Bioethics Session 4 Handout: Prohibitions

What counts as killing? There are some clear cases – bringing about the death of a patient by lethal injection yes, bringing about the death of a patient by choosing not to perform a complex operation no. But what about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdrawing Aid-Type Cases</th>
<th>Assisted Suicide-Type Cases</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Removing a feeding tube</td>
<td>Issuing a lethal prescription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplugging a respirator</td>
<td>Hooking someone up to a suicide machine</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

We would like a general account that would allow us to answer these questions. Three kinds of general account have been suggested by philosophers:

**Account 1:** I kill a person (e.g. John) when I bring about his death by intervening in a self-sustaining process that keeps him alive.

**Account 2:** I kill John when I bring about his death by moving my body in a certain way, and if I had moved my body in most other ways he would have lived.

**Account 3:** I kill John when I bring about his death by behaving a certain way, and my behavior figures in the most natural explanation of why he died.

And when is it morally permissible to kill an innocent person?

**Absolutism**
You should never kill an innocent person.

**Qualified Absolutism**
You should not kill an innocent person (except when you bring about a greater good).

**The Doctrine of Double-Effect (Intent)**
You should not kill an innocent person unless:

- (i) By killing him, you bring about a greater good.
  and
- (ii) Your goal is the greater good, not his death.

**The Doctrine of Double-Effect (Side-Effects)**
It is impermissible to kill an innocent person unless:

- (i) By killing him, you bring about a greater good.
  and
- (ii) His death is a side-effect of your bringing about the greater good.

Condition (ii) is satisfied when the greater good would still have come about if he had not died.