

My thoughts on the Terry Schiavo case

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.med.transcription/2005-03/1651.html>

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Date: 03/22/05

Date: Tue, 22 Mar 2005 09:25:56 -0700

If ever there was a situation that doesn't seem to have one "right" solution, this is it. I feel for Terry's family, even though I don't necessarily agree with their attempts to keep her alive at any cost, with no real reason to expect that she will ever improve. I am staunchly pro-life, but I have a real problem with the vast amounts of money that are spent to add a few months or even weeks to our lives, and I also disagree with the concept that if it is scientifically possible to do something, we ought to do it, regardless of what the practical benefits may be. I have a problem with using Christianity as the basis of a "life at all costs" philosophy without also acknowledging that for a Christian this life isn't all there is—on the contrary, what's waiting for us after this life is over is so much better than anything we enjoy now. The Christian point of view about the sanctity of life is incomplete without acknowledging that death for the Christian is not some horror to be avoided at all costs. The Bible simply does not teach that.

I realize my point of view is colored by the pragmatic nature of my upbringing; my family has never been much into drama or histrionics. Death has never been something to dread for us. My grandfather passed away at home in his own bed with Alzheimer's. When he had no knowledge of anything going on around him, we simply let him go—meaning we didn't force-feed him. All this talk of how horrible it must be to die of starvation or dehydration is simply not accurate when you're talking about someone who has no cognitive abilities.

The fact that it is POSSIBLE to keep someone alive for years and years in a vegetative state by feeding them parenterally or intravenously or whatever doesn't mean that it is IMPERATIVE that we do so. In fact, I'm going to go WAY out on a limb and suggest that what Terry did or did not say about being kept alive at any cost is not the issue. Are we REALLY saying that if a person says, "I want to be kept alive no matter how much it costs and no matter how debilitated I am and no matter how much technology it takes," we as a society are then REQUIRED to honor those wishes NO MATTER WHAT? Are we going to start prosecuting people who don't spend every last dime of their own money and/or society's resources in order to keep someone's heart beating and lungs working a little while longer? I'm not talking about actively causing someone's death, mind you, nor am I advocating legalizing suicide or assisted suicide. But it should not be a crime to let someone

die in peace when their body and/or mind is simply worn out. I can hear the question being asked, "So who gets to decide when enough is enough?" All I can tell you is that for doggone sure I don't want the FEDERAL GOVERNMENT making that decision!

I have a real problem with the federal government getting involved in this for a couple of reasons. First of all, it's just another example of government intrusion into our lives, something conservatives should be fighting against tooth and nail. Furthermore, it undermines the rule of law, something else that is a bedrock principle of conservatism. This issue has been reviewed and re-reviewed ad infinitum by at least 19 judges and I don't know how many legislators in Florida. The laws of Florida have been followed; there is no cause for federal intervention, in my opinion. Thirdly, I don't agree with using a tragic situation like this to further a political agenda, I don't care whose it is. To me this is no different than when feminists were using bogus statistics some years back about the percentage of women who were the victims of abuse at the hands of men. When they were confronted with the fact that their statistics were out and out lies, they responded by saying that the issue of abuse was real, so therefore anything that brought attention to the problem was okay, even if it wasn't actually true! Regardless of what the issue is, it is morally and ethically wrong to use false information or personal tragedy to further an agenda, in my opinion.

Jay