

Case study



Case Study: Terri Schiavo October 16, Case Study: Terry Schiavo The case of Terry Schiavo is one that expanded over fifteen years, beginning on February 25, 1990 and coming to an ethically controversial end on March 31, 2005.

The case drew much public and medical speculation in regard to the right to live, which is the moral concept of a person being able to determine for themselves when they should die, or else being able to choose life over death. Though this concept is one that has been in practice for quite some time, Terri Schiavo could be considered a special circumstance.

On February 25, 1990, Terri went into full cardiac arrest and suffered massive brain damage due to a lack of oxygen (Krasemann & Thiroux, 2008). She spent two months in a coma, then her diagnosis was elevated to a vegetative state. Though the doctors spent years trying to help Terri to become aware, it was to no avail. She was physically alive, but her brain was giving up. She had succumbed to being little more than a body only managing to live due to the machines and technology offered by the hospital.

It was in 1998 that Terri's husband, Michael, petitioned to have the feeding tube removed from Terri, which would cause her to die. Terri's parents, Robert and Mary Schindler, argued against this decision, claiming that Terri was still alive. In 2001, the court determined that Terri would not want to wish to continue these measures that kept her alive and ordered to have her feeding tube removed. Even though it was replaced several days later, after a lengthy court process that went as far as Federal legislation, the tube was permanently removed in 2005.

One side of the argument was that regardless of her condition, Terri Schiavo was still alive. This side favored keeping the feeding tube in unless Terri's

condition deteriorated. The other side argued over the morality of keeping her in a state that caused her to be unaware and unresponsive. Each side felt that they would be acting morally, and that the opposing side of the argument were being very immoral in their actions.

In regard to whether or not the actions to remove Terri from her feeding tube were moral or immoral, all that needs to be considered is that Terri Schiavo had been unable to make the decision for herself whether or not she wanted to continue to live. Therefore, the court had no right to determine that she would not have wanted to continue the use of the feeding tube. While they may have made a valid point, there was no way of knowing for sure what was truly in the best interest of Terri. As such, as long as something was keeping her alive, she should have been allowed to continue living.

A life should not be determined worth living based on the measures being taken to keep that person alive. Alive is alive; whether the person is aware or not of their surroundings, they are still a breathing, living person. To suggest that Terri would have been unwilling to remain in her condition can be seen as almost irrelevant to the actions taken. To claim that a life is less worth living because someone is unresponsive seems to be more for the person wanting to pull the plug, not for the sake of the person in a state of vegetation. Michael Schiavo saw no point to keeping his wife alive and therefore decided it was no good keeping her attached to her feeding tube. Furthermore, the method of starvation to end Terri's life is another issue of ethics and morality. The piece of equipment that was pulled from her was a feeding tube; in cases where it can be determined that a person should be allowed to die is when a life support system is being used. In these cases, the person is only alive because of the machine. Terri had been alive without

the help of a life support system. She required the use of a feeding tube because she was unresponsive to the attempts of doctors to feed her orally (Quill, 2005). To ensure she got her proper nutrition, she was required to be hooked up to this feeding tube. By removing the tube, Terri was being denied food. Terri Schiavo ended up starving to death. To allow someone to feel the pain of hunger, to be denied a necessity of life, is as immoral as it gets. There had been nothing moral about what had happened to Terri Schiavo.

Not only was the reasoning behind ending Terri Schiavo's life immoral, but the method in which it was done is also as such. A living human being was denied food, a vital part of staying alive, by family members, health care professionals, and even government officials (Bishop, 2008). The cardiac arrest that Terri experienced had not taken her life - it had been by the hands of the people who should have tried to save her.

I approached this case study being entirely aware of all the different arguments that had been gone over time and again during Terri Schiavo's stay in the hospital. I also made myself aware of the concept of the right to life, and used this both against and for the condition that Terri Schiavo had been in prior to her death.

References

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