Critical Thinking, Ethical Decision Making, and Philosophical Analysis

Unit Abstract

In 2005, after a protracted legal battle, Terri Schiavo, who had spent fifteen years in a permanent vegetative state, was disconnected from life support and subsequently died. The question at the center of the ethical and public debate over her fate—and the overarching question students will try to answer in this unit—is whether the decision to discontinue life support for Terri Schiavo was just ed or not.

The attempt to answer this question will lead students to explore the profound ethical and philosophical implications of this case, while at the same time enhancing their critical thinking skills.

Students will learn how to:

- Use informal logic to critically examine and evaluate arguments used in ethical claims
- Clarify the meaning of key concepts by exploring their philosophical significance
- Assess relevant information and facts used in the debate

Some of the questions students will explore in the course of this unit are: How can we distinguish between good and bad arguments used in ethical claims? Why is it important for an honest and productive debate to be clear about the concepts used? What, for example, do we mean by “life” and “death”? Are there cases where this distinction gets blurred? What exactly do we know about Terri Schiavo’s condition, and what are the limits to what we can know about her mental state? Can recent advances in neuroscience and technology improve our ability to know what a person in a coma is thinking? Does a person in a permanent vegetative state have a “right to life”? Does it make a difference if we still consider her a person, or the same person? Is it in that person’s interest to be kept alive? Is her life still meaningful? What makes life meaningful, and when—if ever—does life stop being meaningful? Should people have a “right to die”? And who should decide for a person, if she can’t decide for herself?

By addressing these questions, this unit will allow students to appreciate the complex nature of cases like that of Terri Schiavo that involve life-extending technologies and surrogate decision-making. It will demonstrate the importance of understanding such cases, of critically examining arguments, concepts and facts, and of seeking insight from a variety of disciplines. And lastly, and maybe most importantly, it will help students gain insights about the ethical and philosophical questions they may encounter in their own lives.
UNIT OUTLINE AND SEQUENCE OF TOPICS

Introduction

The introductory segment engages students in a pre-assessment activity, provides students with basic information about the Schiavo case and allows students to share their first reactions and intuitions about the case.

Part I: Informal Logic and Evaluation of Arguments in Ethical Claims

In the first part of this unit, students will be introduced to some of the statements put forth by the different parties involved in the Schiavo case (1). With the help of informal logic, students will examine and evaluate the underlying arguments for soundness and validity (2). Students will then identify concepts used in the debate that require further analysis and clarification (3).

1. Presentation and examination of statements used in the Schiavo case.
2. Introduction to informal logic and further examination and evaluation of arguments.
3. Identification of key concepts used in the debate that require further analysis and clarification.

Part II: Conceptual Analysis and Essential Questions

In the second part of the unit, students will engage in a discussion of some of the key concepts used in the debate over Terri Schiavo and their philosophical significance. In each segment, students will engage in a discussion of one of these concepts and their philosophical implications, before applying the insights gained in that discussion to the case. At the end of each segment, students will consider and formulate an answer to the respective essential questions.

1. Life and Death
   What state is Terri Schiavo in?
   Is she dead, alive, or somewhere in between?
   What is the difference between life and death?

2. Personhood
   Is Terri Schiavo (still) a person?
   Is she the same person?
   What does it mean to be a “person,” and to stay the same person through time?

3. Personal Rights
   Does Terri Schiavo have a “right to life”?
   Does every person have a “right to life”?

4. Quality of Life
   What is in Terri Schiavo’s best interest?
   What makes life meaningful?

5. Autonomy
   Who should decide for Terri Schiavo?
   Should everybody be allowed to decide for herself?
   When and why should other people be allowed to decide for us?

Conclusion

A final discussion about the case and whether the decision to disconnect Terri Schiavo from life support was justifiable or not. Students will take another survey to see if their opinions have changed. If so, what was the decisive element that made them change their opinion? If not, did the reasons for their decision change?

Learning Outcomes and Enduring Understanding

- To learn how to use informal logic to critically examine arguments used to support ethical claims
- To develop strategies to explore the meaning and philosophical significance of fundamental concepts, such as “Life”, “Death”, “Person”, and “Right”
- To assess the validity of information and facts presented as part of an ethical claim
- To realize that understanding a complex case like that of Terri Schiavo may require the consultation of various disciplines (e.g. medicine, biology, neuroscience, ethics, philosophy, etc.)
- To appreciate the ethical and philosophical implications of cases that involve life-extending technologies and surrogate decision-making
- To understand and appreciate the scientific and technological challenges (and future possibilities) of diagnosing the mental state of comatose patients
Procedures and Activities

This unit uses a student-centered and interactive approach to teaching. Activities are designed to allow for a maximum degree of student participation and collaboration. Each activity is marked as an individual-, partner-, or group activity, or as a teacher-directed class discussion.

The following icons are used to designate the different types of activities:

- Individual Activity
- Partner Activity
- Group Activity
- Teacher-Directed Class Discussion

Assessment

Assessment may include pre- and post-assessment activities, short reaction papers on the essential question(s) in each segment (formative assessment), as well as a final project (summative assessment). The final project could consist in an individual project (e.g. testifying as an expert bioethicist at the Schiavo trial) or a group project (e.g. role playing in a discussion between the main players in the case).

Pennsylvania State Curriculum Alignment (See Appendix II)

2. Civics and Government (Grade 12): 5.1 (J, L), 5.2 (A, G)
4. Reading, writing, Speaking and Listening (Grade 11): 1.2., 1.6. (A, D, E)

Introduction

This introductory segment begins with a pre-assessment activity (questionnaire), tapping into students’ previous knowledge of, and personal experience with some of the issues addressed in this unit. Students will then be provided with basic information about the Terri Schiavo case. A class-discussion should give students an opportunity to share their first reactions about the case. At the end of this segment, students will take a vote on whether they believe the decision to disconnect Terri Schiavo from life support was just or not: 1) Right decision; 2) Wrong decision; 3) Not sure. Another vote taken at the end of the unit will show if the unit changed students’ opinion about the case.

1. Students will answer the following questions in a questionnaire. The questions listed here are just suggestions and may be altered or amended according to grade level, subject, and course focus.

1. Do you have personal experience with a person who is unconscious?
   Are you familiar with cases of people who are or were in a coma?

2. What can cause people to become unconscious, and what are some of the characteristic features of being in a coma?

3. Do you believe the life of a person in a coma should be sustained at all cost? Why? Why not?

4. Do you agree with the statement: It is never justifiable to knowingly in fact harm another person? Why? Why not?

5. What makes you a person?

6. Are there certain rights that every person should have? What are they?

7. What are characteristic features of a good life? What could you not live without?

8. Can people ever be truly free? What are the limits of our personal freedom? How important is freedom to you?

9. When is it ok to make decisions for other people? When is it ok for other people to make decisions for you?

10. What would you want to happen to you if you were to fall into an irreversible coma?

2. Students will share and discuss their findings with a partner and then report their findings to the class.

3. Students will be introduced to the case of Terri Schiavo and provided with basic information about her life and the events that led up to her death.

In February of 1990 at the age of 26, Terri Schiavo collapsed at home and oxygen was cut off to her brain for several minutes. As a result, she fell into a coma. In May of 1990 she emerged from her coma but remained unconscious. Although severely brain-damaged, Terri Schiavo
was able to breathe, and maintain a heart beat and blood pressure on her own. While her vision was impaired, her eyes were open and functional and she could move her limbs. But she needed a feeding tube connected to her stomach to sustain her life. For many years, Terri’s husband, Michael, and Terri’s parents worked with doctors to try to help Terri regain consciousness. However, years of rehabilitation failed, and Terri did not improve. Arguing that it would have been Terri’s wish to die, Michael, who was Terri’s legal guardian sought to discontinue life support. This decision was challenged by Terri Schiavo’s family. On March 18, 2005, following a prolonged legal battle, accompanied by much media attention, her feeding tube was removed. Terri Schiavo died on March 31, 2005.

Ask students if they believe—as based on the information above—that the decision to disconnect Terri Schiavo from life-support was justified or not. At the end of this session, students should take a vote on whether they believe the decision to disconnect Terri Schiavo from life support was: 1) Right decision; 2) Wrong decision; 3) Not sure. Another vote taken at the end of the unit will show if the unit changed students’ opinion about the case.

PART 1

One of the aspects that make public debates like that over Terri Schiavo’s fate so confusing (and difficult to assess) is the fact that they are not conducted by exchanging and comparing arguments, but rather by using short and often incomplete statements, individual words, or images. In this part, students will be introduced to some of the statements that rect the different positions represented in this case. With the help of general rules of argumentation and basic informal logic, students will learn how to examine the arguments for implicit and explicit premises, and for validity and soundness.

1. Show students a picture of a woman protesting the decision to disconnect Terri Schiavo from life support and ask them what they believe the person is trying to express?
   (For picture, see: http://dawn.thot.net/schiavo-sentinel.jpg)

2. With a partner, students should organize the following statements according to whether they believe them to be in favor of, or against continuing life support for Terri Schiavo (for origin and source of quotes see Appendix III).

   1. “Everybody has a right to life.”
   2. “I think society . . . has been confused over what compassion is. We’re here to love and take care of these people and not kill them.”
   3. "Terri died 15 years ago."
   4. “She wouldn’t like to live like this and that’s all she’s doing -- surviving.
   5. “Terri’s emotions are gone,” ... "What’s there is a shell of Terri. There’s nothing there anymore."
   6. “… the intrinsic value and personal dignity of every human being do not change, no matter what the concrete circumstances of his or her life ...”

3. Collect and discuss students’ findings. Ask students which of the statements they can identify with most, and why? What is it about the statement they find most compelling that makes it “better” than the others? Are there ways to determine the quality of a statement by just looking at their form, i.e. independent of whether we are familiar with the particular facts?

4. Students will be introduced to some basic elements of a traditional theory of argumentation (syllogisms) and informal logic. The goal here is by no means to give students a complete overview, but rather to illustrate that there are certain criteria to distinguish good arguments from bad arguments. For the purposes of this unit, students should be familiar with the concepts, listed below. (For further information on syllogisms, see also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syllogism)

   Ask students, which of the following arguments appears to be “better” than the other, and why?:

   **Argument 1**
   1. All men are mortal.
   2. Socrates is a man.
   3. Socrates is mortal.

   **Argument 2**
   1. All men are mortal.
   2. Socrates is mortal.
   3. Socrates is a man.
The difference between these two arguments is that the conclusion (3) of the rst argument follows from the premises (1, 2), whereas the conclusion in the second argument does not. If the premises in the rst argument are true, the conclusion is also true, whereas, even if the premises in the second argument are both true, the conclusion could still be wrong (e.g., Socrates could be the name of a dog.). While we may still have to check whether the premises in the left argument are true to decide whether the conclusion is also true, we already know that the second argument is "bad," simply by looking at its form.

“Syllogistic Arguments” - The form of the rst argument above is called a “syllogism”. A classic syllogism, as described by the Greek philosopher Aristotle in his “Prior Analytics,” is a logical argument that consists of a conclusion that is inferred from two premises.

Premise 1: All men are mortal.  
Premise 2: Socrates is a man.  
Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

The special thing about a syllogism is that if all the premises are true, the conclusion is also necessarily true (independent of the content of the statements!). In other words, as long as the premises are true, any argument that has the same basic structure as the argument above is also true:

Premise 1: All A are B  
Premise 2: C is A  
Conclusion: C is B

This is just one form of a classical syllogism. Other forms use a combination of the following statements: “All A are B,” “No A are B,” Some A are B,” and “Some A are not B.” (A system of different types of syllogisms going back to Aristotle was the basis for evaluating arguments in Western Philosophy until the 17th century, i.e. for about 2000 years)

“Informal and Non-Syllogistic Arguments” - Whereas arguments can have the form of a formal syllogism, most arguments have the form of informal syllogisms, or are not syllogistic, at all. The main difference is that informal or non-syllogistic arguments are incomplete: they contain unstated assumptions (or “hidden premises”). The following is an example of an incomplete version of the formal syllogism above (see also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enthymeme#cite_note-Klamer2007-1):

“Socrates is mortal because he is human.”

Here, the second premise and the conclusion are stated, whereas the rst premise is assumed, but not explicitly stated:

All humans are mortal. (assumed)  
Socrates is human. (stated)  
Therefore, Socrates is mortal. (stated)

The reason why this is important for evaluating arguments is because—as we will soon see—it can help us identify unstated assumptions that are necessary to support a conclusion, but may turn to be questionable or untrue.

“Validity” and “Soundness” - These terms are used to distinguish between arguments that are actually true (sound) from those that are only formally true (valid). For an argument to be actually true, it has to be both valid (the form is such that the conclusion follows from the premises) AND all the premises have to be true. This distinction is useful in evaluating arguments because we are able to discard arguments as invalid, independent of whether the premises are true or not. Whereas, if the argument is valid, we will still need to examine whether the premises are also true, which requires us to check the facts and cannot be resolved by logic alone.

An example of a valid, but not sound argument is:
1. All humans are mortal.
2. Shrek is human.
3. Shrek is mortal.

While this argument has the same form as the classic syllogism above, and is therefore valid, it is not sound, because the second premise is not true: Shrek is not human, he is a fictional character and not even human as such (I think).

Armed with these basic logical tools, students will now examine some of the arguments used in the Schiavo case.

As we determined earlier, the rst statement (“Everybody has a right to life.”) supports the position that Terri Schiavo should not be disconnected from life support. I.e. this statement is one of the premises of an argument that has the conclusion: “Terri Schiavo should not be disconnected from life support” The question is: What are the other unstated assumptions or hidden premises of this argument?

Premise 1: Everybody has a right to life.  
Premise 2: Terri Schiavo is somebody.  
Premise 3: Terri Schiavo is alive.  
Premise 4: Terri Schiavo has a right to life.  
Premise 5: If somebody has a right to life, then he or she should be kept alive.  
Premise 6: Terri Schiavo should be kept alive.  
Premise 7: Disconnecting Terri Schiavo from life support, would result in her death, i.e. she would not be kept alive.

Conclusion: Terri Schiavo should not be disconnected from life support.
5. With a partner, students will try to nd and record as many unstated or hidden premises as possible for the remaining ve statements above. (See Appendix III for a list of unstated or hidden premises in these arguments.)

6. Collect and discuss students’ ndings. Based on the arguments and premises, what additional information do we need to know (nd out) whether the arguments are not only formally valid, but also sound? In other words, which of the premises are either factually questionable and/or contain words or concepts that are vague or ambiguous and require further clari cation?

7. Working with a partner, students should identify at least three (stated or unstated) premises that they believe to be questionable, either factually or conceptually. They should then formulate questions that would have to be answered in order to decide whether that particular premise is true or not.

**Questionable Premise:** “Everybody has a right to life.”

**Possible questions:** Does everybody mean: all human beings, all persons? Does it include animals? What does it mean to “have” a “right”? Assuming they have it, can people lose their “right to life?”

8. Collect and discuss students’ questions. Organize students’ questions into ve categories. (Questions that do not t into any of the categories should be addressed separately at the end of the unit.)

**1. Questions about Terri Schiavo’s state:**
- What state is Schiavo in?

**2. Questions about her status as a person:**
- Is she (still) a person? Is she the same person?

**3. Questions about her rights as a person:**
- Does she have a right to be kept alive, or: a “right to life”? Does she have right to die?

**4. Questions about what is better for her, i.e. what is in her interest, what she would have wanted:**
- What is in her best interest: to be kept alive or to be removed from life support?

**5. Questions about who should make the decision:**
- Who should decide for her?

**PART 2**

While the rules of argumentation and informal logic can help us examine an argument by identifying its hidden premises, and by examining its validity and soundness, the differences between the positions held in cases such as that of Terri Schiavo often run deeper. These differences are often the result of a different (and often deliberately vague or ambiguous) use or understanding of the key concepts in the debate. This is especially common in cases in which concepts are not clearly de ned and have particularly broad meaning, or when they have different meanings in different contexts. Examples for such concepts on the Schiavo case are: “life,” “death,” “person” and “right.” In the second part of this unit, students will therefore engage in an analysis and clari cation of some of the key concepts used in the debate. Each of these concepts and their philosophical signi cance will be examined independently and then applied to the Schiavo case.

The diagram below gives an overview of this part, showing the concepts as well as the essential questions (both case related and philosophical) discussed in each segment.

**1. Life and Death**

The objective in this segment is to determine Terri Schiavo’s physical and mental state. Whereas she is obviously not dead, she nevertheless seems to be missing many of the characteristics we associate with a living person. But what exactly do we mean by “life” or “alive” and “death” or “dead”? Maybe the meaning of these terms is not as clear as it seems. Students will begin this segment by listing anything they associate with “life” and “death.” Based on their ndings, they will then try to come up with a more general de nition: What are the de ning features of “life”, or “being alive” and “death” or “being dead”?
Next, students will try to think of situations or states that are somewhere between being clearly alive (e.g. being awake, moving, responding, etc.) and being clearly dead (e.g. not moving, not breathing, no heartbeat, etc.). What are the characteristics of such in-between states (e.g. sleeping, being unconscious, or being in a coma)? And what are the difficulties of determining the mental state of a person who is—at least temporarily—unable to communicate with us? How does our sole reliance on an “external” perspective limit our ability to determine a person’s mental state? Students will be provided with information about different types of comas and more specific information about Terri’s Schiavo’s mental and physical condition and will use that information for an assessment of her state.

1. Students will complete a worksheet, listing items they associate with “Life” and “Death”, in the respective circle.

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 Life
  
 Death
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2. Students will share and discuss their findings with a partner. For each concept, students should identify at least three items that they both agree are, for a human being, the defining features of being alive (e.g., being awake, movement, breathing, sensation, communication; etc.), or dead (e.g., permanently unconscious, no brain-activity, inability to move, etc.).

3. Students will present their findings to the class and explain their choices. Their findings will be discussed and put up on the board. Why is it so difficult to describe “death” or “being dead” in positive terms rather than describing it as that which it is not (e.g., not conscious, no brain-activity, etc.)?

4. With a different partner, students should come up with at least one example that would fall into the overlapping area between being alive and being dead. What are examples of experiences or conditions that do not squarely fall into one of the two categories?

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 Alive
  
 Dead
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6. In small groups, students will complete a worksheet, listing characteristics they consider to be typical for each of the following states or conditions:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AWAKE</th>
<th>ASLEEP</th>
<th>UNCONSCIOUS</th>
<th>IN A COMA</th>
<th>DEAD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eyes open, moving, thinking hearing/ speaking, writing</td>
<td>eyes closed, not moving (intentionally), dreaming</td>
<td>eyes shut, deep sleep, dreams?, movement?, harder to wake up</td>
<td>eyes shut(!), no breathing, no movement, no pulse, no thoughts, no dreams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AWAKE</td>
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<tr>
<th>EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AWAKE</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
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7. Collect and discuss students’ findings. Ask students which of the criteria they listed in each category indicates an “internal” and which an “external” perspective (i.e. which represents experiences of the person who is in any of these states (e.g. awake-thoughts, sleeping - dreams) and which are criteria that are observable from the outside (e.g. awake-eyes open, responding; sleeping - REM). Re-organize students’ findings on the board or in a new table:

8. Students will form small groups. They will be provided with information about criteria used to determine the type and severity of a coma or vegetative state. Information is available from the following websites:

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persistent_vegetative_state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persistent_vegetative_state)
- [http://wapedia.mobi/en/Persistent_vegetative_state](http://wapedia.mobi/en/Persistent_vegetative_state)

The distinction between an “internal” and an “external” perspective is important because only when a person is awake can she communicate her internal perspective (thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc.) to another person. In all other cases, we rely solely on an external perspective to determine her physical and mental state. While it may be relatively easy to tell whether a person is sleeping or unconscious (besides the fact that we can usually wake her, or cause her to regain consciousness), this becomes a huge problem with people in a coma or a vegetative state. In these cases it is much harder to use observations and measurable data to draw conclusions about that person’s internal state. (Distinguishing between an “internal” and an “external” perspective also reminds us that we could, of course, nd ourselves on the other side of the equation, i.e. in a coma or vegetative state, in which case the internal perspective would be ours.)
Based on this information and what students already know about the case, they should try to determine the most accurate way to describe Terri Schiavo’s physical and mental state. Students may also be provided with additional resources about Terri Schiavo’s condition, including medical records, expert testimony, and accounts of family members. More information and links are available from:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terri_Schiavo

9. Each group will present their findings to the class. At this point, mention or discuss new technologies that may eventually help us determine more accurately the mental state of a comatose patient (see article on “Functional Brain Imaging”, Appendix 1).

The activities in this segment may have confirmed students’ assumption that Terri Schiavo is still alive, if only minimally, but does that also mean that we should still consider her a person?

2. Personhood and Personal Identity

One of the reasons why it is so important to determine Terri Schiavo’s physical and mental state is that it will help us decide whether she should be considered the same person she was before she fell into the coma, or whether she should be considered a person at all. To answer that question, students will first develop a better sense of what we mean by “person”.

Are all human beings automatically persons? If so, what about fetuses, severely mentally disabled people, or people—like Terri Schiavo—who are in a coma or a vegetative state? And, can only human beings be persons? If so, what about God(s), angels, cyborgs, certain animals (e.g. great apes), computers, unknown intelligent life forms, or an articial device to which all our thoughts and memories have been transferred? But even if we assume that Terri Schiavo is (still) a person, is she the same person? And what makes anybody the same person he or she was at some point in the past?

Based on their findings and the results from the rest segment, students will try to formulate an answer to the question of whether Terri Schiavo is (still) a person or not: 1) She is a person, 2) She is not a person, 3) Not sure.

1. What makes you a person? (Answers may include: ability to think, freedom to act/choose, having a soul, etc.)

2. In small groups, students will compare their findings and try to come up with a general de nition of “person”: “A Person is …”, “(or, more technically: “Something is a person if and only if …”).

3. Collect and discuss students’ ndings. Students should try to reach a consensus on what it means for something to be a person. Display their nding in class on board or chart paper, for future reference. (Answers may include: human being, body, ability to think, language, ability to speak, ability to interact with others, etc.)

4. Based on their de nition(s) and the previous discussion, students will organize a number of items according to whether they believe them to be: a person, not a person, not sure.

I, my partner, Shrek, my computer, a cyborg, God, your family pet, a chimpanzee, Spiderman, someone with complete amnesia, unknown intelligent life forms, a three-weeks old fetus, a ve-months old fetus, a two-weeks old baby, your favorite teacher, your least favorite teacher, ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>NOT A PERSON</th>
<th>NOT SURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Collect and discuss students’ ndings. Ask students if this exercise led them to re-think their de nition of what a person is, and why? The two crucial questions that should come out of this discussion are:

1. Are all human beings (automatically) persons?
2. Can only human beings be persons?

What about Terri Schiavo? It seems that it is at least possible that something can be a human being, but would not (yet, or no longer) be considered a person. Based on our de nition of “person,” our previous discussions and everything we know about Terri Schiavo’s state: Should she be considered a person or not? And if not: What about her has changed so much that would lead us to no longer consider her a person?). But even if we (still) consider her a person, is she still the same person? What makes any of us the same person we were at some point in the past?

6. Are you still the same person you used to be when you were 1, 3, 5, 8 years old (or yesterday, or a minute ago, for that matter)? What has changed? What stayed the same? When did you become a person, or the person you are now? What would have to change for you to become a different person, or seize to be a person?
7. Students will share and discuss their findings with a partner.

8. Students will present their findings to the class.

Discussion questions: Do you continue to be the same person (or at least a person) during periods of sleep (or other less than completely awake states)? How about periods of time of which you have absolutely no recollection (e.g. as a fetus, or during the first few years of your life)? And: Do you continue to be the same person to yourself whenever you sleep, or only to others, or neither? If you went to sleep and were never to awake from that sleep, would you continue to be the same person (or a person), either to yourself, or to others? Why, why not? Does whether you continue to be the same person during sleep (etc.) depend on whether you will eventually wake up (regain consciousness, come out of a coma) and continue to consciously be the same person you were before?

9. Based on all we know at this point, should Terri Schiavo be considered a person or not? One more thing to consider: Even if we assume that Terri is no longer a person, or at least not the same person: Should we still treat her as if she were a/the same person? Would your answer change if Terri were your daughter, your sister, or your aunt?

The reason this is such an important question is that if we believe that Terri Schiavo is (still) a person, we are more likely to attribute certain rights to her (e.g. a person’s “right to life”), whereas we may be less likely to grant her those rights if we still think of her as a human being, but not a person.

3. A Person’s “Right to Life”

If we agree that every person has a basic human right to be protected from physical harm or death, wouldn’t a person in a “coma” or a “permanent vegetative state” also have to be protected by that right? And if so, what could lead her lose that right? There are at least two categories of human beings, who may be considered exceptions: those that are still considered persons (e.g. enemy soldiers), and those that are not (not yet, or no longer) considered persons (e.g. embryos). Does Terri Schiavo fall into either of these two categories? And if so, can the comparison help us understand her status? What could be other reasons why she may not be protected by the “right to life”?

“Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his [or her] life.” (Article 6.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)

1. Share with the students the above quote. Ask students whether they think that every person has or should have the right to be protected from physical harm or death. Why? Why not? What in the above quote suggests that there may be exceptions (“arbitrarily”).

2. With a partner, students should try to think of possible exceptions to the rule. What could lead a person to lose the “right to life”? (Answers may include: people who receive the death penalty for committing heinous crimes, enemy soldiers, terrorists, embryos, unborn babies, etc.)

3. Students will present their findings. What in these cases would lead a person to lose the “right to life”? (e.g. having harmed or being about to harm other people, being involved in an armed conflict with another country, not or no longer being considered a person, etc.).

4. Based on the previous discussion, students should try to answer the question: Based on everything we know about her condition, what (if anything) could have led Terri Schiavo to lose her “right to life”, or, more accurately, the right to be kept alive? What, on the other hand, speaks for the fact that she still has that right?

Terri Schiavo has a “right to life”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRO</th>
<th>Contra</th>
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</table>

5. Collect and discuss students’ findings. Answers may include:

**Pro:** She is still a person, and she hasn’t lost the right to life. She is not a person, or not the same person, but she used to be a person and should still be treated like one, which includes having the “right to life.”

**Contra:** She is no longer a person, and only persons (not all human beings) can have a “right to life.” She is still a person, but not the same person she was before.

But even if we assume that she has the “right to life,” would she even have wanted to be kept alive? Would she have still considered her life meaningful? And if not, would she have chosen death rather than life? Which brings us to our next question: What is it that makes life meaningful and worth living?
4. Quality of Life: What Makes Life Meaningful?

How can we possibly know whether Terri Schiavo would have still considered her life meaningful, or not, or what she would have wanted to happen with her? Since she wasn’t able to communicate with us, there are only indirect ways to find out. First, we could look at evidence from her life before falling into a coma (e.g. written or oral statements, her beliefs, etc.) that may suggest how she would have felt about being in a coma. The other possibility would be to determine whether the life of any person in a permanent vegetative state can still be considered meaningful, or not, and use that general assessment as the basis for a decision. We will first consider the second option. Students will list things that they consider to be most important for a meaningful life, and how losing those items may change the way they feel about their lives. They will then compare Terri’s life before and after falling into a coma, and use that comparison to determine whether they believe that her life—or that of any person in a permanent vegetative state—should still be considered meaningful, or not. Students will then look at evidence that was used by both parties in the legal dispute to show what Terri would have wanted to happen to her. Finally, students should decide—all things considered—whether or not it was ultimately in Terri Schiavo’s best interest to be removed from life support.

1. **On a worksheet, students will list ten items representing things that make their lives meaningful, ranging from “most meaningful” to “less meaningful” (e.g. family, friends, music, NFL, clothes, facebook, World of Warcraft, Love, Ben & Jerry’s ice cream, your pet, Philosophy Club, etc.)**

2. **Students will share and discuss their findings. Together they should try to come up with three items or categories of items that they both agree add the most meaning to their lives.**

3. **Students will share and discuss their findings with the class. What if some or all of the items on the list were taken away from you? What if your life stayed the same, but you had to live in constant pain? How would that change the way you view your life as a whole? Would your life still be meaningful? What would make you want to keep living (e.g. hope for improvement, being of service to others, etc.)?**

At this point students should review the information in the introduction about Terri Schiavo’s life before and after falling into a coma, and possibly be provided with additional information about her life and more specific information about her medical condition (brain activity, ability/inability to experience pain, chances for recovery, etc.).

4. **Students will receive additional information about Terri Schiavo’s life before falling into a coma. Based on that information and the information about her physical and mental state (see previous segment), students should compare her life before and after falling into a coma. What are things that made her life meaningful or worth living before and after she fell into a coma?**

5. **Students will share and discuss their findings with the class. Based on everything we know about Terri Schiavo’s condition, do you believe that her life in a vegetative state was still meaningful? Whatever our answer is, can we assume that everybody would agree with our conclusion? Should our own view be used as a basis to make decisions in all cases similar to that of Terri Schiavo? Why could this option be problematic, or even dangerous? (E.g., every case is unique; there may not be a consensus even among experts as to the exact state of the patient, or the chances for recovery, etc.). And: Who (person, group of people, political body, etc.) should have the authority to establish such a general rule?**

But maybe there is another option: Although Terri Schiavo wasn’t able to express her wishes while in a vegetative state, there may be evidence from the time before she fell into a coma that would indicate what she would have wanted to happen (living will, comments or statements, her general beliefs)?
6. Based on information used in the legal case, students should consider whether they believe that there is enough evidence for us to know what Terri Schiavo’s wishes were. Information available from:

   Guardian ad Litem’s Report on Terri Schiavo Prep
   ar by Jay Wolfson, DrPH, JD, (Dec. 1, 2003).

7. Collect and discuss students’ readings. If they feel that there is sufficient evidence to infer whether or not Terri Schiavo would have wanted to be kept alive, should that evidence be used to make a decision?

Based on all the considerations in this and the previous segments, do you think that it was ultimately justified to discontinue life support for Terri Schiavo? Or do you think she should have been kept alive?

Whatever conclusion we may have reached, it was obviously not up to us to make a decision. Which brings us to the last (and maybe most important) question: Who should decide in a case like that of Terri Schiavo?

5. Autonomy: Who Should Decide

Finally, independent of all the issues we have discussed in this unit: Who should ultimately make the decision for a person in a permanent vegetative state? Ideally, we would of course want a person to decide for herself (which is also what happens in cases where a person on life support is able to communicate her wishes). Or, a person may have left a “living will.” But without the patient’s ability to communicate with us and without any kind of “hard” evidence concerning her wishes, somebody else will have to make the decision for her.

In the first activity of this segment, students will list areas in their lives, in which they decide, and those in which other people decide for them. Students will then explore the following questions: Would you prefer to make all decisions yourself? Are there cases in which you want other people to decide for you? Does it matter who makes the decisions for you? Who would you want to decide for you in situations that involve life and death, and why? Based on all these considerations, who would be the best person to decide for Terri Schiavo?

1. On a worksheet, give examples of areas of your life in which you are able to decide for yourself, and those in which others make decisions for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I decide</th>
<th>Others decide</th>
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2. Collect students’ readings. In which of these cases would you wish you could make your own decisions? In which cases do you want other people to make decisions for you? Why? Does it matter who makes the decision for you?

3. With a partner students should discuss if there is a person in their lives they would trust more than anybody else to make important decisions for them (e.g., boy/girlfriend, mother, father, sibling, etc.), and why.

4. Students will share their readings and explain the reasons for their choices. What makes the person they chose most qualified to decide for you? Ask students if they would trust the same person to make decisions for them if they were in a coma or a vegetative state, like Terri Schiavo? And if not, who would they want to make the decision instead (e.g., a physician or a group of physicians, a friend, a family member, a politician, the state, etc.)?

At this point, students should receive additional information about the people involved in the Schiavo-case: Terri’s parents and brother, her husband, etc.

5. Students will split into small groups. Each group will be assigned one of the main players in the Schiavo case and will come up with arguments for why that person is the most suitable person to decide for Terri Schiavo’s.

6. Groups will present to the class. How does the fact that we have a personal interest in a situation, influence our views and decisions? Should the person who makes the decision be a friend or family member (husband or life-partner, the mother, the father, a sibling), or a person or group of people who has no personal connection to her (e.g., a physician, a group of physicians, a politician, a Bio-Ethicist, a group of Bio-Ethicists, etc.)?

CONCLUSION

1. Students will take another survey to see if their opinions have changed.

2. Ask students what led them to change their opinion. If they did: What was the decisive element of our discussion of the cases that led them to reconsider. If not, did the reasons for their decision change? And for the students who were undecided at the beginning of the unit: If they are still undecided: What additional information would they need to make a decision? If they made a decision: What about our discussion of the case enabled them to reach a conclusion in the case.
Appendix I: Additional Readings and Resources

Introduction
Terri Schiavo Case:
Overview and Timeline: Available from:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terri_Schiavo and
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terri_Schiavo_timeline

Part I
Informal Logic:
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-informal/#His

Part II
Segment 1: Life and Death
Life:

Death:

Glasgow Coma Scale: Available from:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow_Coma_Scale

Vegetative State: Available from:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persistent_vegetative_state
http://wapedia.mobi/en/Persistent_vegetative_state

New technologies:


Segment 2: Personhood and Personal Identity
Personal Identity:
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal/


"Is Data a Person?" Available from:
http://www.mind.lsu.edu/curriculum/what_is_a_person/what_is_a_person.php

Segment 3: A Person’s “Right to Life”

Human Rights:
http://www.iep.utm.edu/hum-rts.htm

Right to Die: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_to_die

Segment 4: What Makes Life Meaningful?
Meaning:
Overview of, and quotes from Viktor E. Frankl’s book “Man’s Search for Meaning,” available from:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man’s_Search_for_Meaning and
http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Man’s_Search_for_Meaning

Segment 5: Agency and Autonomy
Autonomy:
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/advance-directives/

Appendix II: Pennsylvania Academic Standards addressed in this Unit

1. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY (Grade 12)

3.2. Inquiry and Design: The nature of science and technology is characterized by applying process knowledge that enables students to become independent learners. These skills include observing, classifying, inferring, predicting, measuring, … communicating, using space/time relationships, … raising questions, formulating hypotheses, … interpreting data, formulating models, designing models, and producing solutions. Everyone can use them to solve real-life problems. …

3.6. Technology Education: … Technology is the application of tools, materials, processes and systems by humans to solve problems and provide bene ts to humankind. We use technology in an attempt to improve our environment. These improvements may relate to survival needs (e.g., food, shelter, defense) or they may relate to human aspirations (e.g., knowledge, art, control). They can include unexpected bene ts, unexpected costs and unexpected risks. Technology education involves a broad spectrum of knowledge and activities. Effective technology education combines knowledge of content, process and skills to provide students with a holistic approach to learning.

A. Analyze biotechnologies that relate to propagating, growing, maintaining, adapting, treating and converting. …

• Analyze specific examples where engineering has impacted society protection, personal health application or physical enhancement.

3.7. Technological Devices: … New technological tools and techniques make it possible to enact far-reaching changes in our world. Technology enhances the students’ abilities to identify problems and determine solutions. …
3.2. Inquiry and Design: The nature of science and technology is characterized by applying process knowledge that enables students to become independent learners. These skills include observing, classifying, inferring, predicting, measuring, ... communicating, using space/time relationships, ... raising questions, formulating hypotheses, ... interpreting data, formulating models, designing models, and producing solutions. Everyone can use them to solve real-life problems. ...

3.8. Science, Technology and Human Endeavors
A. Synthesize and evaluate the interactions and constraints of science and technology on society.
   • Evaluate technological developments that have changed the way humans do work and discuss their impacts (e.g., genetically engineered crops).
   • Evaluate socially proposed limitations of scientific research and technological application. ...

C. Evaluate the consequences and impacts of scientific and technological solutions. ...
   • Analyze and communicate the positive or negative impacts that a recent technological invention had on society.
   • Evaluate and describe potential impacts from emerging technologies and the consequences of not keeping abreast of technological advancements

2. CIVICS AND GOVERNMENT (Grade 12)

5.1 Principles and Documents of Government
I. Analyze historical examples of the importance of the rule of law explaining the sources, purposes and functions of law.
J. Analyze how the law promotes the common good and protects individual rights.
L. Analyze Pennsylvania and United States court decisions that have affected principles and ideas of government in civic life.

5.2 Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship
A. Evaluate an individual’s civic rights, responsibilities and duties in various governments.
G. Evaluate what makes a competent and responsible citizen.

3. HEALTH, SAFETY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Grade 12)

10. 1. Concepts of Health
A. Evaluate factors that impact growth and development during adulthood and late adulthood.
   • acute and chronic illness
   • communicable and non-communicable disease
   • health status

B. Evaluate factors that impact the body systems and apply protective/preventive strategies.
   • health status (e.g., physical, mental, social)
   • nutrition

4. READING, WRITING; SPEAKING AND LISTENING (Grade 11)

Read and understand essential content of informational texts and documents in all academic areas.
   • Differentiate fact from opinion across a variety of texts by using complete and accurate information, coherent arguments and points of view.

   • Distinguish between essential and nonessential information across a variety of sources, identifying the use of proper references or authorities and propaganda techniques where present.
   • Use teacher and student established criteria for making decisions and drawing conclusions.
   • Evaluate text organization and content to determine the author’s purpose and effectiveness according to the author’s theses, accuracy, thoroughness, logic and reasoning.

I.6. Speaking and Listening
A. Listen to others.
   • Ask clarifying questions.
   • Synthesize information, ideas and opinions to determine relevancy.

D. Contribute to discussions.
   • Ask relevant, clarifying questions.
   • Respond with relevant information or opinions to questions asked.
   • Listen to and acknowledge the contributions of others.
   • Facilitate total group participation.
   • Introduce relevant, facilitating information, ideas and opinions to enrich the discussion.

E. Participate in small and large group discussions and presentations.
   • Evaluate the role of media in focusing attention and forming opinions.

Appendix III: List of arguments, including unstated or hidden premises (Part 1, Activity 2)

| "Everybody has a right to life" | "... the intrinsic value and personal dignity of every human being do not change, no matter what the concrete circumstances of his or her life..." | " I think society...has been confused over what compassion is. We're here to love and take care of these people and not kill them."
| --- | --- | ---
| Terri Schiavo is somebody. | Every human being has an intrinsic value and personal dignity. | Compassion means to love and take care of people. |
| Terri Schiavo is alive. | The circumstance of a human being’s life have no in uence on a person’s value and dignity. | Compassion never means killing people. |
| Terri Schiavo has a right to life. | Although the circumstances of Terri Schiavo’s life have changed drastically, her value and personal dignity have not. | Disconnecting Terri from life support means to kill her. |
| If somebody has a right to life he or she should be kept alive. | Disconnecting a person’s life means to violate that person’s intrinsic value and her personal dignity. | If we kill Terri we are not being compassionate. |
| Disconnecting Terri Schiavo from life support would result in her death, i.e. she would not be kept alive. | | People should be compassionate. |
| Terri should not be disconnected from life support. | Terri should not be disconnected from life support. | Terri should not be disconnected from life support. |
Sources of quotes:

1. “Everybody has a right to life.” (Bobby Schindler, Terri’s brother)

2. “Terri’s emotions are gone,”... “What’s there is a shell of Terri. There’s nothing there anymore.” (Michael Schiavo, quoted in an article published by the St. Pete Times on March 31, 2005)

3. “She wouldn’t like to live like this and that’s all she’s doing -- surviving.” (Michael Schiavo)

4. “I think society...has been confused over what compassion is. We’re here to love and take care of these people and not kill them.” (Bobby Schindler)


6. “...the intrinsic value and personal dignity of every human being do not change, no matter what the concrete circumstances of his or her life...” Address of John Paul II to the participants on the international congress on “Life-Sustaining Treatments and Vegetative State: Scienti c Advances and ethical Dilemmas,” Saturday, March 20, 2004

“Terri should be disconnected from life support.”

1. “What’s there is a shell of Terri. There’s nothing there anymore.”
2. “Terri died 15 years ago.”
3. “She wouldn’t like to live like that and that’s all she is doing - surviving.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Terri is only a shell, i.e. the body. A human being that is only a shell and has lost all intrinsic life, has lost what it means for a human being to be alive. Having lost what it means for a human being to be alive is equivalent to being dead. Terri is dead. Disconnecting Terri Schiavo from life support doesn’t kill her because she is already dead.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are two different entities: One is Terri before she fell into a coma (Terri 1), the other one is Terri after falling into a coma (Terri 2). Although we call both of them Terri, and they both share the same body, one of them (Terri 1) is dead, whereas the other (Terri 2) is still alive. The human being whose life support will be disconnected (Terri 2) is not Terri 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terri is alive. We have reason to believe that before she fell into a coma, she wouldn’t have wanted to live the way she is living now, i.e. merely “surviving.” She is still the same person she was before she fell into a coma. Since she is the same person, we must assume that she feels (or would feel) the same way about her situation now as she did before she fell into a coma. The wishes of a person with regard to whether or not they should be disconnected from life support or not should be respected. If she is not disconnected from life support her wishes will not be respected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| “Terri should be disconnected from life support.”

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