

The Time of Mercy

By Steven Terenzio

November 1, 2014 may well go down in infamy as the date that the practice of euthanasia was normalized in the United States of America. On that day, 29 year-old Brittany Maynard, surrounded by family members at her home in Portland Oregon, consumed a lethal dose of barbiturates as prescribed by a doctor. Although Oregon's "Death with Dignity Act" became law back in 1997 and has resulted in over 800 deaths to date, the Maynard case received special notoriety. With the orchestration of a leading assisted suicide advocacy group,¹ Mrs. Maynard, who was suffering from a type of brain cancer called glioblastoma, had plainly stated that she wanted her case to be a catalyst in spreading the legality of assisted suicide across the entire nation. Initial reports following her death seemed to indicate that her cause was succeeding, and as this is being written, California has just become the sixth state to legalize the practice.² An "exclusive" piece in *People* magazine presented a glowing picture of the Maynard affair without once pausing to consider a single negative ramification of this most public display of a supposedly private matter. A host of other entirely positive reports followed in what is now *de rigueur* in the news and entertainment industries toward anything deemed progressive.³

One suspects that a movie will not be long in the making. After all, even the notorious Jack "Dr. Death" Kevorkian was given respectful treatment by the industry in a 2010 HBO movie "You Don't Know Jack," including an Emmy award for Al Pacino in the title role. Brittany Maynard, who reportedly possessed a number of naturally good qualities, should fare well indeed at the hands of the mavens who dominate the celluloid field. There is no reason to suspect, either, that such a project will veer from the consistent advocacy of assisted suicide that has purveyed movies and television over the last generation. Oscar winning films *The English Patient* (1997) and Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) are just two of the more notable examples that have come out of Hollywood. When TV has broached the topic, a consistently favorable picture of assisted suicide invariably emerges.⁴

It was not always so. During the heyday of the Hollywood studio system in the 1930s and 40s, movie moguls were constantly aware of the standards set down by the old Production Code.⁵ While the code was in full force, movies did not depict morally evil things as anything but the evil they are. True, as with other sins, suicide was occasionally depicted – off screen – in films c. 1930-1960, but it was always painted as the tragedy that it is, not as some dignified act of self expression.

While filmmakers had begun to chip away at the Production Code by the late 1950s, television would hold the line a little longer than its older cousin in the movie industry. It was not until the "relevance" shows of the 1970s – both in dramas and situation comedies – that the glamorization of sinful behavior would pass over the air waves into America's living rooms. So whereas the major media generally applauded the demonstration of physician assisted suicide in November 2014, it is profitable to recall, before the memory hole sinks too deeply, that there was another November in America's past when network television presented a thoroughly positive view of the sanctity of human life.

Remarkably, at least in the context of its time, the vehicle for this witness to life came not from a religious program, talk show, or news documentary, but from a weekly entertainment series. That such a theme would be treated on commercial television in those days was not to be expected. Program sponsors at the time wielded considerable leverage over the content of the scripts lest they include anything considered controversial.⁶ As a result, topical issues of the day were rarely

touched upon. For this and other reasons, and surely for motivations of his own, then FCC chairman Newton Minow, with a nod to T.S. Eliot, called television a “vast wasteland.” And yet, at nine o’clock on the evening of November 17, 1963, the NBC network aired an episode dealing with the issue of mercy killing on its popular western series *Bonanza*. Since Minow explicitly included westerns among the list of shows toward which he directed his opprobrium,⁷ it is ironic that *Bonanza* would be a vehicle to broach such a serious topic. Typical of the western genre, a number of *Bonanza* teleplays routinely included killings, sometimes even by the show’s principal stars.⁸ As the series evolved, however, like other so-called “adult westerns” (*Gunsmoke*, *Wagon Train*, et. al.), the show increasingly eschewed the “shoot ‘em up” style, tackling more human interest plots and themes revolving around various social concerns.

For those readers who need an introduction, *Bonanza* premiered in the fall of 1959, just one of more than two dozen westerns then dominating network programming.⁹ One factor that did differentiate it from most of the others was that it was filmed in color, a rarity at the time. Since NBC was a subsidiary of RCA, the leader in the production of color televisions, it was hoped that *Bonanza*, replete with outdoor, location scenes of mountains, lakes, and towering pines, not to mention a large, ornately furnished ranch house, would help spur the sales of color televisions.¹⁰ The series became one of the seminal TV shows of its day, the number one rated program for three consecutive seasons in the mid 1960s.¹¹ The show revolved around Ben Cartwright, a thrice-widowed father of three adult sons, as he and his boys worked and defended their large cattle ranch, the Ponderosa, bordering Nevada’s Lake Tahoe. Nearby Virginia City, the site of a famous silver strike in 1859, known to history as the Comstock Lode, provided the locale for many of the episodes.

Interestingly, both the historical time frame of *Bonanza* (c. 1860-1880)¹² and the years of its television run in the 1960s and early 70s were at the edges of crucial turning points in popular thinking on the topic of euthanasia. Though the Hippocratic Oath forbade the practice of doctor assisted suicide, its prohibition, like today, was ignored by many physicians in classical antiquity. Only with the advent of a Christian ethos by the purveyors of medicine did adherence to the oath become commonplace.¹³ As the Christian centuries advanced, the Augustinian description of suicide as “self murder” became the prevailing opinion up until modern times.¹⁴ Certain enlightenment figures such as Voltaire and Hume did argue for suicide as a personal right, but theirs remained a minority opinion. With the rise of Romanticism in the early 1800s and the concurrent reaction against the rationalist thinkers of the previous century, “mercy murder” was still viewed by most in both England and America “as a sin against God” well through the middle of the Victorian era.¹⁵ The medical profession on the whole also strongly opposed putting physicians in the role of deciding the quality of a patient’s life. As one German doctor put it in 1846, “the consequences would be unforeseeable and the doctor could well become the most dangerous person in the state.”¹⁶

The growing secularization of Western society in the latter half of the 19th century would precipitate a gradual shift in the view on euthanasia. A combination of materialist ideas – Darwinism, Utilitarianism, Malthusianism, eugenics – began to gnaw at the belief in the sanctity of each individual life, as created by God.¹⁷ Though the medical community by and large still refused to “don the robes of an executioner,”¹⁸ with the dawn of the 20th century, the word “euthanasia” began to take on a different and sinister meaning.¹⁹

With the devastation of World War I (1914-18) and the resultant shortages, hardships, and distress in Europe, there emerged an increasingly greater strain on holding the line against those who had designs on destroying “worthless” lives. Thus, if one were to look for something like a watershed mark in Western man’s failing conception about the intrinsic value of all human life, it

may well be found in the 1920 publication of a tract by one of Germany's leading jurists, Karl Binding, and a psychiatrist, Alfred Hoch. The title of the paper makes abundantly clear as to its thesis: "Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life." It should be noted that the date of the publication was 13 years before Hitler assumed power in Germany, during the period of the Weimar Republic (1919-33).²⁰ Binding and Hoch's paper proved very influential and helped to lay the philosophical groundwork for the Nazi euthanasia program in 1939-41.²¹

America had been spared much of the carnage that Europe suffered as a result of World War I. That factor and a post war rise in religiosity in the U.S. somewhat slowed the push for the legalization of mercy killing.²² Nevertheless, the onset of the Great Depression gradually brought enough of a change in public opinion to embolden the purveyors of euthanasia to establish their first formal advocacy group, the Euthanasia Society of America (1938).²³

Just when it seemed that euthanasia advocates were gaining momentum in the public acceptance of their cause, however, World War II intervened. The onset of the hostilities and society's resultant preoccupation with the war effort put the issue of euthanasia, as with most other things, on hold for the duration. Then with the war's end came the public revelations of German medical practices, including euthanasia, at the Nuremberg trials in 1946. The Nazi/euthanasia connection would make mercy killing a difficult sell in the immediate years following World War II.²⁴

Another important factor that kept the pro euthanasia movement at bay in post war America was the large Catholic presence, indeed dominance, in the field of medical ethics. Such was state of affairs in the 1950s that opponents of the Church were most explicit in their frustration toward the preponderance of Catholic publications and action in the medical field: "Catholic literature on the morals of medical care is both extensive and painstaking in its technical detail, while Protestant and Jewish literature is practically non-existent."²⁵ Theologians, ethicists, doctors, and nurses all could confidently follow the lead of the reigning pope, Pius XII, who gave a large number of addresses during the 1950s covering various aspects of medicine in light of the Natural Law and Catholic moral teaching. One theologian predicted that Pius would go down in history as the "pope of medical ethics."²⁶

By the time of *Bonanza's* original network run (1959-73), however, there were fundamental changes brewing in American culture on many social issues such as school prayer, feminism, contraception, population control, and abortion. These also directly or indirectly had an impact on the question of euthanasia.²⁷ The Catholic edifice that had previously held back the drive toward "mercy murder" was teetering at this time. The Church's vanguard that was so impenetrable only a decade prior no longer offered a united resistance to the evils pervading the culture. There was dissent from within the Church's own ranks both in higher education and among moral theologians following Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humane Vitae* that upheld traditional Church teaching on the sinfulness of artificial birth control.²⁸ There also was a noticeably less militant approach and tone directed at the cultural elites by leaders in the Church following the Second Vatican Council.

In addition, the new field of bioethics, as evidenced by the founding of the Hastings Institute (1970), was heavily influenced by the concurrent rise of "situation ethics."²⁹ In a nutshell this moral theory claims that no acts are intrinsically evil in themselves but rather need to be judged according to the specific, concrete situation in which they take place. Thus, for example, the moral principle that the direct killing of innocent or helpless human life is evil cannot be made as a blanket statement, according to situation ethics, since there may be unique circumstances and individual motivations that would excuse one from culpability.

But Ben Cartwright is a symbol of another era and way of thinking. The pivotal scene in the *Bonanza* episode we are considering, entitled “The Quality of Mercy,” occurs during a conversation between Ben and his 20 year-old son Joe. In the story, “Little Joe” was riding along when he hears an explosion in a nearby mine. As he enters the mineshaft, he finds his best friend holding a two by four and standing over a dead man. Joe’s friend explains that the dead man, the friend’s future father-in-law, was buried under a large pile of timber from the explosion and had pleaded to be put out of his misery. Joe hesitantly agrees not to mention the killing for the sake of his friend’s fiancé. But when his conscience begins to bother him, Joe elicits advice from his father, presenting the case as a hypothetical. While the *Bonanza* series did not shy away at times from invoking God directly, we see here that Ben takes a decidedly Natural Law approach toward the question of mercy killing:³⁰

Joe Cartwright: It’s the sort of thing you can’t decide the right or wrong until it happens – and then it happens and you think you’ve done what’s right. And then you start thinking that maybe you were wrong.

Ben Cartwright: Well, you know, men generally know the difference between right and wrong. Of course, when they’re wrong they don’t always like to admit it.

Joe: But that’s just it, I don’t know right from wrong anymore... See, now, a man is badly hurt and he’s in a lot of pain. And his friend knows he’s in a lot of pain. And the man knows he only has a short time to live. But even those last few moments of his life are gonna be filled with agony. So he asks his friend if he would end it. If he would put him out of his misery. He keeps begging and pleading with him for mercy. Just to be able to die. And he keeps at him until there is nothing he can do except do what his friend asks...

And he kills him. Was that so wrong?

Ben: Don’t you know? [Incredulously]

Joe: I’m not sure, Pa.

Ben: Well, I am sure, son. I am very sure! *That was wrong!*

Joe: How can you be so definite when I told you what the friend was going through?

Ben: Well, it’s not up to the friend to make the decision. No matter how much pain the injured man was going through, it’s not up to the friend to decide.

Joe: Can’t you understand? He did it out of pity! He couldn’t watch this man die in agony.

Ben: *He couldn’t watch this man die in agony?* Well, how about the injured man? Don’t you think that perhaps in his suffering he was trying desperately to live? Not to die?

Joe: He begged him to help him to die.

Ben: I've always believed that when a man is badly hurt, I mean really hurt badly, his body's broken, nature tries to pick up the pieces and make him whole again. Now, I don't know how much nature thinks about the pain that she's causing the man while she's mending his body. But her main purpose is to preserve life. To nature, life is sacred whether the body is whole or crippled. And that's why I think that no one has the right to end someone else's life. Nature doesn't give up that easily. She's always working for survival, not for destruction. She doesn't always know when she's licked, but when she finally does admit to it, I guess there's nothing man can do except yield to the inevitable.

But until that moment, *until that moment*, *no man* has the right, morally or legally, to snuff out a man's chance to survive.

Joe: Then you let him suffer.

Ben: I'd help him all I could. I'd try to ease his pain as much as possible...Joseph – have you ever seen a man in this condition?

Joe: No

Ben: Well, I have. I saw a man fall to the deck of a ship from the crow's nest. I saw a man trampled in a stampede. Oh, I've seen *a lot* of men trampled in stampedes. None of them died right away. They were in terrible pain. But none of them wanted to die. See, a man, when he's in bad pain, really doesn't know what he's saying. His body is fighting for survival and his mind isn't always aware of that. It's suffering the pain. So he begs to die. But he shouldn't be listened to. A friend should listen only to the pulse of life. Fight with it. Not against it.

Shortly before her death, Brittany Maynard posted on Facebook that “today is the day I have chosen to pass away with dignity in the face of my terminal illness...”³¹ This matter-of-fact reference to personal choice in the matter of life and death did not originate with her; it is the popularly received teaching for at least the past generation, rooted in the modern notion of individual rights and absolute control over all facets of one's life and death. Consider the title of a Hollywood movie from more than 30 years ago: “Whose Life Is It Anyway?”³² The question in the title being merely rhetorical, it is an example of the belief which fundamentally mistakes the level of autonomy that man has over his existence. Catholic moral theology teaches that whereas men have *useful* dominion over their lives, *absolute* dominion belongs to God alone. Our origin is from God and our destiny is to go back to God; He has given us our life on trust for awhile, to use it, expecting us to properly return it to Him as its owner. God is so to speak the landlord of our existence, while we are its tenants.³³

“Today is the day *I have chosen.*” There really can be no starker contrast between those words and the Gospel's: “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but thine be done.” (Lk. 22:42)

Near the end of the *Bonanza* episode, Little Joe is still languishing around, paralyzed into inaction. But his father will not have any more dialogue on the matter: “I know it’s hard,” Ben tells him, “but there is an answer and the time for talking is over.” A slight spoiler alert: the viewer ultimately finds out that the motivation for the “mercy killing” was not as single-minded as Joe was first led to believe. But we should not entirely accuse the writer of conveniently skirting the central moral dilemma; as in real life, motivations are often varied and mixed. What should not be varied and mixed for a Christian, however, is his response to Christ’s admonition: “if anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Lk: 9-23)

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¹ The organization is Compassion & Choices, the direct descendent of The Hemlock Society, which was founded in 1980 by Derek Humphrey. Humphrey’s book *Final Exit* is an instruction on how to commit suicide. Elizabeth Hanink, “Dying Without Dignity & Other End-of-Life Scares,” *New Oxford Review* (July-August 2015), <http://www.newoxfordreview.org/article.jsp?did=0715-hanink> (accessed August 29, 2015).

² Steven Ertelt, “More People Died in Assisted Suicides After Media Sensationalized Brittany Maynard’s Death,” *LifeNews.com* (May 5, 2015), <http://www.lifenews.com/2015/05/05/more-people-died-in-assisted-suicides-after-media-sensationalized-brittany-maynards-death/> (accessed August 29, 2015); Steven Ertelt, “Euthanasia Activists Pushing to Legalize Assisted Suicide in Two Dozen States,” *LifeNews.com* (Jan. 30, 2015), <http://www.lifenews.com/2015/01/30/euthanasia-activists-pushing-to-legalize-assisted-suicide-in-two-dozen-states/> (accessed August 29, 2015); Ian Lovett, “California Legislature Approves Assisted Suicide,” *NYTimes.com* (Sept. 11, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/12/us/california-legislature-approves-assisted-suicide.html?_r=0# (accessed Sept. 26, 2015).

³ Wesley J. Smith, “Why Did the Media Adore Brittany Maynard and Ignore Lauren Hill,” *LifeNews.com* (Apr. 14, 2015), <http://www.lifenews.com/2015/04/14/why-did-the-media-adore-brittany-maynard-and-ignore-lauren-hill/> (accessed Sept. 26, 2015); Elizabeth Hanink, “Dying Without Dignity”; Steve Ertelt, “Euthanasia Activists Pushing”.

⁴ Such popular weekly series as *ER*, *Chicago Hope*, *Law & Order* and, as if to emphasize that it is the wave of the future, *Star Trek Voyager* have each aired episodes in support of assisted suicide. As for a millennial culmination of the media’s celebration of the practice of helping people to die, there was the 1999 *60 Minutes* segment which aired an actual videotape of Kevorkian performing an assisted suicide. Wesley J. Smith, *Culture of Death* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), pp. 99-100. Such positive portrayals in movies and over television have continued over the last decade. Amy E. Hasbrouck, “Amour And Fear: Assisted Suicide at the Oscars,” *NRL News Today* (March 1, 2013), <http://www.nationalrighttolifenews.org/news/2013/03/amour-and-fear-assisted-suicide-at-the-oscars/> (accessed Sept. 27, 2015); Robin Marants Henig, “Fictional Plotlines and Real Assisted Suicide,” *The Atlantic* (Mar 27, 2014), <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/03/fictional-plotlines-and-real-assisted-suicide/359680/> (accessed Sept. 27, 2015).

⁵ The Motion Picture Production Code was established in 1930 by The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America as a self regulating tool designed to prevent government regulation of the film industry. Sometimes referred to as the Hays Office after its longtime president Will B. Hays, the code was jointly written by a Catholic layman, Martin Quigley, and a Jesuit priest, Daniel Lord. The influence of the code was at its height during the period (1934-54) when Joseph Breen, another Catholic, was appointed its administrator. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v. “Quigley, Martin Joseph.” It was also during the

Breen era that the National Legion of Decency was established, an influential office of the U.S. bishops that reviewed and rated movies based on moral content.

⁶ In that era of commercial television broadcasting, one or two advertisers typically sponsored an entire series. Actors in character would often plug the sponsors' products at the end of an episode by speaking directly to the viewing audience. Thus, the sponsors wanted to avoid anything that might upset potential consumers of their wares.

⁷ Harry Castleman and Walter J. Podrazik, *Watching TV* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982), pp. 145-46. Actor Pernell Roberts, who starred as one of the Cartwright boys in *Bonanza*, essentially concurred with Minow when he left the series at the height of its popularity due to his dissatisfaction over the show's scripts. His co-star Lorne Greene, however, was not persuaded: "Look, nobody claims that every script we do is great. If we get eight or ten good ones out of 34 in a year, that's a lot more good theater than there would be without *Bonanza*"; from an article in *Look* magazine quoted from Melany Shapiro, *Bonanza* (Nipomo CA: Cyclone Books, 1997), p. 9.

⁸ The contradiction is only apparent, of course, due to the muddling of proper distinctions often attached to the "seamless garment" approach to the life issues; i.e., the moral difference between the direct killing of innocent, human life and other types of killing that may be justified under the proper conditions, e.g., self defense and authoritative retribution.

⁹ Gary R. Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 197

¹⁰ CBS, already number one in the Nielsen Ratings, did not wish to help the sales of its chief rival by increasing the number of colorcast programs. ABC, meanwhile, at the time a distant third among the networks in revenue, was hesitant to assume the added cost of broadcasting in color at a time when only a small percentage of homes had compatible sets. It wasn't until 1966 that network prime time programs were entirely transmitted in color.

¹¹ The show would place in the top 10 for a decade before going off the network schedule in 1973 after 14 seasons. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1979), pp. 805-08; Alex McNeil, *Total Television* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 1147-52.

¹² Among the historical references made were Mark Twain's stint as editor of Virginia City's daily newspaper (1862-64), the granting of statehood to Nevada (1864), the close of the Civil War (1865), the operation of the U.S. mint in nearby Carson City (opened in 1870), and a great fire in Virginia City (1875).

¹³ Ian Dowbiggin, *A Concise History of Euthanasia* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), pp. 10-11. The Hippocratic Oath states in part: "I will not give a fatal drug to anyone if I am asked, nor will I suggest any such thing." Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁴ The term "suicide" was not coined until 1642 by an English doctor named Thomas Browne. The notion was to differentiate killing oneself from homicide. Dowbiggin, p. 28

¹⁵ Dowbiggin, pp. 31, 39.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 44

¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 52-57

¹⁸ From the Journal of American Medicine, quoted in Dowbiggin, pp. 51-52.

¹⁹ The classic definition of euthanasia is "dying well," a morally valid desire such as when one prays for a good death. In recent times the term has come to mean something much different, i.e., "easy death." See A. Bonnar, O.F.M., *The Catholic Doctor* (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1950), p. 105, and Bernard J. Ficarra, *Newer Ethical Problems in Medicine and Surgery* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1951), p. 86.

²⁰ This period of German history is probably best known in America as the timeframe for the popular Broadway musical *Cabaret*. Weimar Germany is typically depicted by historians as a culturally modernistic, liberal democracy. Paul Johnson, *Modern Times*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), pp. 112-15.

²¹ Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 15.

²² Dowbiggin, p. 75.

²³ Dowbiggin, pp. 80, 82.

²⁴ Ian Dowbiggin, *A Merciful End: The Euthanasia Movement in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 65.

²⁵Quoted in Dowbiggen, *History of Euthanasia*, p. 103. To cite just a few examples of Catholic influence in the medical field c. 1950: a) The National Catholic Federation of Physicians' Guilds (now The Catholic Medical Association) was founded in 1932 and published *The Linacre Quarterly*, an influential journal of articles on medical science and Catholic theology; b) while Catholics comprised about 22% of the U.S. population in 1953, Catholic schools comprised nearly 30% of all nursing schools in the U.S., graduating almost one-third of the nation's nurses. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v. "National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds" and "Nursing, Catholic Schools of"; c) The Catholic Hospital Association came out with its widely disseminated *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Hospitals* in 1947 and subsequently published from 1949-1955 a series of five highly regarded booklets on moral problems in medicine. Gerald Kelly, S.J., *Medico-Moral Problems* (St. Louis: The Catholic Hospital Association of the United States and Canada, 1958), p. vii

²⁶ John P. Kenny, O.P., *Principles of Medical Ethics* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1962), p. viii.

²⁷ E.g., the 1962 the Supreme Court case *Engel v. Vitale* that banned prayer in public schools; the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which ignited the modern women's movement; the 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut* Supreme Court decision that overturned laws against the sale of contraception by invoking the right to "privacy"; Paul Ehrlich's 1968 bestseller *The Population Bomb* with its dire predictions of mass starvation; the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. Historically, those sympathetic to these issues also supported euthanasia, see Dowbiggen, *Merciful End*, pp. 48, 124, 130, 144, and Wesley J. Smith, *Culture of Death*, p. 21.

²⁸ As detailed in Fr. Peter Mitchell's book *The Coup at Catholic University: The 1968 Revolution in American Catholic Institutions*, over 500 theologians from across the country signed a statement of dissent against the pope's teaching, including the faculty at the U.S. bishops' own Catholic University of America. A year earlier, the presidents of 26 Catholic universities met at a conference in Wisconsin to declare their independence from the magisterium of the Church in what became known as the "Land O'Lakes Statement". See Justin Petrisek, "Fidelity Triumphs over Dissent: Remembering the 'Coup at Catholic University'", The Cardinal Newman Society (July 17, 2015) <http://www.cardinalnewmansociety.org/> (accessed 10/22/2015).

²⁹ Situation ethics was the creation of Joseph Fletcher, an Episcopal minister and early member of the Euthanasia Society of America. Wesley J. Smith, *Culture of Death*, p. 11; Ian Dowbiggen, *Merciful End*, p. 100.

³⁰ From the *Bonanza* episode "The Quality of Mercy", written by Peter Packer, directed by Joseph H. Lewis; Lorne Greene as Ben Cartwright, Michael Landon as Joe Cartwright; filmed: 7/31/63-8/7/63; CBS DVD, NBCUniversal Media, Paramount Pictures, 2013.

³¹ Nicole Weisensee Egan, "Terminally Ill Woman Brittany Maynard Has Ended Her Own Life," *People* (11/02/2014), <http://www.People.com/article/brittany-maynard-died-terminal-brain-cancer> (accessed 9/ 5/ 2015).

³² The 1981 movie starring Richard Dreyfus was adapted from a play by English playwright Brian Clark.

³³ The writer is indebted to the late Msgr. William B. Smith of the Archdiocese of New York for the "landlord"/"tenant" analogy. While the intrinsic evil of directly killing an innocent human life is the primary argument against mercy killing, moral theologians have also employed a secondary argument by invoking what is called the "wedge principle." This states that an act, even if it causes no harm in exceptional circumstances in an individual case, should be prohibited if it would injure humanity were it to be raised to a general rule of conduct. Joseph V. Sullivan, S.T.L., *The Morality of Mercy Killing* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1950), p. 54f. Thus, in the case of decriminalizing voluntary assisted suicide, the *voluntary* could easily lead to *non-voluntary* or *compulsory*, as has happened in present day Holland. Nick Hallett, "Assisted Suicide 'Out of Control' in Netherlands," *Breitbart London* (3 Oct. 2014) <http://www.breitbart.com/london/2014/10/03/assisted-suicide-out-of-control-in-netherlands/> (accessed 10/19/15); Wesley J. Smith, *Culture of Death*, p. 111; Wesley J. Smith, *Forced Exit* (New York: Times Books, 1997), p. 94ff.