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While I have not personally experienced being in a position to choose between life and death, I have always been curious as to how such a decision could be made with complete consideration of ethical principles. I am particularly interested in the fact that the law recognizes the right of a patient to refuse medical treatment. This right includes the refusal of life-saving treatment, which could lead to death. The expression of a patient's refusal could be made either before the administration of the treatment or at a prior and advanced time, well ahead of future incompetence (Michalowski).

The recognition by the law of the patient's right is so strong and resolute, such that the disregard of the patient's wishes through the administration of medical treatment despite his refusal would amount to battery (Michalowski). However, despite the legal principles allowing, in certain circumstances, the decision to curtail a life or to halt the provision of life support systems, the question in my mind remains. Does a decision to continue or discontinue a life violative of an ethical principle?

If so, I wonder up to what extent a decision to curtail or prolong one's life would the action still be considered ethical. A patient is a person who has the right to decide everything that has to do with his own life. A popular position on this quandary is that together with this person's right comes the responsibility to act responsibly. Before a patient's refusal of medical treatment, it must be ensured that he is competent to make such an important decision. It must be ensured that he is apprised of all the facts necessary for him to make an intelligent decision.

Thus, the patient must be told about the " nature and purpose of the procedure. " When making the decision, the patient must not be influenced

by external factors. Finally, it must be made clear that the decision would apply to future circumstances (Michalowski, 2005). However, learning and understanding utilitarianism, an ethical theory developed by popular philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, I could not help but apply the theory in the situation described above.

According to these philosophers, moral value of human actions should depend on the effect of such action on people (West). Thus, they did not believe that other factors, such as motive or will, have anything to do with morality (West). Indeed, utilitarianism has captured the interest of many people because it is often used to justify the morality of certain human actions, based on practical considerations.

Following Bentham's philosophy, the quandary could be resolved by taking into account the things that possibly motivate a man in his actions. Bentham and Mill worked on the assumption that only two possible things could motivate man (Online Guide to Ethics and Moral Philosophy). These are pleasure and pain. Man naturally desires happiness, but wants to avoid pain (West). The two utilitarian philosophers likewise believed that man only has one end, and such end is happiness, which is brought about by pleasure (Bentham; West).

Thus, they formulated a thesis that holds that human action would be considered morally right or wrong, depending on whether it tends to promote happiness for the greatest number of people to promote happiness for the greatest number of people (Bentham). If so, such act would be morally right. Following Bentham's rationalizations of his notion of utilitarianism, the dilemma could be analyzed following four points. First, it should be

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recognized that pain and pleasure play a fundamental role in human life (Online Guide to Ethics and Moral Philosophy).

Thus, in the given scenario, both pain and pleasure would play out in varying degrees among the people involved, such as the patient, his friends and his family. Thereafter, it should be considered how human action gets the approval or disapproval of society. According to Bentham, such judgment by society is based on the action's consequences (Online Guide to Ethics and Moral Philosophy). Thus, in application, the act of prolonging life support could affect society's approval or non-approval depending on the consequences evoked by such an act, such as prolonged life or otherwise.

The next consideration would involve the fact that pleasure is equated with good while pain is equated with evil (Online Guide to Ethics and Moral Philosophy). Finally, for utilitarian philosophers like Bentham, pleasure and pain could be measured through "quantification (Online Guide to Ethics and Moral Philosophy)." Thus, in the given scenario, I could rule on the morality of an act depending on certain criteria of evaluating pain or pleasure, such as the effect of the consequences of the act of removing life support vis-a-vis the act of letting it continue.

Thus, while other philosophies might accept the act of curtailing a person's life based solely on the principle of patient autonomy, utilitarianism would not readily acquiesce in such a decision. Considerations based on the pain or pleasure it would impose on various interested stakeholders would have to be made. Only the solution that could offer the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people would be recognized by utilitarianism as the ethical course of action. Works Cited Bentham, Jeremy.

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. London: Wilson & Pickering, 1823. Michalowski, S. “ Advance Refusals of Life-Sustaining Medical Treatment: The Relativity of an Absolute Right”. The Modern Law Review Limited 68. 6 (2005): 958-982. Online Guide to Ethics and Moral Philosophy. “ Utilitarianism. ” 2002. 19 Nov. 2008. . West, H. R. “ Utilitarianism. ” Encyclop? dia Britannica. 20 Nov. 2008. .