



A Magazine of Ideas from Thales College

THEORY & GROUND

Volume 1, November 2024

On the Cover:

“Distant View of the Heath” – Macbeth, Act I

Illustrator: T. Creswick | Engraver: John Jackson

See the record for Charles Knight’s “Distant View of the Heath” from The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakspeare: Tragedies, Vol. II in Michael John Goodman, The Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive [30 October 2024].

Theory & Ground

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Thales Press

Our Inaugural Issue

by Peter Forrest, Ph.D.

Provost & Dean of Humanities

Thales College

If you're reading this, you've picked up or clicked on the inaugural issue of *Theory & Ground (T&G)*, a new magazine of ideas published by Thales College. Like enthusiastic first-time parents, we can't wait to share our new creation with you. And, like those new parents, our creative choice of a baby name may elicit responses of polite befuddlement from friends and strangers alike. So, the occasion seems to call for an explanation and defense (an *apologia*, if you will) of that choice: *why name your magazine Theory & Ground?*

Admittedly, it's an unusual juxtaposition, and its meaning is not immediately apparent. A while back, I noticed that our founder, Bob Luddy, would frequently employ variations on a specific turn of phrase. He would say things like, "We must ensure our students are grounded in reality," or, "That person understands the theory, but *he just can't get to ground.*" Over time, I came to see that this distinction between theory and ground captures the heart of the mission and vision of our institution.

Thales College is guided by the conviction that to become truly educated—or to truly be prepared for adulthood, which amounts to much the same thing—a young person must acquire *both* philosophical wisdom and professional and technical knowledge and competence. We have spoken of this balance in many ways—*Scientia et Sapientia*, education of "the head and the hand," the classical and the practical—but, I don't think we have articulated it better than as "theory and ground."

First, **theory**: from the Ancient Greek word, *theoria*, meaning contemplation or speculation, or, literally, the state of gazing at, or of being a spectator. Association with scientific theory has given our English word a connotation of something dry and sterile, but, for Plato and Aristotle, the word was connected to attending religious shrines and festivals. It is the word Plato used to describe what the philosopher does when he abstracts away from the distractions of life and contemplates

the Forms, especially the highest form, the Form of the Good. The Latin equivalent, *contemplatio*, was used in the Christian tradition to describe the contemplative life, the goal of which is the mystical vision of God. The beginning of wisdom is *to lift one's gaze*.

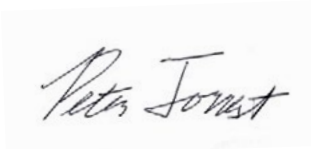
Second, **ground**: from the Old English (Germanic), *grund*, meaning, well, the ground. We speak of a humble person being “grounded” and “down to earth,” of “hitting the ground running” and “standing one’s ground.” A grounded circuit controls dangerous electricity by channeling it in a safe direction. The grounds for a claim or an action are its foundational support. In each case, the word signifies a sure and stable reality, the domain of practical action, where lofty thoughts and aspirations make a concrete difference. The beginning of knowledge is to be *in touch with reality*.

At Thales College, we seek both a higher vision and a surer grounding than modern education has offered. This magazine is about those twin pursuits.

Each issue of *T&G* will feature original work by members of the Thales College community and guest contributors and be organized around six sections:

- **Welcome:** An introduction to the issue
- **Founder:** A letter from our founder, Bob Luddy
- **Theory:** Contemplation of the Good, True, and Beautiful through scholarship in the Liberal Arts and Humanities
- **Ground:** Application of knowledge to real-world challenges through articles on business, industry, education, and leadership
- **Scholé:** News from the college
- **Beauty:** A short work of art or literature to inspire the soul

Enjoy.



Volume 1
November 2024

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FOUNDER p. 4

**What Does It Mean
to Be Educated?**

by Bob Luddy

THEORY p. 7

**Christian Themes in
Shakespeare: An Interview**

with Anthony Esolen, Ph.D.

GROUND p. 19

**More than Servant
Leadership**

by Jon S. Rennie

SCHOLÉ p. 25

**Reflecting on the
October 3 Sydney & Cecile
Smith Lecture on Virtue**

by Lucy Maher

BEAUTY *back cover*

**Curtal Sonnet:
On Losing a Language**

by Mark Wagenaar, Ph.D.

**THEORY &
GROUND**



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For more information on this
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media@thalescollege.org.*

What Does It Mean to Be Educated?

*by Bob Luddy, Founder
Thales College*

In a time when truth is distorted as individuals are encouraged to produce their own version of reality, it is imperative that institutions of higher education return to their original mission of educating a student in what truth is, how it is obtained, and how to apply it toward the goal of human flourishing.

An educated person is a truth seeker, who continuously gains knowledge of objective truth leading to wisdom and excellent judgment.

Virtuous character formation is the highest priority for this person—beginning with humility. Virtue is foundational because it allows one to use knowledge and skills productively as a servant leader. A life devoid of virtue will lead to continuous trouble and often tragedy. The men and women who built the ancient Roman Republic understood this, as they practiced hard work, marriage, and patriotic citizenship.

It follows that a truly educated person has a deep understanding of the Natural Order, which consists of the laws and principles by which God created the universe. Thomas Aquinas stated, “The eternal law is God’s wisdom, since it is the directive norm of all movement and action.” Human wisdom in all cases is inferior to God, which is why all humans must understand the Natural Order and make decisions based on God’s wisdom.

Another primary purpose of formal education is to enhance thinking capabilities to facilitate human

“ **A life devoid of virtue will lead to continuous trouble and often tragedy.** ”

progress. Too many educated individuals think they already have learned the answers, when in fact the problems presented to us are new ones, which require original thinking and research to solve. As noted by Henry Hazlett: “You can’t look up new problems in a book.” The capability and talents of an individual are best demonstrated, I believe, through how a person gains the knowledge needed to solve new problems.

With these truths in mind, Thales College provides a double major to each student—a Bachelor of Arts in both Entrepreneurial Business and the Liberal Arts—because philosophy, literature, history, economics, and ethics are as important as technical skills. Students learn how to utilize market-based economic laws to improve outcomes. Classical studies inform students about unchanging human nature, which is essential for future sound judgment both in life and in their business careers.

Students at Thales College also learn from our series—The Sydney & Cecile Smith Lectures on Virtue—which features erudite professors along with leaders in government, business, and industry. These lectures provide a lifetime of knowledge and wisdom from master thinkers and leaders.

Crucially, Thales College students move from “theory to ground” by entering internships to develop and exercise experimentation, manual skills, common sense, and practical wisdom from mentor-teachers. The modern world is oversaturated with credentialed individuals lacking these qualities, which impedes decision making.

Thales College students are learning to become thinkers from their professors, a classically focused Liberal Arts curriculum, Socratic discussions, and professional internships. In the process, students will learn the importance of informal learning, which begins in formal education and lasts a lifetime.

Lastly, writing and communication skills are how we hone our thinking and problem solving. My mentor, Bill Peterson, Ph.D., emphasized that “the best writing is rewriting,” to add clarity, simplicity, and succinctness. A truly educated person must not just think critically and grasp truths, but also know how to communicate them.

Becoming a well-educated, virtuous leader takes a lifetime of study, work, perseverance, debate, and problem solving. For our students, that lifetime’s work begins well at Thales College.

Bob Luddy



Left:
*Thales College
Matriculation
Ceremony
Fall 2024*

Opposite Page:
*“Shakspeare”
by Charles Warren
after John Thurston,
Courtesy Yale Center
for British Art,
Paul Mellon Fund
[30 October 2024].*

Christian Themes in Shakespeare

*An Interview with
Anthony Esolen, Ph.D.
Distinguished Professor of
Humanities, Thales College*

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The following is an excerpt from a longer interview with Dr. Anthony Esolen, Distinguished Professor of Humanities at Thales College, on Christian Themes in the Plays of William Shakespeare. When we think of Shakespeare, do we think of him as a distinctively *Christian* poet and playwright? I would venture that for most of us, the answer is 'no.' Perhaps this is because he did not write on explicitly theological subjects—unlike other great Christian poets such as Dante and Milton. Or, perhaps it is because we see Shakespeare as too quintessentially modern, and too universally acclaimed, to be anything but a thoroughly secular writer. In any event, here to set the record straight is Professor Esolen.



PETER FORREST, PH.D.:

Tony, I'm wondering if you can just start us off by introducing us a little bit to the life and times of William Shakespeare. And, do we know much or anything about his own personal faith?

ANTHONY ESOLEN, PH.D.:

Well, his father was a recusant Catholic. He paid the fine, so to speak, that you would have to pay if you weren't attending Anglican services. You'd have to expect roadblocks in whatever career you took, and that you'd be penalized a little bit financially.

So, Shakespeare grows up in this, in the midst of not just conflicts between the churches, but a struggle to understand what exactly the word of God implies for you being a Christian generally.

You had not just the Anglicans, but a kind of radical left wing among the Protestants who believed that you were already made holy and

you could dispense with most law. But, then you also had radicals who believed that the Anglican Church was too compromised by adopting most of the liturgical forms of the Roman Church and preserving the episcopacy.

FORREST: Would this be who we call the Puritans today?

ESOLEN: Yes. And “Puritan” was an insult, just like “Gothic” was invented as an insult word by the Renaissance people, looking back on medieval architecture and saying it’s fit for barbarians! Of course, it implied that they didn’t understand the architecture—The Puritans didn’t go around calling themselves Puritans because that would be snobbish and prideful; their enemies called them that sarcastically.

The Puritans were a thorn in the side of the ordinary Anglican Church and wanted to keep the Catholics out. You could be executed if you were a Catholic priest in England. If they found out that you had celebrated mass, you could be drawn and quartered—that is, they cut you open. They hanged you by the neck, but not till you were dead; you see, “to be hanged by the neck until dead,” that’s not redundant. They’d cut you down before you

died; and then, they disemboweled you. You would still be living. You’d see this. They’d throw the bowels on the pyre, you’d expire, and then they cut your body up into quarters—so that you’d be drawn, that is disemboweled, and you’d be quartered. Horrible executions.

So, Shakespeare’s growing up in the midst of this. And, he’s got cousins who are Catholic priests. He’s got cousins on the mother’s side who are in this mix, too. Maybe some of them have taken part in hiding a priest. They used to create spaces inside walls to sneak a priest in. And, Elizabeth’s priest hunters got very good at detecting aberrations in a house’s architecture.

So, you’re growing up in the midst of this, and you’re the smartest poet who ever lived. You’d see the need for social order. In fact, you’d at least nominally accept the Anglican Church. Otherwise, you’re not going to be able to work. You make your peace with it, and maybe you see: “there’s nothing that they’re actually doing that I disagree with in their services or the way they pray that I disagree with. I’m not comfortable about the spying and the execution of priests, but I see the need for order. I reject what the Puritans

are after. I reject the sneaky Calvinism that's behind some of it. So, I'm not with the Scottish Presbyterians, but—"

You're in the midst of this, and you've got to think about all of these things! While you're making your career, you're making your money, putting on plays for a general audience and becoming very quickly the best loved, most popular playwright in the nation, winning, in fact, the favor of the Queen. And, then when the queen dies, King James comes to the throne. You win the favor of the king pretty readily, and you rename your players the King's Men.

Shakespeare is in the midst of all of this, and he's *preoccupied* with what we would now call moral-theological concerns: What does it mean to be a good human being created by God? With an eternal destiny? What does evil do to the human soul, by the very nature of evil and the human soul? How do we combine, in any society, true justice with the kind of practical liberty that human beings are going to need? How do you incorporate mercy into justice? How do you save lost human souls...if they can be saved? All of these are central questions to the drama of human life.

And, he's examining them *all the time*. He alludes to Scripture far more often than any of his contemporaries do. But, it's never in a goody two-shoes kind of way. Even more than Christopher Marlowe writing *Doctor Faustus*; Ben Jonson, who like Shakespeare has kind of a funny relationship with the churches for a while and too is a recusant Catholic; Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, with whom he collaborated on a couple of plays; John Ford—not to be confused with the great American director; younger people like Green and Decker... There are a lot of playwrights right there. And, *nobody* does as much, by far, with these fundamentally theological questions as Shakespeare does.

FORREST: So, I'm thinking about classical education and who are the medieval and early modern writers that people go to—people like Dante and Milton—you've got theological questions front and center. And Shakespeare, as far as I'm aware, doesn't ever write as explicitly about *explicitly* theological questions as such. Is that fair to say, or are there explicitly theological questions that are subtly presented? Or, is it more that he's offering a Christian perspective on these "Big Questions": about politics, and law, and the nature of the human

person?

ESOLEN: He's certainly doing the latter, and sometimes he is in fact grappling with what you would call a clear moral-theological question. But, he's not writing a theological poem, as Dante or Milton. He's putting a play on stage. And, he wants to make money. He has to tell a good story.

FORREST: If you want to make money, don't just focus on the theological questions!

ESOLEN: Well, you can do it, but you can't turn it into a sermon! This is where Christian people who try to make movies in our time fail, because they don't know that they're supposed to be telling a story, not preaching a sermon.

And Shakespeare understood the difference.

FORREST: So, taking ideas about sin and grace and judgment, or "less theological" ideas about law, governance, and society, where do we see these themes, of either category, coming out in his plays?

ESOLEN: You see them most prominently in the four great romances, and especially the final three: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. Then, you

see them in peculiar ways in the four great tragedies: *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*.

And then you get them in the problem comedies, such as *Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, and in some of the other comedies, that are really broaching pretty serious matters of human self-damnation, of grace, of gratitude especially, such as in *As You Like It*, and to a lesser degree in *Twelfth Night*, [and] *Much Ado About Nothing*.

When you begin to see it, then you see that it's really very close to Shakespeare's heart. It really is kind of all over the place, even when he's telling a different kind of story.

FORREST: So, you mentioned "problem plays"—what is that category?

ESOLEN: The problem comedies are centrally about conflicts between the letter of the law and mercy. And what grace means, and what is the appropriate response to a gift. How to live in the economy of gift rather than an economy of *quid pro quo*.

The two plays in question there are *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*. If we're



Above:

“Scene V - Fields without the Town” – Measure for Measure, Act IV

Illustrator: G. F. Sargent | Engraver: John Jackson

See the record for Charles Knight’s “Scene V - Fields without the Town” from The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakspeare: Comedies, Vol. II in Michael John Goodman, The Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive [30 October 2024].

talking about the economy of grace rather than the economy of exchange, then the play is *The Merchant of Venice*. How to reconcile mercy with justice—or what the difference is between mercy and leniency—what the difference is between justice and application of the letter of the law that becomes inhuman or even absurd, then we look to *Measure for Measure*, whose very name comes from Scripture!

In *Measure for Measure*, here's the setup. We've got a city. It's a pretty good place to live. There's not a lot of violent crime in Vienna, but it's also a somewhat decadent place to live. There are brothels. And the Duke of Vienna has been a bit lenient.

He's a typical, good Shakespearean ruler in this sense: he loves his people and perhaps is too indulgent. And, he's more scholarly than political, and this kind of tends to get him to duck out of the messiness of politics too much. And he begins the play by telling his two chief advisors, an older man and a young man, that he's going to retire from Vienna and he's going to leave them in charge.

The elder of the two is like he is only not as competent. The younger is clearly a Puritan of sorts. His name is Angelo—"angel." And it's to Angelo that the Duke gives principal charge over Vienna while he's gone.

And he doesn't tell these two where he's going, right? He doesn't let them in on his plan. But, we are let in on the plan because he tells a monk who is his advisor that things have gotten a little hairy in Vienna, they've gotten a little decadent. We have most needful laws that curb—they're like bits in the horse's mouth—that curb the headstrong steeds of youth. But, we've let them slip. And, he's hoping that Angelo, who is more severe than he is, will apply the laws. And the monk says, "why didn't you apply them yourself?" And he says, "in me, it would have seemed like tyranny." Because when you let people get away with something for so long, it's as if you approved it. And that's not consistent.

FORREST: Every teacher knows this from the classroom. You're supposed to lay down the letter of the law on Day One, and then you can ease off, as opposed to what most of us probably fall into, which is to be too nice and then having to do a course correction!

ESOLEN: And then you're hated! Then the people rightly say, "well, you let us do these things. You implicitly approved them!" But, he also says to the monk that Lord Angelo is a man who scarcely confesses that his blood flows. And

essentially, he's also testing him to see whether he will be just, or whether he simply *appears* to be just.

And one of the laws in Vienna, as we soon find out, is absurdly severe. Everybody in the Elizabethan audience would have recognized this. This law has gone overboard. And it hasn't been applied in a long time. If you get a girl pregnant and you're not married, the punishment is death. It's a capital crime.

We learn news about this in a brothel. Lord Angelo has caught this young man who has gotten his girlfriend pregnant, and he has condemned him to death.

The young man, Claudio, is betrothed to the young woman Julieta. He's betrothed. And they've been waiting for family approval and for some dowry to be forthcoming. So, it's a kind of situation that everybody in the Elizabethan audience would have been familiar with. We're not talking here about two thoroughly irresponsible people. We're talking about two people who are committed to one another, and they want to get married. And it's the family squabbling about money that's gotten in the way. But that squabbling is thought to

be temporary. It's going to pass. But, in the meantime, they've jumped the gun, so to speak. And now, the crime is written on Julieta, on her body. She's showing.

Claudio does not make light of this. He is ashamed at what he's done. And Shakespeare doesn't make light of it either. Nowhere in Shakespeare will you find fornication looked upon with a shrug.

And, that's a kind of funny thing, because Shakespeare himself married a woman, Anne Hathaway, who was seven, eight years older than he was. He got her pregnant. They married.

FORREST: How do we know that?

ESOLEN: We know it from marriage records and from the record of the birth of the child.

So, Claudia was going to suffer a sentence of death. This is legal. And he has done wrong, and he admits it! He's not defiant. But, the law is overboard.

Claudio asks a friend of his, Lucio, "a fantastic." He's a fellow who lives a completely irregular life. A part-time soldier, part-time



Above:

“Isabella” – Measure for Measure, Act II

Illustrator: J. W. Wright | Engraver: W. H. Mote

See the record for “Isabella” from The heroines of Shakspeare: comprising the principal female characters in the plays of the great poet. Engraved in the highest style of art, from drawings by eminent artists. With letterpress extracts from the text, in English and French; and critical essays on each of the characters in Michael John Goodman, The Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive [11 November 2024].

frequenter of places to get drunk and pick up a prostitute.

FORREST: And, is that the connotation of “a fantastic?”

ESOLEN: No, “a fantastic” means, you know, a half-crazy person. He does carry a lot of the comic value in the play, and he’s fun to have on stage, although he is actually quite wicked. But, he’s a friend of Claudio.

And Claudio says to him: “I have a sister, she’s beautiful, she’s young, and she’s pure. And, she has power in her speech to move men’s hearts. She’s a novice in the convent. Go to her and ask her to go to Lord Angelo and plead with him to spare my life.”

Now this Isabella is about to join the Sisterhood of Saint Clare, a notably severe order. When the rules regarding her speaking to men are revealed to her, she says, “And is this all?” And the answer is, “What, is this too much?” And she says, “No, I desire rather a more severe restraint!”

So, it’s this young woman who’s beautiful, but in some ways is overdoing a rejection of natural human ways, who this frequenter of brothels and public houses is going to the convent to talk to—

and the only reason he can talk to her personally is because she’s a novice—to get her to go outside the walls, to plead to this Puritan over here to spare her brother’s life—because her brother has not done something that’s worthy of death.

Her brother has gotten a girlfriend pregnant. And, that was a girl that she grew up with; they were schoolgirls together. And she detests the sin that Claudio has committed. She says, “Well, let him marry her,” and Lucio says, “the Lord Angelo is not going to allow it, because *it’s not to the letter of the law.*”

And how do you plead? How do you persuade this man? What argument can you possibly use?

She says at first, for instance, “condemn the fault, but don’t condemn my brother.” And he says, “the fault stands condemned already, ‘mine were the very cipher of a function, if all I did was to condemn the fault and not the actor of it.’ Why am I here? I’m here as a magistrate. The fault stands condemned already by God. I am a magistrate. I condemn people, that’s what I’m charged with doing. I punish actions.”

But, in the course of her back and forth with Angelo on two

occasions, he falls for her and begins to desire her sexually and will propose that he will save Claudio's life if she will go to bed with him.

And she says, "I'll proclaim you through the city a hypocrite, a black-hearted hypocrite!" And he says, "Isabella—who would believe you?"

The man is going to be guilty intentionally—not in fact, but in his intent—he's going to be guilty of rape and murder. How do you save, now, not just Claudio's life, saving him from the chopping block, but how do you save Angelo's soul? How do you do it without pitching Isabella into an act of wickedness? So that you pull souls that are threatened with destruction out of the fire, without breaking a law or bending a law? How do you have both together?

The Psalm that is read, one of the readings out of the *Book of Common Prayer* for the day on which this play is performed at Windsor Castle before the king, King James, is the Psalm—I believe it's number 84. I may get the number wrong, but it's the Psalm with the so-called four daughters of God, "mercy and justice have met, righteousness and peace have kissed." So,

everybody in James's audience, these were not dumb people, they had this in mind already. And, they hear the name of the play, *Measure for Measure*. And they know the Sermon on the Mount, they know what Jesus is talking about, and they know what goes on from there.

They know, "How do you say to your brother, 'brother, let me take the speck out of your eye'"—and this is clearly Angelo's relation to Claudio—"when all along there is a plank in your own eye! Hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye. Then you can see well enough to take a speck out of your brother's."

But this is not to say, oh you know, there is no speck in your brother's eye. It's not to say, well, this is just an alternative way of looking at things. There is a speck in your brother's eye, but there's a plank in your own! "Condemn not lest you be condemned, for with what measure you measure, so shall it be measured out to you."

FORREST: So, do you think that if Angelo wasn't a hypocrite that Shakespeare would be okay with him condemning Claudio? Or, is him condemning Claudio? Or, is there something that's a problem beyond that?

ESOLEN: No, there's something that's a problem with the law in question. But, there was a problem even before Angelo falls for Isabella. There's a problem with Angelo. And Lucio says to the Duke—the Duke's in disguise by the way, in disguise in his character throughout the play. So, the Duke is watching things transpire, and Lucio says to the Duke—well, he thinks he's just talking to this monk—Lucio says, “what about this Lord Angelo? They say his very urine is congealed ice.”

So, the thing that's wrong with Angelo is that he doesn't know himself. He thinks he is a just man. He thinks he is a righteous man. Now, he may all day long talk about the fact that he's a sinner, but he's one of those sorts who thinks he's a righteous man, and he cultivates this appearance of righteousness not to be a hypocrite.

Now he himself—there's a woman who was betrothed to him. He didn't get her pregnant. But, her brother was sailing home with a large dowry for her, and the ship was destroyed at sea. The brother was killed. And down went the goods to the bottom of the deep blue sea.

And Angelo dumped the girl. This we learn in the middle of the play, but she still has this love for him, and he treated her in a shabby way, and said afterwards to justify it, it was because he found her too flighty, too much levity, too loosey goosey. So, he slanders her to boot.

She becomes drawn into the play. And here's the question. How do you save Claudio's life? How do you save Angelo's soul? How do you keep Isabella from committing sin? How do you make good for this young woman, Mariana, whom Angelo dumped? How do you bring back a greater social order in Vienna and not end up being despised for it as a tyrant?

FORREST: And maybe we shouldn't entirely spoil the plot, for those who don't know the play. But it occurs to me when you talk about that combination of mercy and justice—not just erasing the law or not just looking the other way at sin or transgression—but there being space to save Claudio's life and Angelo's soul, that the Christian response is going to involve Christ. As a mediator. And I'm not going to ask the overly simple question, which is, “Is there a Christ figure in *Measure for Measure*?” something like that. But a lot of it, if I'm remembering

“ Christ is the answer. ”

rightly, comes down to the work of the Duke behind the scenes—

ESOLEN: Who is acting as a kind of providence.

FORREST: So, in broad strokes, what is Shakespeare’s answer to those questions that you asked?

ESOLEN: Christ is the answer.

Now, on the Elizabethan stage, you were forbidden by law to utter the name of God, or the name of Christ. Because it was considered not fit there. Therefore, if you were going to refer to God or Christ, you had to do it by a circumlocution. But it’s clear, for instance, in the play *The Merchant of Venice*, that Christ saves mankind not by dispensing with the law, but by fulfilling it and then transcending it.

The law is good. It must not be condemned. It must not be swept aside. We’d devour each other like monsters of the deep if we had no

law! The law is good. But, the law is not enough. And, if we fix on the person of Christ, and what it means for Christ to save mankind, then we’ll understand *why* the law is not enough, but also why the law has not to be abrogated but fulfilled. And, what it is that goes beyond the law.

And in *The Merchant of Venice*, the word in various forms that shows up throughout the play— The word is **grace**.



For the rest of the interview, watch the full video here: ThalesCollege.org/TG1-Esolen

More Than Servant Leadership

*by Jon S. Rennie, Instructor of Entrepreneurial Business
Thales College*

The Leadership Question

For over 30 years, I have led people in the military, global corporations, and the manufacturing business I co-founded. I also have been actively writing and speaking about leadership issues to a wide audience in books, articles, and podcasts for a decade. Yet, I have always struggled to answer one of the most basic leadership questions: “What is your leadership style?”

That question should be as simple as, “What is your favorite color?” However, like many leadership practitioners, until recently, I understood leadership in practice but had limited knowledge of academic leadership theory. My knowledge was based on personal experiences and the often-confusing messages in popular literature. For example, a simple Google search for the term “leadership styles” yields a wide variety of academic and non-academic leadership theories.

“ **Transformational leaders develop and grow employees, foster collaboration, coach and teach, offer praise and timely feedback, and communicate clear values and beliefs primarily focusing on achieving the mission.** ”

“Servant leadership” has been my standard answer to this simple question over the years. Servant leadership is an academic theory that has become mainstream due to popular books by Robert Greenleaf, Ken Blanchard, Kenneth Jennings, and John Stahl-Wert. It is characterized by prioritizing followers’ growth and well-being, which, in theory, will lead to better overall engagement.¹ As a leader, I consistently have focused on my followers and have improved employee engagement successfully everywhere I have served. I credit the financial and operational success of the businesses I have led to an increasingly active and engaged workforce. Based on my non-academic understanding of leadership then, servant leadership seemed to fit.

More Than Servant Leadership

However, through my doctoral studies, I came to see that my standard answer was simply wrong. As I dug deeper into the extensive academic research in the leadership field—especially Northouse (2022), a robust review of 15 major theories and models of leadership—I realized that I might not be a servant leader at all.² My personal leadership style emphasizes people *and* organizational outcomes, whereas servant leadership mainly focuses on the former.

When I first read the academic definition of servant leadership, I realized something was missing. Eva et al. (2019) define servant leadership as an “other-oriented approach to leadership manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community.”³ Nowhere is there a mention of organizational results. The assumption is that, as employees’ needs are prioritized, the by-product will be improved performance.

¹ Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., van Dierendonck, D., & Liden, R. C., “Servant Leadership: A Systematic Review and Call for Future Research,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 30, no. 1, (2019): 111-132, doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004

² Northouse, P. G., *Leadership: Theory and Practice (Ninth Edition)*, (SAGE Publications, 2022).

³ Eva et al., “Servant Leadership,” 114.

Some studies have shown that servant leadership improves customer satisfaction, but Giolito et al. (2021) were the first to study whether it would improve financial results.⁴ Their study showed that servant leadership *does*, in fact, lead to enhanced profits, but it was surprising to learn that it took more than 50 years from Greenleaf's early writings on servant leadership for a team to prove that it works. Improving the financial performance of a business is an essential outcome that shareholders and investors want from business leaders. In my experience leading eight manufacturing businesses for three global companies, financial performance was essential for career preservation. Servant leadership fails to fully embrace financial and operational outcomes, so I found myself searching for a leadership style that addresses both the people *and* mission.

Transformational Leadership

If you talk with any of my employees, they likely will say that I exhibit many of the characteristics of servant leadership described in Northouse (2022). I take pride in being empathetic and attentive to their needs. However, while I care deeply for my followers, I do not always place their individual needs and interests as my top priority. It makes little sense to have happy employees in a business that has to shut down due to poor performance. Instead, I focus on the people *and* the mission. This dual effort is something I learned as a young nuclear submarine officer. A people *and* mission focus is essential for a successful submarine deployment and a high-performing organization. It was in Northouse (2022) that I first learned about transformational leadership, and the more I considered this leadership style, the more I realized it was a better reflection of my approaches over the years—and indeed, what I now believe is the best way to lead and operate a thriving business.

⁴Giolito, V. J., Liden, R. C., Dirk, v. D., & Cheung, G. W., "Servant Leadership Influencing Store-level Profit: The Mediating Effect of Employee Flourishing," *Journal of Business Ethics* 172, no. 3 (2021): 503-524, doi:10.1007/s10551-020-04509-1

Servant leaders focus on employees' well-being, whereas transformational leaders focus on employee and organizational growth.⁵ Transformational leaders organize and unify followers around pursuing well-communicated common goals.⁶ Transformational leaders do not ignore the well-being of people, but their focus is to help employees become the best versions of themselves so that the mission can be realized. Transformational leaders develop and grow employees, foster collaboration, coach and teach, offer praise and timely feedback, and communicate clear values and beliefs primarily focusing on achieving the mission.⁷

Researchers have pinpointed five core transformational leadership practices based on interviews with such leaders describing their best experiences.⁸ These practices include:

1. *modeling the way*. Transformational leaders lead from the front and act in a way that demonstrates the behaviors they expect from followers.
2. *inspiring a shared vision*. Transformational leaders develop and communicate a clear vision for the organization that explains where the company is headed and why.
3. *challenging the process*. The status quo is the enemy of transformational leaders, who always encourage employees to find a better way.

⁵ Andersen, J. A., "Servant Leadership and Transformational Leadership: From Comparisons to Farewells," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 39, no. 6 (2018): 762-774, doi:10.1108/LODJ-01-2018-0053

⁶ Caza, A., & Posner, B. Z., "Mixed Associations Between Grit and Transformational Leadership Behavior," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 15, no. 3 (2021): 6-20, doi:10.1002/jls.21781

⁷ Kouzes, T. K., & Posner, B. Z., "Influence of Managers' Mindset on Leadership Behavior," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 40, no. 8 (2019): 829-844, doi:10.1108/LODJ-03-2019-0142

⁸ Kouzes & Posner, 829-844.

4. *enabling others to act*. Transformational leaders delegate authority to followers to act in pursuit of the mission and work to remove barriers that hinder their performance.
5. *encouraging the heart*. Like servant leadership, transformational leadership requires leaders to encourage and help followers become their best versions in pursuit of the shared vision.⁹

While this model certainly includes an element of servant leadership, it prioritizes organizational results. Transformational leaders motivate and support followers to achieve their personal and collective best performances. In other words, they work to *get the best out of their team members* in pursuit of collective performance.

Let us briefly home in on *just one* of these practices and think about how enterprising young college interns and graduates can learn from and apply this in their early careers: They can help transform a company by being willing to *model the behaviors the company seeks*. Employers are looking for young people who can add value to their organizations and help them reach their goals. They are looking for active employees who can understand the mission, get engaged, learn quickly, and become net positive contributors to the team. They are looking for creators rather than consumers. Young college interns and graduates can stand out and make a name for themselves by modeling the behaviors that company leaders are looking for in employees. They can do this by paying careful attention to company messaging and being willing to step up. For example, company leaders are always looking for volunteers to attend specialized training, help with critical projects, or master a new system or process. The more a new employee can learn, know, and do for a company, the more valuable they become to company managers. In the process, they will gain valuable knowledge and skills to help them throughout their careers.

In my company, I have seen this work firsthand. New employees who can quickly add value to the company get more opportunities and responsibilities. For example, our chief operating officer (COO) originally

⁹Caza & Posner, 6-20.

started as a college intern in manufacturing engineering. She quickly learned the business and embraced the behaviors we were looking for in employees. She tackled the most challenging projects with grit and determination, earned the respect of the entire workforce, and was hired after graduation. As a full-time employee, she continued to add value and help the company meet its toughest objectives. She was the natural choice when we were looking for a quality manager, then an operations manager, and eventually a COO. In less than ten years, she advanced from college intern to top management by embracing transformational leadership practices and becoming the best version of herself.

Overall, transformational leadership is the most effective leadership style for engaging employees in pursuing organizational objectives. I have seen it work in the military, corporations, and startup businesses. I have learned that it is hard to beat a team where every team member is working to become his or her personal best in pursuit of an inspiring shared vision. College interns and graduates can stand out if they embrace transformational leadership early in their careers and work to become the type of employees their company leaders desperately need.



“

...it is hard to beat a team where every team member is working to become his or her personal best....

”

Reflecting on the October 3 Sydney & Cecile Smith Lecture on Virtue

by Lucy Maher

Thales College Senior Class Student

The following essay describes the October 2024 Smith Lecture on Virtue by Dr. Ryan Olson (Director, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia), which explored the connections between Jewish historian Josephus and virtue. Dr Olson’s lecture was titled, “Right where you left me’: Choosing Virtuous Traditions Again – Ancient Insights from Josephus.”

Lecture Summary

As a father of dedicated “Swifties,” Dr. Olson borrowed his lecture title from Taylor Swift’s “Right where you left me.” In that song, Swift remains right where her lover left her in case he returns. This title illustrates how people tend to leave behind traditions, and yet, those traditions remain available for future practice. Dr. Olson argued that we in the present stand in need of traditions, and they remain right where we left them.

Parents worry about their children leaving their religious tradition, and they struggle to form what he calls a “greenhouse” ecosystem, where the ideas and values they learn are reinforced through mutual support in churches, schools, and homes. Without consistent value reinforcement, Olson argued, many teenagers end up leaving their religious traditions.

Olsen cited research that suggests most young adults who leave religious traditions end up practicing “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (MTD), the tenets of which are: God exists, and He created and watches over everything; God wants people to be nice to each other; the purpose of life is to be happy; God is deistic and distant but is there to solve our problems; and good people go to Heaven. Young adults adopt this view because they see their parents practice MTD consciously or unconsciously.

“ Human nature being constant,
history is a tremendous teacher. ”



Above:
“Clasped Hands [verso], c. 1612”
by Giacomo Cavedone
Courtesy National Gallery of Art,
Washington [30 October 2024].

MTD provides a veneer of religious and traditional values but lacks the substance of traditional religion.

It is now almost a duty for a young person to question God and tradition, which has never been the case before. As Olsen put it, “Simply accepting the tradition that was handed down to one family is out of the question. We are now in a social world where we must choose our beliefs and ways of living.”

Olsen turns to Josephus because “Human nature being constant, history is a tremendous teacher.” Josephus is a valuable guide for those wishing to reclaim old traditions because he lived in a complex time and place, experiencing both Roman and Jewish culture and witnessing momentous political events and philosophical movements. Josephus wrote about his own education, which is a rarity in antiquity, and he also provided insight into the various Jewish sects at the time.

From his writings, we learn that Josephus was noted for his memory, quick comprehension, love of books, and knowledge of the law. He was so knowledgeable that at fourteen years old, leaders would come to him to gain understanding and advice regarding the law. He received both a traditional Jewish education in *Torah* and a Greek-style education in *paideia*, the formative transmission of Greek culture through musical and gymnastic education (as described by Plato). Josephus claimed that his education provided harmony, an important concept in philosophy. Aristotle calls this principle “concord,” which is like-mindedness. Conflict arises from people thinking they deserve more than others, or “rivalrous self-interest.” Education is meant to cultivate concord.

The value of concord became even more significant following the Jewish Revolt. Josephus sought a way to retain his Jewish identity while living in a Roman-dominated world. He did so by bringing his Jewish traditions, Greek learning (*paideia*), and Roman civic practices together. In his *Histories*, Josephus shows the Romans that the revolt was not the fault of Jewish elites. These elites had a Roman education and formed virtues like concord. The masses, uneducated in *paideia*, refused to be ruled. Josephus even compared Pharisees to the Stoics, further connecting him to Rome.

At the end of his lecture, Dr. Olsen listed four main lessons from the life of Josephus: the power of early formation, the relevance of status in education, the importance of holding to religion and tradition, and the value of wise leadership.

Concluding Evaluation

This lecture highlights what David Hicks calls the “necessity of dogma.”¹ Dogma refers to a principle pre-established as true. At the beginning of the lecture, Dr. Olsen pointed out how today we reject dogma. We feel the need to question and doubt everything, whereas in past cultures, many precepts were accepted as true. Hicks sees an issue with modern doubt because “youthful skepticism often amounts to little more than an arrogant prejudice against novel or difficult ideas. It can lead to cynicism – a sophisticated (now sophisticated) belief that all ideas are relative and that none is worthy of one’s wholehearted allegiance.”² In contrast, in Josephus’ life we see tradition as something constant, something to return to, not something to throw away.

¹ David Hicks, *Norms and Nobility: A Treatise on Education* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1999), 66.

² Hicks, vii.

“ **We cannot throw away tradition carelessly, and crucially, we cannot start with doubt. Instead, we find happiness by accepting dogma and then testing life against those received truths.** ”

This is not to say that Josephus blindly accepted the knowledge passed down to him. Instead, he spent years researching and apprenticing before joining the Pharisees' sect. Yet, while moving in elite Roman circles, Josephus held to the tradition, religion, values and wisdom of his ancestors. This represents an acceptance of dogma, both in a religious and intellectual sense. We cannot throw away tradition carelessly, and crucially, we cannot start with doubt. Instead, we find happiness by accepting dogma and then testing life against those received truths.



OTHER NEWS FROM THALES COLLEGE

Essay Contest

Thales College's 2024-25 Essay Contest's prompt focuses on how to best promote virtuous American individualism. The contest is open to high school students in grades 10–12 (one submission per student), and **various prizes will be awarded to the top submissions including cash prizes/scholarships and publication** in *The University Bookman* (online publication) and a future issue of *Theory & Ground*. For more information and essay submission, visit ThalesCollege.org/Essay.

Early Acceptance Scholarship

Early applicants to Thales College are eligible for a \$2,000, one-time scholarship. To qualify, simply submit an undergraduate application, complete an admission interview, and **accept offer of admission by December 15th**. This scholarship award is applicable to tuition at Thales College only and may be used in tandem with other Thales College scholarships. Apply online at [Thales College.org/Apply](https://ThalesCollege.org/Apply).

Curtal Sonnet: On Losing a Language

*by Mark Wagenaar, Ph.D.
Instructor of Liberal Arts
Thales College*

Of Frisian, the tongue of my ancestors—
of farmers & butchers, tongue of the North Sea—
three dialects survive: but how many have gone

the way of echoes, of my *pake* (grandfather),
who in the Resistance remembers the hungry
unearthing tulip bulbs: *they cooked up like onions.*

I dream a ghost ship to sail the nameless years,
to trawl for the languages of buried cities,
the vowels of vanished people: seine forgotten

seas, lost rivers.

Cast heaven.

Author's note:

I finished this poem in October 2024 and chose the “Curtal Sonnet” form. My son Hopkins’ namesake, Gerard Manley Hopkins, created this form (it’s essentially a ¾ sonnet, with an ABC ABC ABC rhyme scheme, with AC rhymes in the last broken line), so it shows the influence of one of the great poets—one of many we read and study at Thales College—who, in turn, was responding to a long poetic tradition.