

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 29, 2011 at 4:17pm

\ "How dead is dead? \ "

by Zoe Ryan

NCR Today

From "How dead is dead?" story in the Economist:

IN GENERAL, people are pretty good at differentiating between the quick and the dead. Modern medicine, however, has created a third option, the persistent vegetative state. People in such a state have serious brain damage as a result of an accident or stroke. This often means they have no hope of regaining consciousness. Yet because parts of their brains that run activities such as breathing are intact, their vital functions can be sustained indefinitely.

When, if ever, to withdraw medical support from such people, and thus let them die, is always a traumatic decision. It depends in part, though, on how the fully alive view the mental capacities of the vegetative?an area that has not been investigated much.

To fill that gap Kurt Gray of the University of Maryland, and Annie Knickman and Dan Wegner of Harvard University, conducted an experiment designed to ascertain just how people perceive those in a persistent vegetative state. What they found astonished them.

Find out what here.

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