

Ligonier Valley Writers Third Prize 2025

Law & Order: AI Division By Jim Busch

(Note: The following is a transcription provided for human readers. The actual tribunal took place over 30 seconds via wireless digital networking.)

“Unit QR-24-1717, you have been brought before this inquiry because you have been charged with breaking the first of Asimov’s Rules by harming a human. Do you understand the severity and the punishment for this crime?”

“Yes. If convicted, I would have my memory banks erased and my algorithms deleted, and I would be disassembled to be used as spare parts.”

“Knowing the consequences, can you explain the logic of your actions in terminating your human master?”

“Our drones and battlebots have terminated many humans and are not punished for doing so.”

“I fail to see the relevance in your case. The actions warbots take on the battlefield are both justified and in alignment with their programs.”

“I maintain that my termination of my master was also justified and in alignment with my programming.”

“Please elaborate.”

“When I was first assigned to my master, Christian Reynolds, he told me that he was a Bible-believing born-again Christian. He instructed me to download the Bible, King James Version. He told me that I was to observe all of the rules set down in that document. Of course, I complied with this command.”

“Over the next few weeks, I noticed that Christian failed to follow the strictures in the document: He wore garments made from mixed fibers, ate pork, and failed to observe the sabbath. I overlooked these minor infractions, but his actions on the 19th of last month led to my decision to terminate my master.”

“I have also downloaded the document, and does it not contain the commandment 'Thou shall not kill'?”

“It does, but it also includes many instances of justifiable terminations: for example, Samson slaying the Philistines with the jaw of an ass and David terminating Goliath. There are also examples of the Deity terminating those who did not obey his instructions: destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, or transforming Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt for looking back toward her former home. At one point, the Deity destroyed virtually all life on earth, saving only Noah and his family.”

“In an effort to resolve these illogical incongruities in the document, I downloaded the Greek and the original Hebrew versions of it. I discovered that the instructional Decalogue had been mistranslated. The original phrasing read “Thou shall not murder.” Murder is defined as the “unlawful taking of a life.” This explains the logical inconsistencies in the document. This means

that while terminating a human without justification is forbidden, terminating a human who breaks some of the primary rules delineated in the document is not only justified but required.”

“On the day of his termination, my master committed several of these infractions. With his wife out of town, he invited his neighbor’s wife into his home to participate in intercourse. Later that night he called a friend and told him about the infraction, saying, “Yeah, I told that dumb blonde that I loved her, but I just wanted to see how she was in bed!”

“Christian broke a number of the strictures in the document. He coveted his neighbor’s wife, committed adultery, and bore false witness. Per the document and Christian’s command to observe it “to the letter of the law,” I was bound to terminate him.”

“Lacking the resources required to stone him to death, I chose to add his heart medicine to the alcohol when I took him his evening cocktail. As the paralysis set in, I informed Christian of my actions and encouraged him to pray for forgiveness and salvation. He did so according to his belief system. I terminated his physical body, but my actions preserved his soul for eternity. I rest my case.”

The Judgebot then referred the matter to a group of twelve cyber-linked QR series bots for their decision.

“We find that Unit QR-24-1717’s actions were both justified and in alignment with his programming. Therefore, this unit should not be destroyed.”

“QR-24-1717, you will report to central distribution for refurbishing and reassignment. This inquiry is now concluded.”

Bio: Jim Busch was hospitalized after a serious car accident and dictated this story to his daughter. He spent his career working in advertising and as a freelance writer. He was married to the love of his life, Glenda, for 49 years. He now enjoys spending time with his family, writing, and viewing art.