thorough explanation can be found in the gray box below.

The key to understanding when to use the Trot Out the Toddler technique is to distinguish arguments that are on-topic from those that are off-topic. Greg Koukl of [Stand to Reason](#) states, “If the unborn is not a human being, no justification for abortion is necessary.

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The Four Steps of “Trot Out the Toddler”

The following sections come out of JFA’s *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue* Interactive Guide

ANALYZE

Before we can answer the question, “Can I kill this?” we must answer a prior question, “What is it?” Most pro-choice arguments simply assume the unborn is not a human being. Yet, generally speaking, pro-choice advocates must directly argue that the unborn is not a human being in order to justify abortion. If your conversation is not focused on the question, “What is the unborn?” you may be wasting time.

To refocus the discussion, “Trot out the Toddler.” First, **AGREE** with the person’s concern. Then, **APPLY** the person’s concern to a two-year-old and ask if it’s okay to kill the 2-year-old for that reason. When the person responds by saying, “No,” **ASK WHY** it’s not okay to kill the two-year-old. It may take a few more questions to get down to the reason – that two-year-olds are human beings. **AH!** That’s the issue then: Is the unborn a human being like the two-year-old?

IMITATE

Pro-Choice: Some women are too poor to care for a child, so I think abortion should be legal.

Pro-Life: I think you’re right that some women are really destitute. It’s very sad. Can we agree that we should do our best to help them? [**STEP 1: AGREE**]

C: Sure. So, do you agree we shouldn’t get in the way of their choice?

L: I agree we shouldn’t get in the way of most choices, but I have a question: Imagine I had a two-year old here and his mother is very poor. Should she be allowed to kill him? [**STEP 2: APPLY**]

C: No.

L: Why do you think she shouldn’t be allowed to kill the toddler? [**STEP 3: ASK WHY**]

C: That’s obvious. The toddler is human. But abortion is different – the unborn isn’t human.

L: [**Mentally: Ah!**] So can we agree that the issue is not poverty or choice, but “What is the unborn”? If the unborn is human, like the toddler, we should protect him also, shouldn’t we? [**STEP 4: AH!**]

C: Sure...if. But I don’t think the unborn is like the toddler. No one knows when life begins anyway.

*Thanks to Scott Klusendorf at the **Life Training Institute** for helping us learn to Trot Out the Toddler! Go to www.prolifetraining.com for LTI’s great training and resources.*

However, if the unborn is a human being, no justification for abortion is adequate.” An on-topic argument is one that focuses on whether or not the unborn is human. If someone says abortion is okay because the unborn is a blob of tissue, she is making an on-topic argument. Why? Because the pro-choice person is focused on whether the unborn is human. If someone says, the unborn can’t feel pain and therefore are not fully human, that is also an on-topic argument. However, the pro-choice argument about privacy is off-topic because it ignores the central question “What is the unborn?”

Making this distinction between on-topic and off-topic arguments and learning how to Trot out a Toddler helps pro-life people navigate their conversations about abortion. Here’s how I was able to use Trot out a Toddler in my conversation with Thomas after he signed the side of the poll signifying that he thought abortion should remain legal:

Paul: Do you think abortion should be legal through all nine months of pregnancy?

Thomas: Yes.

Paul: Do you think abortion should be legal for any circumstance during all nine months? Or do you believe certain circumstances for having an abortion are not acceptable?

Thomas: I believe it should be legal if the mother was raped or if the child will be deformed.

I discovered what Thomas believed by using the Three Essential Skills: ask questions, listen, and find common ground. I will discuss these skills in more depth in a future newsletter, but they are the foundation to having a healthy, productive and thought-provoking conversation with a pro-choice person. Incidentally, these skills are also helpful when talking to friends and family.

As we discussed rape and child deformity, Thomas made it clear that he was mostly pro-life and only in favor of abortion for these two reasons. His reason for favoring abortion in the case of rape was out of deep-seated desire to care for the mother who is a victim of rape. And his concern for the deformed child was what I would call misguided compassion. He didn’t want the child to suffer ridicule or judgment.

Paul: Isn’t the central question that needs an answer, “What is the Unborn?” [He was unsure, so I asked another question.] “Would you agree that before one can answer the question, “Can I kill *it*?” one must know what *it* is?

Thomas: I agree.

Paul: First, I agree that rape is a tough circumstance. It is very difficult to imagine myself in that situation and to imagine how I would handle it if one of my daughters or my wife was raped and became pregnant. However, imagine a mother has a two-year-old child who is the product of rape. Would it be permissible for the mother to kill that two-year-old if seeing that child outside the womb causes her to remember the violent act of rape? [*Steps 1&2 - Agree and Apply*]

Thomas: Well, no.

Paul: Why not? [*Step 3 - Ask Why*]

Thomas: Because the two-year-old is human.

Paul: So it sounds like it is not the circumstance of rape that is the key but whether the unborn is human? [*Step 4 - Ah*] ... Isn’t the unborn child as human as you or I, just younger and less developed?

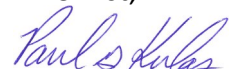
Thomas: "You have a point there. That has got me thinking. I think you have switched my view."

I doubted him as it seemed he made a rather abrupt switch in his view, but Thomas clearly stated, “I agree that if they are both human, then the circumstances really don’t matter.” At this point I asked him his name. “Thomas,” he said. I thought it was a rather funny coincidence. He was Thomas, but because he changed his mind so quickly, I was the one caught doubting!

What struck me about this conversation was that Thomas didn’t need to be told that the unborn is human. He already believed that. He needed to apply that belief to all of the tough life circumstances surrounding unwanted pregnancy. I simply provided him with a safe place where he could process his thoughts out loud. Keep in mind that Trot Out the Toddler is not an argument that proves the unborn is human. To do that, you will need a [different kind of tool](#).

Maybe there is someone in your circle who needs you to Trot Out the Toddler with them. Send me an email (paul@ifaweb.org), or write me a letter with questions you have about Trotting Out the Toddler. Thank you for your continued support of my work.

In Christ,



Paul G Kulas