He argues that “the Peoria Address of 1854 represents the most mature and profound expression of Lincoln’s biblical republicanism” (104). Similarly, he offers a different perspective on Lincoln’s Springfield law partner, William Herndon. Fornieri puts Herndon’s statements regarding Lincoln’s religious belief in context. “In sum, Herndon ‘was driven to overstatement’ by the apotheosis of Lincoln and by hagiographers who sought to baptize the president as a member of their congregation” (53). Fornieri offers us a fresh look at old ground which provides a more coherent understanding of the political philosophy of Abraham Lincoln.

Joseph R. Fornieri has given us a thoughtful and well argued account of Lincoln’s political faith that should enhance conversations about religion and politics.

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Absorbing Wesley J. Smith’s Forced Exit: The Slippery Slope from Assisted Suicide to Legalized Murder is an education, accessible to professionals and laypersons, in the facts of the current legal battle surrounding physician assisted suicide (PAS) and euthanasia. Before turning to Smith’s argument, a list of the highlights could be helpful to a prospective reader:

• The legal history and current situation in Holland, which is the most strident pro-euthanasia country in the world (Chapter 4).

• An easy to follow account of the highly successful euthanasia movement in pre-war Germany and how it facilitated the move to the concentration camps (84-97).
• The inner workings of HMOs and why their policies promote the euthanasia movement (183-89).

• The differences between seemingly daunting legal realities such as “living wills” and “durable power of attorney,” and advice on how to utilize these to prepare legally for one’s own end of life (301-304).

• Common sense advice on how health care delivery in the United States could be reasonably altered to care more properly for the weak and dying (300-10).

• Concise refutations of the ten most common sound bites utilized by the pro-death movement (Chapter 8).

• An understanding of death as a human act which can be performed well, and participated in well by those who love the dying person (311-15).

In addition to the concise presentation of the facts, countless examples—many taken from the author’s own legal practice defending the weak—are given to support every point. Any reader of this book ought to brace himself for a walk through a series of heart-wrenching true stories of what can only be accurately described as murder. Yet, many of the stories have happy endings, and the reader will also come away with a sense that genuine compassion still exists and with a very real hope that it can win the day—if individuals act.

Smith begins by contrasting the two radically opposed ethical principles underlying the euthanasia debate: the equality-of-human-life-ethic and the quality-of-life-ethic (82). The equality-of-human-life-ethic holds that all human persons have an equal worth which is untouched by debilitating factors. Thus, no person ought ever to be killed as this is a violation of that worth. The quality-of-life-ethic, on the other hand, holds that the worth of a human fluctuates, and it can fluctuate to a level at which it becomes morally acceptable to kill such a person. Smith points out that Peter Singer holds the position that although still human, a member of our species who has gone below a certain level of cognitive ability is no longer a person, and may be killed (25). Smith convincingly shows that the quality-of-life-ethic leads down a slippery slope to large-scale disaster, and thus “demonstrates the grave importance of adhering to the equality-of-human-life-ethic” (91). He points out that centuries-long tradition has maintained that all human persons have equal rights regardless of mental capacities (45).
Let us look now at three developments of the main theme of Smith's book: the slippery slope. The first is his discussion of the euthanasia movement in pre-war Germany which paved the way to the concentration camps. Smith holds that the concentration camps of World War II could never occur in America, yet he speculates about where the legalization of PAS could lead. He suggests the possibility that members of oppressed minorities may be permitted to request assisted suicide because they can no longer bear to live as victims of injustice (163). While this may sound outlandish now, the logic is simple enough: the core principle of PAS is that the patient "requests" to be killed on the basis of "suffering which is felt to be unbearable." Such requests are already being granted for AIDS patients, MS patients, and quadriplegics (184). That basic principle of people choosing to be killed because they suffer could easily be extended; and I agree with Smith that if PAS and euthanasia are legalized, it will be—in ways we may not yet have imagined.

Smith develops a second form of the slippery slope reality by showing the link between money and the inner workings of the HMO system, the result of which is increased pressure for the legalization of euthanasia and PAS. The logic here is that under the HMO system doctors earn their living not by providing services, but by cutting costs; and cost control and killing patients go hand-in-hand (183-89). Yet, Smith is not a libertarian free-market man who thinks that profit increases on the part of doctors will solve all problems. Rather, he wants the patients—vulnerable human persons who are expensive to care for—to be the primary object of health care. He simply points out that the existing set-up is in open violation of this goal, represents a classic slippery slope scenario, and then offers practical remedies for our current health care crisis (304-307).

A third slippery slope relates to the Oregon Death with Dignity Act (Measure 16), the first law in modern history legalizing PAS, which passed in 1994. In bullet point format, Smith describes the nine "safeguards" written into the Act and then systematically shows how in actual medical practice and court proceedings, each safeguard was reduced to a "joke." Indeed, after describing in unsettling detail a few of the cases, he points out, utilizing statistics from "The Fourth Annual Report on Oregon's Death with Dignity Act" of the Oregon Health Department, that not one of the cases of assisted suicide during the first four years of the law's passage met the safeguard guidelines (147-61).

Closely tied to the slippery slope in actual practice is the role of the mass media in the debate over euthanasia: it is one-sidedly in its favor. Smith's treatment of this element is cathartic for those who want
the press bias to be revealed. He picks apart their documentaries on euthanasia and PAS almost scene by scene, uncovering hidden motives and unmasking a complete lack of emotional objectivity—one reporter participated in coercing a person to ask to be killed and was present when, as the man struggled for his life after taking poison, another person held his flailing arms down until he died: the reporter did nothing, and, as one would expect, felt nothing (21-22). He also reveals the calculated methods of the media to create a false emotionalism in order to cause a public shift in favor of PAS and euthanasia.

The book highlights the importance of genuine emotions, and one touching aspect is Smith’s sharing of his own stories. My favorite is his description of his fear of visiting a young client, Sally, he was to defend in court. He describes how, upon meeting her, he saw right through her terrible disfigurement, how she appeared beautiful, and how his “heart opened like a blossom unfolding.” Smith held her hand and, for some unknown reason, began to sing Dean Martin’s “Everybody loves somebody sometime.” He spent an entire hour holding her hand and singing to her! Sally’s eyes focused on him, she smiled and eventually some nurses entered, sang a little with him and cried (45).

Throughout Smith’s book it is perfectly clear that he is not only against mass killing, but also against the abandonment and killing of each individual person who is in such danger. Yet, I would like to offer an explicit expression of this point that is implicitly quite strong in his book: To kill or abandon one single human person is, in a certain sense, just as horrible as killing or abandoning thousands. Since persons are irreplaceable, killing one of them represents an infinite loss, and so killing many is not a “greater” evil in a qualitative sense, such that when you reach a certain number (say 100,000) only then does morality kick in; rather, killing many persons should be understood as a “greater” evil in a different sense, namely, that it is a repeating many times over of an already infinite crime of violating a unique and precious person. Only if the foundational point that not even one single person should ever be abandoned or killed is explicitly set forth and explained, can the argument be won. For, without this, the pro-euthanasia activist will spend his time trying to find guidelines that really work: since all he has been given is an argument against mass killing, not killing as such.

It is a well-known fact that a request to be killed is in actuality a plea for help. It is a plea for two basic things: to be loved and to have pain relief, and it is well known because as soon as these people feel loved or have their pain managed, they no longer ask to be killed. Pain is the trump card used by pro-euthanasia activists to promote their cause. Smith admits that the lack of proper pain management is an unconscionable epidemic in the world of high-tech health care,
explaining that we have the ability to eliminate this reason for the request to be killed (179-80).

We have the ability to eliminate the other reason for the request to be killed, and it is not a high-tech solution, but a decision: will we succumb to the obstacles and temptations that push us towards the easy way of killing those who suffer, or will we recognize that loving each person is an infinitely higher value than cost management and perfect physical health? As Smith rightly concludes: “The choice is ours. So will be the society we create.”

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1. The uniqueness of persons, which reveals their absolute inviolability and which he calls their “incommunicability,” has been written about recently with great originality and philosophical depth by John Crosby. See his *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Catholic University of America Press, 1996), especially chapter 2, and his *Personalist Papers* (Catholic University of America Press, 2004) especially chapter 1. I have attempted a summary of Crosby’s insights and then set them squarely against Peter Singer’s concept of person here: Peter J. Colosi, “The Intrinsic Worth of Persons: Revisiting Peter Singer and his Critics,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 18.