



# HUMANITIES

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES SPRING 2019

## BRIGHAM YOUNG ACADEMY.

Provo City, Utah, 12/3 1886

### THE FOLLOWING SPECIFICATIONS

Represent the efficiency of Levi Benson  
a student of the Acad. Department for 3  
Term, 10 Academic Year, according to the Record for said  
term. The maximum mark is 10.

SPECIFICATIONS.	EFFICIENCY.	SPECIFICATIONS.	EFFICIENCY.
Punctuality .....	<u>9 1/2</u>	Grammar <u>Rhet</u>	<u>7</u>
Order .....	<u>10</u>	Composition .....	<u>7</u>
Theology .....	<u>8 1/2</u>	Arithmetic .....	<u>7</u>
Reading .....		Geography .....	
Orthography .....		Penmanship .....	<u>8</u>
<u>Algebra</u>	<u>7 1/2</u>	<u>Agreement</u>	<u>6 1/2</u>
<u>Bookkeeping</u>	<u>7 1/2</u>		
<u>Geometry</u>	<u>7 1/2</u>		
<u>Physics</u>	<u>6 1/2</u>		
<u>Govt &amp; History</u>	<u>7</u>		
No. of days present <u>45</u>		After-hour excuses <u>1</u>	
Party permissions .....		Reprimands .....	

KARL G. MAESER, Principal.

J. E. Palmage Secretary of Faculty.

# With What Measure

By Dean J. Scott Miller



WE MUST all judge our way through life. One of the earmarks of critical thinking, an outcome described or implied in most syllabi in the College, is learning how to make fitting evaluations. In fact, one's quality of life often is directly linked to the ability to exercise discriminating judgment. This issue of *Humanities* addresses the notion of judgment, specifically the idea and role of grades in the academy but, more generally, how the human need to compare and draw distinctions can both serve and abuse us.

Alfie Kohn recently proposed a thought experiment about how we view grading. What, he asks, would be your reaction if you were to read that, against expectations, all students in a given high school course passed the class?<sup>1</sup> His conclusion: most people would respond with anything but a celebration of student and teacher achievement since built into our approach to judgment is an instinct to compare. That instinct, relative rather than absolute, would lead us to conclude that standards were too low, rather than that the teacher and students had diligently worked together so that all achieved the course learning outcomes. Often our evaluations are less about judging and more about ranking, which is a very different type of measurement.

The hierarchical nature of most human societies suggests we are naturally inclined to rank ourselves and others, so placement tests play a central role in how power is distributed in society. For millennia, Chinese imperial examinations determined the governing class and offered a means of rising in the world. The influence of that system still exists across Asia, for good and ill. In Japan and India some teenagers, whose families desire their success in entering the most exclusive universities, fail their exams and, with hopes for elevating family status dashed, commit suicide. This annual tragedy underscores the opportunities and dangers of assessment systems.

Our evaluations often come in the form of binaries: we focus on the difference between ourselves and someone else; we see ourselves as either succeeding or failing; we consider others as either friends or enemies. Polarity prevails as well in our metaphysics, where we frame existence in terms of light and darkness, good and evil, virtue and vice. Even where more graduated distinctions may appear, such as the A-through-E of the classroom, a binary tension persists in the background: do we pass, or do we fail? The final exam in the school of mortality is often framed in a correspondingly binary manner: heaven, or hell?

But life will teach us that not all choices are between good and evil, nor are most simple. Many great thinkers, writers, and artists have explored the theme of agency in a complex world: Goethe's *Faust*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Cao's *Dream of Red Mansions* all contain

characters who find redemption from binary thinking through their own failures and the intervention of others. Our own experience of life may regularly involve examples of personal wars won after learning from many battles lost. This kind of victory—where we transcend our failures through reflection, inspiration, adaptation, and renewed attempts—is at the heart of education in the academy.

In medieval European universities students took few, if any, written exams. Most, in fact, were orally administered in public (and in Latin), both by professors and alumni visitors! By its very nature, the oral examination was an interaction rather than a binary right-or-wrong test, and allowed for a great deal of exam flexibility and creative response. Evaluations were as much learning experiences as final reckonings. Over time, as enrollments swelled and the Industrial Revolution wrought its cultural changes, written exams were found to be more efficient at producing larger numbers of graduates. Grading became less a rite of passage and more a systematized process, focused on ranking student

performance to filter out those unfit for further study. Thus, today's GPA-centric universe derives from the industrialization of education. From the time we enter middle school, our cumulative grade profile becomes a metric upon which so much depends but that, in the broader scheme of life, only vaguely correlates with things that really matter. We judge, and are judged, by stylized, limited criteria.

For most students coming to college, self-criticism via comparison constitutes a formative part of their education, especially during the early years. BYU is a big pond, and even the largest fish in high school will feel

like minnows at times at this unique and highly talented university. Add to that a loving but rigorous faculty who grade more strictly than high school teachers, and we find a recipe for mass anxiety and insecurity. Most students, however, make it through somehow with egos intact because they learn to see their strengths and weaknesses more clearly while discovering new passions and interests. They find joy in discovery and self-mastery that is the core of higher-level learning.

How does this miracle of learning and transcendence happen? It is largely a factor of wise and loving judgment delivered by teachers who are more interested in measuring as a means to promote growth than ranking as a means to filter or condemn. In this regard, a well-evaluated course can, indeed, mirror the ultimate calculus of mortality under divine tutelage: less a winnowing of masses than a waking to our own true selves. As we judge our way through life, may we be both charitable and wise in how and why we measure!

Life will teach us that  
not all choices are  
between good and evil,  
nor are most simple.

1. Alfie Kohn, "Why Can't Everyone Get A's?" *New York Times*, June 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/15/opinion/sunday/schools-testing-ranking.html>.





## HUMANITIES | SPRING 2019



### 15 Dignity in the Twenty-First Century or How to Overcome Your Inner Seventh Grader

We can learn a lot about how to treat one another by reflecting on Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and our own most embarrassing seventh-grade blunders.

By Trent Hickman



### 18 A Golden Rule for Grading

Grades are a sensitive subject for more than just students.

By Joe Parry

#### 2 | RESPONSE

Have something to add to the conversation? Send us your feedback!—Timeline—Crossword Solution

#### 4 | PERSPECTIVE

Jorge Cocco Santángelo's *Forty Days* and *Forty Nights*

#### 6 | ANTHOLOGY

Judge—No Such Thing as a Bad Question? Assistant Professor Matt Baker Receives Dissertation Award—BYU Writing Center Tutors Present at the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association Conference—A Bridge Over the Abyss—Introducing the Essay Genome Project

#### 11 | HUMANITIES REVIEW

What have we been up to lately? Don't miss these faculty and student highlights.

#### 22 | RETROSPECTIVES

Alumni Update: In Your Own Words—Faculty Farewells: Mariolina Johnson and Dee Gardner

#### 24 | VOX HUMANA

Judging Assumptions

#### 25 | CROSSROADS

Prime Choice Select

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## Doubting the Doubters

I WAS A LITTLE DISMAYED that a whole issue of the *Humanities* publication was turned over to “doubt.” Saying doubt is good and acceptable doesn’t end up going in the right direction, in my opinion. The Savior said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” (John 8:32) not, “Ye shall doubt and doubt will lead you to the truth.” It never does. In fact, I worry where many of these doubters will be a decade or so down the road, and how about their students who cling to every word they say? We have a serious responsibility in teaching the youth.

My feeling has been that we should always be searching for the truth, and hopefully making progress towards it, in our thinking and in our personal living. I have always found that with enough time and also thorough investigation, doubtful issues can be solved, or at least we can realize that they won’t be solved in this life. But I’ve sufficient personal experiences with the Spirit to know that whatever doubts I might have about something should not be life-consuming. I don’t work from doubt, and never will.

—ROYAL SKOUSEN,  
PROFESSOR OF LINGUISTICS

quilt pattern that evolves from dark hues of crimson and scarlet to purified shades of pink and white is a poignant depiction of “opposition in all things” that refines our capacity to discern and choose light in the darkness (2 Nephi 2:10). Anderson’s image articulated the bindings I feel to my quilting foremothers whose faith in Christ empowered them to wrap their loved ones with comfort in sickness, starvation, poverty, disease, and death. Their thousands of persistent handiworks are tangible symbols of God’s promise that “all things wherewith you have been afflicted shall work together for your good” (D&C 98:3). Such consecrated living and giving depicted in Paige’s work reassure me that “God love[s] His children,” even when “I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

—EMILY WHITE, BA HUMANITIES ’03  
MA TESOL ’05

I WOULD like to suggest including my favorite painting of the Savior, *Prince of Peace* by Akiane Kramariki, in hopes this beautiful rendition will speak to others as much as it has spoken to me, [akiane.com/product/prince-of-peace/](http://akiane.com/product/prince-of-peace/).

—JOSEFINA GARECA HEALY,  
BA TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION  
WITH A MINOR IN PSYCHOLOGY ’08

## What literature or art helps you build your faith?



WHEN I spotted Paige Anderson’s abstract painting titled *In All Things* at a local art sale, I was immediately captivated. Paige graciously shared her visual insights

regarding small repetitive patterns of worship that are central to the gradual, vertical process of change through Christ, who can strengthen us in all things (Alma 26:12). Her powerful geometric illustration of a

A BOOK that I would recommend for light reading is *Illusions, the Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah* by Richard Bach, who also wrote *Jonathon Livingston Seagull*, though I like *Illusions* better. Some of my favorite quotes from *Illusions* include the following.

“What the caterpillar calls the end, the Creator calls a butterfly.”

“Here’s a test to see if your mission on earth is finished. If you are alive, it isn’t.”

“The original sin is to limit the IS (God). Don’t.”

“The best way to avoid responsibilities is to say, ‘I have responsibilities.’”

—CHARLES CRESAP, BS PSYCHOLOGY ’68



## READER RESPONSE TO HUMANITIES MAGAZINE

Want more thought-provoking discussion with fellow BYU Humanities alums? Connect with us between issues of *Humanities* on social media!



The views and opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the faculty, administration, or staff of the BYU College of Humanities. Submissions may be edited for length, grammar, appropriateness, and clarity.



Humanities Center director Matt Wickman came prepared on a cold January workday in the JFSB when the heat was out temporarily.

## WINTER SEMESTER 2019

The 2019 English Symposium hosted international relations and Russian literature BYU alumna and new UVU president Astrid Tuminez to deliver the keynote address. Visit [bit.ly/AstridTuminez](http://bit.ly/AstridTuminez).

BYU ranked No. 1 for the number of bachelor’s

degrees granted in Arabic, Portuguese, and Russian, and in the top 10 for linguistics and comparative studies. See [bit.ly/language\\_degrees](http://bit.ly/language_degrees).

Faculty were invited to attend Question. Persuade. Refer. (QPR) training to help those who might be considering suicide. See pages 8–9 or [qprinstitute.com](http://qprinstitute.com).

**MARCH** Valerie Hegstrom, professor of Spanish & Portuguese and director of Global Women’s Studies, delivered the annual P.A. Christensen lecture. See page 13 or [bit.ly/Hegstrom2019](http://bit.ly/Hegstrom2019).

The BYU Model UN team representing Italy received the “Outstanding Delegation” highest award.

**APRIL** The College hosted the annual Language Choirs Concert, at which the French, German, Russian, Welsh, and Scandinavian choirs, along with Mariachi Los Pumas performed, [bit.ly/humchoirs](http://bit.ly/humchoirs).

**APRIL 26** Although grateful to celebrate with our newest alumni

and their families at this convocation, in alignment with the university commencement schedule we bid a bittersweet farewell to future August convocations, [bit.ly/Ntrotzdem](http://bit.ly/Ntrotzdem).

**FEBRUARY** John Rosenberg, Associate Academic Vice President for Undergraduate Studies and professor of Spanish & Portuguese,

hosted former Spanish President José María Aznar to discuss the effects of Brexit on the rest of the world, [bit.ly/Europe\\_crossroads/](http://bit.ly/Europe_crossroads/).



## The Power of Rereading

ONE TEXT I teach in my Modern Chinese Literature in Chinese course each fall is a short story by Lu Xun (1881–1936), the pioneer writer of modern vernacular fiction. Entitled “Kong Yiji,” the story focuses on the life of a traditional intellectual, the eponymous Kong, as in Kong Fuzi (Confucius), who struggled to survive in an era of modernization and change in China. Kong failed to pass any of the civil service examinations and thus failed to qualify for even the lowest government post or a private teaching position. A good calligrapher, Kong is reduced to work copying books and documents for wealthy gentry families. Unfortunately Kong is lazy, fails to complete his work assignments, and has a penchant for wandering off with the books, brushes, ink, and paper that his employers have provided to him to complete his various jobs. When found, Kong is often beaten, and as the story closes, after a particularly severe thrashing, we find him unable to use his legs and forced to scoot along the ground on a reed mat.

I first read Lu Xun’s story in a second-year Chinese language class at the University of California at Berkeley. As a newly returned missionary and not knowing what I wanted to study, much less do for the rest of my life, I knew I wanted to retain but also develop my language skills. So, I opted to enroll in a class that would help me build on my Chinese reading and writing ability. As the school year ended, our teacher informed us that we would have a chance to read “Kong Yiji.” I remember how exciting it was to read something real—not a simplified, adapted, or specially written text for a second-language learner, but something written by and for Chinese people. In fairness, the task was not easy, and I’m not sure how much I really understood after that first reading. But I remember how linguistically “grown up” I felt as I worked through the text. I recall how satisfying it was to realize I could read well enough to make some sense of the story and to feel that, perhaps, I might actually one day learn to read Chinese.

Back then, I sensed the plight of the protagonist, a man who had not excelled in the traditional educational system and fared poorly in a world into which he did not fit, lacking the credentials of a scholar or the strength, stamina, and work ethic of a peasant. A person of only minimal significance, he became the butt of jokes and a source of entertainment for his fellow villagers. Only the young narrator, a surrogate for the author himself, seemed to show any interest or concern. The author described with sensitivity and empathy Kong Yiji’s final disabled state, crawling around the village no

longer able to walk due to his being severely beaten for stealing from a local gentryman who, unlike Kong, had passed two of the three major civil service examinations and earned a place of respect in his community. As the story concludes, Kong crawls out of the wine shop in which the story is set one last time, never to be seen again. Lu never tells us that Kong has died; instead, he allows the reader to draw her own conclusions.

Having taught this work each fall for the past fifteen years, and again in translation during winter semesters from time to time, I now recognize the consummate skill with which Lu crafted this story in a way that allows us to see Kong’s flaws and recognize how out of place he is in a China on the eve of modernization, yet also to view the protagonist with compassion and a measure of dignity rather than disgust or derision. Kong may be a victim of his own actions, but he is also a victim of circumstances beyond his control. The ability to find compassion for others even while recognizing their culpability for their actions is a lesson that I have gained from reading and rereading—with my students—this masterwork of Chinese fiction.

The power of rereading is perhaps no better exemplified than in the most important sort of reading we do: studying scriptural texts. Since completing the Book of Mormon for the first time as a newly called missionary in the Missionary Training Center, I have read through this text so central to our faith more times than I can count. Yet with each rereading, I learn something new—something timely, critical at the point where I am in my life. This is not because the text is somehow different, but because I am different—I have changed and am at a new point in my life where I need wisdom and inspiration suited to my present circumstances. The power of the Book of Mormon and the other standard works is that they offer a wealth of spiritual truths and timely teachings tailored for each of us as readers where we are in the journey of life.

—STEVE RIEP, HUMANITIES CENTER FACULTY  
FELLOW AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ASIAN &  
NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES

*This article was first published April 8, 2019,  
on the BYU Humanities Center blog, abridged,  
and reprinted here with permission, [humanitiescenter.byu.edu/the-power-of-re-reading/](http://humanitiescenter.byu.edu/the-power-of-re-reading/).*

### CROSSWORD SOLUTION

**DOWN:** 1. Mite 2. Oral 3. Dose 4. Enter 5. Lye 6. Afro 7. Bear 8. Lacks 9. Ere 10. Court 11. Order 12. Weedy 15. Rio 20. Will 21. Bob 23. Bash 25. Les 27. Hawk 28. Ebon 29. Eyre 31. Rule 33. Brie 35. Step 37. KOS 38. Et tu 40. Exam 41. Deco 42. Orem 45. Spas 47. Two 50. Ann 52. Med 54. Power 55. Grade 56. Assay 58. Mercy 60. Quilt 62. Ohm 64. Vore 65. Ewes 67. Stay 68. Erin 69. Rene 71. Gab 72. Lps

**ACROSS:** 1. Model 6. Able 10. Cow 13. Irony 14. Fear 15. Fore 16. Taste 17. Race 18. Rude 19. E. Lee 20. Work 21. Bored 22. RBI 24. Sio 26. Try 27. Hee 30. Air 32. Ebb 34. Abyss 36. Ukas 39. Redo 43. Worth 44. Lot 45. Sixer 46. Knee 47. Test 48. Peace 49. Paw 51. Uma 53. Mom 54. PGA 57. Nom 59. Esq. 61. Orson 63. Eyed 66. User 70. Wash 71. Grow 72. Litre 73. Edam 74. Acre 75. Plain 76. Rey 77. Byes 78. Styne

The ability to find compassion for others even while recognizing their culpability for their actions is a lesson that I have gained from reading and rereading.



JORGE COCCO SANTÁNGELO (B.1936), *FORTY NIGHTS*, OIL ON CANVAS, 2018. BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN ZION GALLERY, 2018.

## Jorge Cocco Santángelo's *Forty Days* and *Forty Nights*

ARGENTINE ARTIST Jorge Cocco Santángelo began painting sacred events with several features of the postcubist art movement in the hopes that “those who see the paintings will gain a stronger testimony that these things happened, that the Lord lives, that He is a powerful and miraculous being, and that He is our Savior.”<sup>1</sup> This new style, which he affectionately dubbed “sacro cubism,” allows Cocco to combine his favorite medium with religion, as shown in his two paintings of Christ’s fasting for forty days and forty nights before beginning His ministry. We sat down with art historians Martha Peacock and Elliott Wise for an informal conversation about the College’s most recent art acquisitions.

**MP:** [Cocco’s] really is a style that has been influenced not only by cubism but also a kind of cubo-futurism, simplification into planar geometric forms that give you the basic structure of a human form—or, in this case, [he gives us] a landscape or a kind of wilderness here and at the same time a kind of almost churchlike, holy setting. He offers us the sort of bare essentials to indicate those things, not a lot of detail, which is what cubism is all about.

There’s something really deeply spiritual about the way that Cocco uses those simplified forms to create a narrative. In *Forty Nights* Christ appears almost overcome by His human nature and has to sort of throw off that

human self, the struggle that [fasting] was for Him. See how He’s looking down and everything is darker? There’s a kind of “capping” of the heavens. For example, there’s this cloud cover that blocks His access. And then you have these shards of paint almost piercing Him, as if that’s part of the suffering and the pain and the struggle that He’s going through—the clenched fist, the depravation of the body.

**EW:** I have a hard time not being reminded of the cross in *Forty Nights* with the way that Jesus’s hand is grasping the edge of this line. You can see a beginning of a bar there. That’s precisely the kind of thing a devotional image often does: one scene presents a shadow of another scene that prefigures or looks ahead.

I think that the way Cocco manipulates cubist language really does something quite powerful because it prompts a very analytic, meditative kind of experience. When you break everything down into these shapes, the work prompts you to meditate, which is exactly what He is doing in these images. A lot of times in our religion, we read scripture stories and see traditional illustrations of scenes, and that certainly has always been a function of ours—to illustrate. But if we think that’s all an image can do—illustrate something—we miss the enormous potential of art to interpret or suggest or prompt spiritual, meditative kinds of experience.





JORGE COCCO SANTÁNGELO (B.1936), *FORTY DAYS*, OIL ON CANVAS, 2018. BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY DAVID M. KENNEDY CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, 2018.

You look at this and you immediately know there's a certain depth here that you're supposed to figure out.

**MP:** That is the way He taught. The parable, too, is not just a straightforward story but is meant to force you to think more deeply about meaning and symbols. And that enriches our experience.

**EW:** Another way cubist abstraction works is that it enables you to focus on different parts of the composition that you wouldn't otherwise. For instance, so much of the composition is straight, geometric lines that contrast and draw your eye to the very few circular shapes: the clouds, the moon. Ultimately, you keep being drawn back to the most circular part, which is Christ Himself.

**MP:** Cocco almost has made parentheses of the two figures of Christ. When viewed side by side, He is the end point of either image. I really think these two paintings must have been intended to be read as a narrative from struggle to divine revelation. They really should be seen as a continuation in a horizontal fashion, I think. From *Forty Nights*, then you move on to the daytime canvas, and the heavens open up. This wonderful light comes filtering down in wider columns that illuminate Him in a position of direct connection with God. What He was really after in terms of the fast has now taken place. He is reaping the inspiration of Heavenly Father. The two paintings really should be seen in a narrative fashion, in terms of the human struggle and the divine potential of Christ.

**EW:** That's right. Modern art is almost always—at least in this movement of it—about some kind of spiritual, transcendental kind of experience.

*Forty Days* and *Forty Nights* were recently acquired by the College of Humanities, David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Education in Zion Gallery (EIZ), and Harold B. Lee Library and can be viewed in the EIZ and Kennedy Center, respectively, Monday through Friday.

*Martha Moffitt Peacock is a professor in the Department of Comparative Arts & Letters who specializes in the study of baroque art of the seventeenth century in Europe with particular interest in art from the Dutch Republic.*

*Elliott Wise is an assistant professor in the Department of Comparative Arts & Letters who specializes in the study of late medieval and Renaissance art in Europe, particularly fifteenth-century northern Europe.*

*This interview was conducted by Erin Jackson at the Education in Zion Gallery May 24, 2019, and abridged with permission.*

1. "Jorge Cocco Santángelo: Sacred Events from the Life of Christ," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018, [bit.ly/Cocco40](http://bit.ly/Cocco40).

# judge [Dʒʌdʒ/]

**verb.** To form an opinion or conclusion about (a person or thing), esp. following careful consideration or deliberation; to assess, evaluate, or appraise<sup>1</sup>

JESUS SAID, “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”<sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith adds the injunction to judge *righteous* judgment.<sup>3</sup> The Greek word for “righteousness” is *dikaiosyne*, which also means “justice,” so the point is that we’re supposed to judge in ways that bring about justice.

Both Jesus and Paul argue that rigid application of the law can, on occasion, thwart justice rather than serve it. In this they follow the Hebrew prophets, who routinely blast religious observances, no matter how meticulous, that do not serve justice. Here is Amos:

I hate, I despise your festivals,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals  
I will not look upon.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.<sup>4</sup>

Amos is not saying that religious observance is pointless—only when justice and righteousness do not accompany it. Justice and righteousness are matters more of the heart than of external obedience: witness Hosea’s “I will have steadfast love and not sacrifice”<sup>5</sup> or Jeremiah’s “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”<sup>6</sup>

Are we equipped to judge whether the law is in someone’s heart? Sure, sometimes people’s goodness shines through so abundantly as to leave no question, but the easy cases may not be much help in the hard ones. Jesus’s call to refrain from judgment may even suggest that the easy cases are hindrances to getting the harder ones right. Because *dikaiosyne* means both “righteousness” and “justice,” it simultaneously refers to the character of both individuals and the societies they inhabit. This justice is both personal and social. Can these forms of justice be at odds? The great philosopher Immanuel Kant thought not: his notion of the categorical imperative holds that we should act such that the principles behind our actions, if rendered universal, would not destroy our society. More recently, John Rawls has envisioned a similar basis for moral action: we should make choices as if from behind a veil of ignorance that obscures our own particular forms of social advantage or disadvantage.

But what if the relationship between our own personal choices and social justice is harder to sort out than either Kant’s or Rawls’s highly rationalistic methods might lead us to believe? What if we, as humans, lack the capacity to imagine the universal implications of our actions in the ways that these philosophers ask us to do? What if, worse yet, the implications of our actions are only rarely universal, tending almost exclusively to be particular or situational? What if the action that is right for one person in one circumstance might be wrong for another person, even when faced with what appears to be a similar dilemma?

Perhaps our best hope of judging righteous judgment lies in humility and restraint.

—JASON KERR, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

1. OED, “judge,” v. 1.1.a., accessed July 25, 2019, <https://oed.com/view/Entry/101888>.

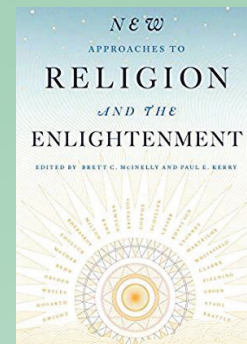
2. Matthew 7:1–2, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.

3. Matthew 7:1–2, Joseph Smith Translation Appendix, emphasis added.

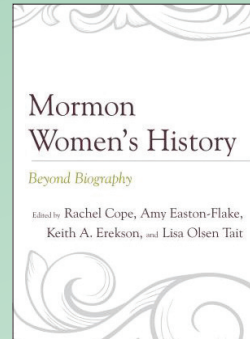
4. Amos 5:21–24, NRSV.

5. Hosea 6:6, NRSV, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 12:7.

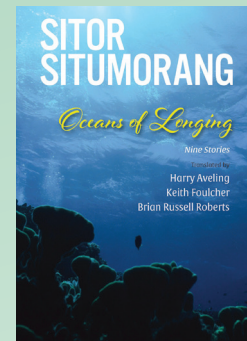
6. Jeremiah 31:33, NRSV.



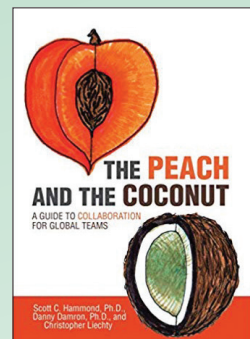
Brett McInelly



Julie Allen and Heather Belnap



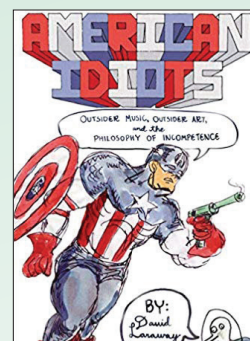
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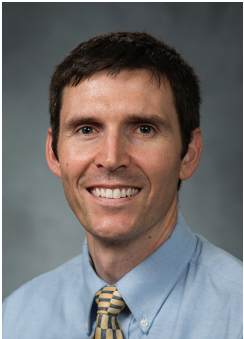
Brandie Siegfried



David Laraway



## No Such Thing as a Bad Question? Assistant Professor Matt Baker Receives Dissertation Award



MATTHEW J. BAKER, assistant professor of editing and publishing in the Department of Linguistics, was recently awarded the “Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award on Business Communication” by the Association for Business Communication (ABC). Baker’s dissertation focused on the efficacy of “social how-to questions” that are posted to community-based “Social Question and Answer” (SQA) websites. An international, interdisciplinary organization

“committed to advancing business communication research, education, and practice,” the ABC awards one researcher every year for having contributed significantly to “scholarship, research, and/or pedagogy of business communication.” According to the organization, this contribution should also demonstrate “originality of thought and careful investigation.”<sup>1</sup>

Baker, who received the award at the association’s fall 2018 conference in Miami, was nominated by his dissertation advisor, Jo Mackiewicz of Iowa State University. Open to all researchers in the field who have recently completed their dissertations, the award is international in scope and extremely competitive. In addition to a one-year membership in the ABC, each year’s winning researcher receives a plaque and a monetary award at the association’s annual conference.

“I was grateful that the dissertation was recognized,” Baker said. “As a result, I’ve been able to make some great connections with scholars across the country, and I hope the recognition helps disseminate my findings so people can write questions more effectively to get the answers they need.”

—ELIZABETH BARTON, BA ENGLISH AND FRENCH STUDIES ’18

1. <https://www.businesscommunication.org/page/awards>.

## BYU Writing Center Tutors Present at the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association Conference



IN THE COLLEGE of Humanities, experiential learning doesn’t get much more hands-on than the work performed at the Research & Writing Center. In addition to conducting 15,000+ tutoring sessions per year with writers from across campus (800+ courses served), writing consultants are involved with other valuable forms of experiential learning.

Each semester, writing consultants are mentored on projects that expand their learning experience and align with their personal and professional goals. Consultants interested in technical writing and editing develop and revise handouts. Those seeking teaching experience plan, prepare, and conduct workshops or develop instructional videos. Writing and research consultants collaborate on projects such as source evaluation tools for the Harold B. Lee Library Instruction Service (for example, [realfakenews.byu.edu](http://realfakenews.byu.edu)) and citation training resources. Consultants moving forward into academia participate in conducting research or present at academic writing center conferences, such as the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association Conference, pictured here. The experiential learning possibilities are vast and help consultants gain and develop knowledge and abilities that serve them well beyond their time on staff in the Research & Writing Center.

—LISA BELL, ASSOCIATE COORDINATOR, BYU WRITING CENTER

# A BRIDGE OVER THE ABYSS



**T**WO OF MY TEENAGE SON'S friends committed suicide this winter. Their situations were different, their challenges particular to their lives, but their deaths both came as a profound shock to my son and me. I found myself weeping for days, mourning the loss of the light that these young men took with them out of the world, aching for the pain of their friends and family, wondering what could have led them to the point that ending their lives seemed like their only option.

Since I'm a scholar of literature, I turned to stories to try to make sense of these tragedies. In his 1980 sci-fi novel, *Se dagens lys* (*See the Light of Day*), the Danish author Svend Aage Madsen describes a society that institutes a nationwide system of rotation—in which people wake up every day in a new home, with a new family situation and a new job—as a means of combatting a global suicide epidemic. An older woman named Varinka, who lived through that era and helped shape the rotation system, describes how the crisis developed:

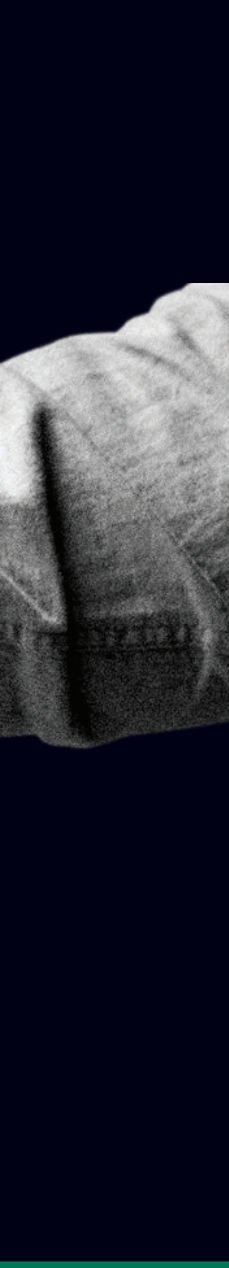
It started very quietly. A young man jumped from the tower of City Hall. No one paid that much attention, that sort of thing happened now and then. A young couple was found dead in the forest, in a tight embrace. An older woman set herself on fire, apparently intentionally. People began talking about it. It was still just a faint rise in comparison to the things people had become accustomed to. Somewhat later, a book became popular, in which the young protagonists killed themselves, not because of unhappy love—that was nothing new—but because of boredom or powerlessness. Several couples imitated the book and were found with it in their arms. “We have finally found a purpose: death,” one of the couples wrote. Someone made a film that magnified the situation even more. The tendency toward suicide spread. It wasn't just in this country. New reports came in every day, especially from large cities, but also from the countryside. It became—I hate to use the expression, but it is the most fitting term—fantastically fashionable. Serious newspapers were shocked, distanced themselves from it, analyzed it, and sought its cause. But it didn't change anything. Popular rags promoted suicide, worshipped it almost, and it became even more popular. Every day, the papers were full of famous, touching, or clever goodbye

## ABOUT QPR TRAINING

“QPR rests on the belief that if we, sensitive to the pain of the people around us, dare to ask whether they are thinking of suicide, persuade them to stay alive just a little longer, and refer them to people who can help, more people will survive existential heart attacks.”

Find resources and trainings on QPR so you may be prepared to help. Visit [qprinstitute.com](http://qprinstitute.com).





notes. Articles about the most inventive, beautiful, or grotesque methods.<sup>1</sup>

Looking back years later, Varinka tries to make sense of the collapse of her society. She concludes,

It was as if humanity had reached a natural ending. The final goal of development, it was called. There had been wars and periods of violence, there had just been a wave of violence and criminality, naturally as a consequence of anger, envy, and a sense of injustice. But even those things were understandable and even acceptable, in comparison with . . . the mental plague. It was so incapacitating and at the same time so predictable, because it was the logical consequence of the meaninglessness.<sup>2</sup>

That last line really struck me, that hopelessness is the logical consequence of meaninglessness. I look around at our society's obsession with money, the love of money, if you will, that seems to inform the priorities of our political leaders and to motivate people in their choice of studies, their professions, their voting, their life choices, and so on, and I see the same kind of creeping meaninglessness that Varinka describes.

Although the author couldn't remember, when I asked him a few years ago, if this was the case, I see a connection between the social rotation system described in Madsen's novel and the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's essay "The Rotation of Crops," which appears in his two-volume thought-exercise *Either/Or* (1843). In this essay, the narrator 'A,' an aesthete, describes boredom as the root of all evil, advocating that people, like farmers, rotate their interests and relationships in order to remain engaged and productive. He explains, "Boredom rests upon the nothing that interlaces existence; its dizziness is infinite, like that which comes from looking into a bottomless abyss."<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of an aesthete, simply ensuring that you are continually distracted from the abyss is enough to counter the paralyzing power of meaninglessness. However, as Elef and Maya, the protagonists of Madsen's novel, discover, the continual rotation of life situations, while ensuring that everyone gets an equal share of life's ups and downs and guaranteeing the stimulation of new experiences each day, is nevertheless incapable of meeting people's deeper emotional needs. It is in connecting with each other, in learning each other's stories, that Maya and Elef find a bridge over the abyss, a deep meaningfulness to motivate their rebellion against society.

Similarly, Kierkegaard only introduces the aesthete 'A's' perspective in order to counter it, first with the ethical

perspective of Judge Wilhelm, in the second volume of *Either/Or*, who advocates for doing hard things because they are our duty, and ultimately, over the course of his authorship, with the idea that we must leap into the abyss, trusting joyfully in the "absurd" belief that God's promises will be fulfilled, even (or especially) when their fulfillment seems impossible, as in the case of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

These thoughts remained with me when I attended a workshop designed to promote awareness of a public health initiative called QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.), a mental health equivalent to CPR. Most people who survive physical heart attacks do so because of widespread public knowledge of CPR; the QPR movement wants to create similar conditions for people suffering from thoughts of self-harm so that others know how to intervene and offer help. The workshop facilitator explained that no one commits suicide because they want to die, they just want a release from pain. QPR rests on the belief that if we, sensitive to the pain of the people around us, dare to ask whether they are thinking of suicide, persuade them to stay alive just a little longer, and refer them to people who can help, more people will survive existential heart attacks.

The humanities got their name from their ability to expose and illustrate the human condition, to share the stories of our common humanity and individual joys and pain, to illuminate the meaningfulness of our lives. I believe that meaning is to be found in those stories, in the connections between us. It may seem absurd that art and music and film and poems and essays and novels and dance can weigh more in the calculus of human happiness than money and power, but I believe it joyfully all the same.

*Julie Allen is a professor in the Department of Comparative Arts & Letters and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow. This article was first published on the BYU Humanities Center blog and reprinted with permission, <http://humanitiescenter.byu.edu/a-bridge-over-the-abyss/>.*

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1. Svend Aage Madsen, *Se dagens lys*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1988), 82. My translation.

2. Madsen, *Se dagens lys*, 82.

3. Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, *Enten/Eller*, 4th ed. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1988), 1: 291.

The Humanities Center promotes innovative scholarship and teaching in the language, literature, thought, culture, and history of the human conversation. For more information, visit [humanitiescenter.byu.edu](http://humanitiescenter.byu.edu).

## Introducing the Essay Genome Project

ENGLISH PROFESSOR PATRICK MADDEN'S Essay Genome Project uses computer-aided stylistic analysis to discover stylistic, tonal, and formal similarities and influences among essays across the past four centuries and around the globe.

Said Madden, "We intend to reconfigure our understanding to see 'essay DNA' as it propagates across the globe and through the decades."

The site analyzes the data algorithmically (using mathematical models for representing textual features) to create visual representations (including dendrograms, network graphs, and principal component analyses).

The site also allows writers to upload their own essays to find stylistic affinities. The results produce user-friendly recommendations for readers based not only on similar subjects, time periods, or geographical regions, but on stylistic and formal traits.

Find your style affinity at [egp.byu.edu](http://egp.byu.edu).

## Worlds Awaiting

WANT MORE book recommendations and reviews? Tune into [byuradio.org](http://byuradio.org), where there are always more "Worlds Awaiting."



Want to have an opportunity to receive a critique on your writing? If you're in the Intermountain area, check out these local writing conferences.

**Life, the Universe, & Everything (LTUE):** The Marion K. "Doc" Smith Symposium on Science Fiction and Fantasy originated at BYU and has grown and changed a lot over the last 30 years. LTUE is a three-day academic symposium on all aspects of science fiction and fantasy. Comprising panels, presentations, and papers on writing, art, literature, film, gaming, and other facets of speculative fiction, LTUE is . . . a gathering place for fans of our creative and innovative world to hang out and share their love of all things amazing, obscure, and even not-quite-real, [ltue.net](http://ltue.net).

**Writing and Illustrating for Young Readers** aims to provide writers and illustrators opportunities to learn their craft, receive good critique, and have a supportive community so they can achieve their creative goals and find success. To learn more about this five-day workshop, including opportunities to consult with editors and agents, visit [wifyr.com](http://wifyr.com) or email [carolthewriter@yahoo.com](mailto:carolthewriter@yahoo.com).

Hosted by BYU Conferences & Workshops, the semiannual two-day **BYU Symposium on Books for Young Readers** draws teachers, librarians, and book lovers ages 13 and up to hear from Newbery- and Caldecott-winning authors and illustrators, [bfyr.byu.edu](http://bfyr.byu.edu).

Thanks to generous experiential learning funding, three MFA candidates in Creative Writing who saw a need on campus for a dedicated **BYU Young Adult Novelist Conference (YANCON)** achieved their goal and organized the inaugural event in 2018. YANCON is a conference for current BYU students to learn about craft, drafting, revision, and publishing from BYU graduate students, professors, and published authors, including keynotes from New York Times bestsellers, [english.byu.edu/young-adult-novelist-conference-yancon-at-byu/](http://english.byu.edu/young-adult-novelist-conference-yancon-at-byu/).

"You don't get to decide what resonates with people or not. It's completely out of our hands. [Once] what I thought was beautifully said, nobody cared about. And that turned out to be a major theme in my writing career."

—SHANNON HALE, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR, SPEAKING AT THE MAY 2018 BYU YOUNG ADULT NOVELIST CONFERENCE

YOU  
SOUND  
LIKE



Virginia Woolf



Agnes Repplier



G.K. Chesterton

YOU  
MIGHT  
ENJOY



George Orwell



Robert Louis Stevenson



Eliza Haywood

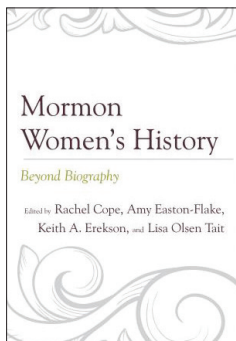


## QUOTE

“Know what to take seriously, and take those things seriously. And know early in life, if you can, what is noise—because it is so full of noise out there.”

—ASTRID TUMINEZ, NEWLY INAUGURATED UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT, SPEAKING AT THE 2019 ENGLISH SYMPOSIUM  
BA INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND RUSSIAN LITERATURE '86

## DEPARTMENT NOTES: COMPARATIVE ARTS &amp; LETTERS

*Mormon Women's History: Beyond Biography*

DEPARTMENT of Comparative Arts & Letters professor Julie Allen and associate professor Heather Belnap discuss the realities of early Latter-day Saint women in the new book *Mormon Women's History:*

*Beyond Biography*. We all know the early Saints faced many judgments, but what many of us may fail to recognize is that the way those Saints' lives are remembered can also become a standard of judgment for women now. In particular, female Saints were—and are still—subjected to expectations of perfection. Allen and Belnap challenge the typical image of early Latter-day Saint women as passive, prim, and “perfect” in their respective contributions.

Both Allen's and Belnap's chapters focus on the lives and struggles of pioneer women. In Allen's chapter, she discusses the experiences of Wilhelmine (Mine) Jorgensen, a Danish immigrant and faithful member of the early Church who tended her farm and children while her husband served abroad.

While this may sound like the story of a typical, idealized missionary wife, Allen clarifies

that Mine's life was full of daily doubts and challenges, not just opportunities to grow. To Allen, the realities of Mine's life make her story easier to relate with. In our subsequent interview, Allen added,

The fact that it was really hard to send your husband on a mission and to be in this peripheral space between your English-speaking neighbors and your Scandinavian neighbors and between other Scandinavian immigrants and other Mormon settlers—that makes her story more relatable. It's a better story than, “These women just had faith, and it didn't really bother them.” Of course it bothered them! And it bothers us! To know that it's okay, you're bothered, and you remain faithful anyway? That's what matters.

Like Allen's account about Mine, Belnap's chapter explores the idea of early latter-day Saint women as active participants in their communities. Her chapter focuses specifically on Latter-day Saint women artists who traveled to Paris in the late 1800s as an opportunity for both personal development and freedom.

In the nineteenth century, many women found that studying in Paris was a chance to develop both their talents and their personal

faith. Part of the Relief Society's purpose during that time was to encourage others to appreciate beauty, and many women chose to do so by using and developing their artistic gifts. It is

because of this priority that members of the Church now have many of these sisters' paintings to provide insight into the early Saints' true thoughts and feelings.

To both Allen and Belnap, hearing the stories of women

pioneers' perseverance can bring the modern Saint closer to her historical peers. As Belnap said in our interview, “Many of us feel an urgency to have this generation and the subsequent generations feel a connection to our past, to our predecessors, and to say that many of the struggles and the issues that we have are the same.” By highlighting more accurate depictions of past generations, Saints can leave behind the misconceptions of pioneer women as mere supporters and, instead, embrace the reality of both their immense faith and their personal struggles.

—JENSYN EUBANK, ENGLISH '20



## DEPARTMENT NOTES CONTINUED: COMPARATIVE ARTS & LETTERS

### Yōkai and Fear

THE ART HISTORY Business Capstone class taught by associate professor James Swensen in the Department of Comparative Arts & Letters presented an exhibition in December 2018, based on the Japanese “Monster Scroll” or *Inventory of Hobgoblins*, located in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections of the Harold B. Lee Library. The exhibit focused on the *nurikabe*, *akakuchi*, *yumeno seirei*, and *yako* from Japanese folklore and also included unique offerings that students in the course were invited to contribute.

Pictured above, the *nurikabe*, a three-eyed doglike *yōkai*, or monster, appears mysteriously on roads and blocks travelers at night.

The literal translation of its name is “plaster wall,” and the only way around is said to be if one knocks on it with a stick. As part of the course, students were encouraged to examine how the *yōkai* featured on the “Monster Scroll”

could be proxies to understand natural phenomena and communities’ fears. Students discussed the idea that fear, if contained in physical form, could cause people to unite or even confront its cause.

Students in the class sent pictures of these *yōkai* to local artists to create their own renditions of these creatures or fears. For example, Hayley Page, an artist and curator of the exhibit, created a blanket that represents how she copes with her anxiety.

The curators of this exhibit also created a board where members of the community could share their own fears. Another of the curators, Meagan

Anderson, said, “We’re presenting what our modern-day monsters are. I think this project has helped us to highlight a lot of issues at BYU.” Many of the issues included on the board were fears having to do with mental

health, concerns with our nation’s politics, and even struggles with personal relationships.

The Art History Business Capstone students’ goal was to make the exhibit interactive so that viewers could borrow concepts from a different time and culture to navigate their current view of the world. A theme that emerged was how learning about different cultures broadened perspective. Said Page,

With any artwork you analyze, you’ll find multiple perspectives, social implications, personal psychological implications. And I think that’s a big thing that art history has done for me—to help me see more sides of the story.

For more about the “Monster Scroll,” including insight from assistant professor Jack Stoneman in the Department of Asian & Near Eastern Languages, check out the latest issue of *BYU Magazine*, [magazine.byu.edu/article/catching-an-invisible-ghost/](https://magazine.byu.edu/article/catching-an-invisible-ghost/).

—JESSICA MELLOR, ENGLISH '19



## SPANISH &amp; PORTUGUESE

## P.A. Christensen Lecture, Translating Maria do Céu's *Enganos do bosque, desenganos do rio*: Domestication, Misreading, and Gender

FOR THE ANNUAL P.A. Christensen Lecture, professor Valerie Hegstrom examined errors that resulted from the “translation, mistranslation, and misreading” of the Portuguese nun Maria do Céu's *Enganos do bosque, desenganos do rio*, the first part of which was published in 1736. Soror Maria's story follows the journey of a *peregrina*, or pilgrimess, who must choose between a pleasant path leading to the grove of the hunter and the difficult road leading to the shepherd's garden.

Hegstrom identified *Enganos*'s female protagonist as what sets Soror Maria's work apart from similar stories. She stated, “The allegory asserts that female pilgrims have agency, can choose between vice and virtue, and can find their way to God without the mediation of male ecclesiastical authority.” For the time, and from a nun, this assertion was progressive.

In 1741, Soror Maria submitted part two of her manuscript to Padre Francisco de Costa to be published. What followed was a series of translations and partial publications, often with incorrect or missing attributions. Hegstrom illustrated this pattern

with “Cubridme de flores” (“Cover Me with Flowers”), a poem Soror Maria wrote in Spanish that contains her most frequently quoted passages.

In this poem the peregrina voices the longing of the human soul for God. One of do Céu's translators, Padre Enrique Flores, attempted to adapt her work for a Spanish audience, rewriting the poem despite that it had already been penned in his native language. Padre Flores's version of “Cubridme de Flores” left lasting effects. Other translators, like Juan Nicolás Böhl de Faber and Sir John Bowring, later misnamed or completely erased Soror Maria as the author. Hegstrom noted how they also separated the story of the peregrina from the poems, secularizing works such as “Cubridme de flores” so that the longing expressed was between mortal lovers and not a pilgrimess wayfaring toward heaven. Hegstrom claimed these translators' processes were closer to “creative or free mistranslation” than responsible translation.

From 1849–99, Soror Maria's words could be found echoed in many German

lyrical translations and music arrangements of an “anonymous” Spanish poem. Some of these arrangements were written by well-known composers like Adolf Bernhard Marx and Robert Schumann though, Hegstrom explained, “none of these composers knew that a Portuguese nun had penned the lyrics they set to music.”

Hegstrom concluded by noting how the journey of Soror Maria's work has mirrored the travels of her pilgrimess. “The peregrina's pilgrimage took her through the hunter's grove, along the road of asperities, and across the lake of tribulation to the garden of the shepherd,” Hegstrom said, “but she also traveled to Madrid, Hamburg, London, Berlin, to concert halls in many parts of the world, and into several languages.” The peregrina's journey has been arduous, but Hegstrom is determined that it will end with the rightful attribution of Soror Maria's work.

— JENSYN EUBANK, ENGLISH '20

## PHILOSOPHY

## Anne Finch Conway



WINTER SEMESTER 2019, assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy Katie Paxman created the first installment of a series of publications about 10 female philosophers

from the early modern period who are typically left out of classes teaching the history of philosophy, despite their relevance in their own time. The publications are meant to serve as a tool for professors who want to include more women philosophers in their syllabi but do not know where to start.

The first philosopher Paxman highlights is Anne Finch Conway. Born in England in 1631, Conway grew to learn Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. By the time she was 20, she had begun a correspondence with Henry More in which they engaged philosophical concepts and questions. Her philosophical foundations in these letters are revealed to be largely Cartesian, but Conway's philosophies would later veer away from Cartesianism as she developed her own ontological system.

Later, Francis van Helmont was impressed by her intellect and became a second philosophical mentor. He spent a decade as a guest at Conway's home, during which time he influenced Conway's interest in Kabbalah

and Quakerism. Van Helmont ultimately published her single philosophical treatise, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, after her death. Later, he gifted a copy of *Principles* to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

Conway's work influenced Leibniz's own philosophical ideologies. Although they never met in person, Leibniz wrote after Conway's death that his “philosophical views approach somewhat closely those of the late Countess of Conway.” Unfortunately, confusions in nineteenth-century historical work led to the misattribution of *Principles* to van Helmont. This error led to Conway's name falling further into obscurity. Paxman's hope is to restore Conway's and other female philosophers' names and legacies. For more about the project, visit [philosophy.byu.edu/](http://philosophy.byu.edu/).

—ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
KATIE PAXMAN WITH STUDENTS  
OLIVIA MOSKOT AND JONATHAN DUTSON

## October 31: Commemoration of Martin Luther

WHILE MOST AMERICANS spend Halloween dressed in costumes, knocking on doors, begging for treats, most Christians—and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should as well—celebrate a world-shaking event that took place on this evening in 1517 in the small German university town of Wittenberg. Knowing that on the morning of November 1—the sacred All Saints’ Day—dignitaries, professors, students, and townsfolk would enter the Castle Church to celebrate Mass, the Catholic priest and Augustinian monk Martin Luther pinned 95 theses on the entrance to the church. It was customary in those days to formulate grievances as thesis statements and publish them in a well-attended spot, challenging interested parties to a public debate.

Who was this relatively unknown monk, and what motivated him to such a courageous act? Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in the central German town of Eisleben to an ambitious mine operator and a deeply devoted mother. He received an excellent education, earning an MA in law. His father wanted him to enter the prestigious diplomatic service; the Lord, however, had a different destiny in mind for this precocious young man. The passing of a friend and a close encounter with death during a violent thunderstorm caused Luther to change his career and enter the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt to devote his life to God. He studied theology, was ordained a priest in 1507, and in 1512 was awarded the

Doctor of Theology degree from the newly founded University of Wittenberg. From then on, he occupied the chair of Biblical Studies at the university.

For years, Luther had been plagued by a fundamental question. What can sinful man expect from God’s justice? Luther longed for God’s mercy but feared His condemnation.

How could he please a God who was angry with him, and how could he escape His vengeance? The church had prescribed the way of meticulous confession and the performance of works, pilgrimages

to sacred shrines, and prayers before the relics of saints. Several intimate experiences drove Luther to desperation, and he began to hate God, an unpardonable sin. Finally, after years of agonizing struggle, he received his answer from the apostle Paul, who, in his Epistle to the Romans, admonished Jewish converts to forsake the detailed “works” prescribed by the Law of Moses in favor of accepting Christ by faith: “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

When members of his parish no longer came to confession but returned with letters of indulgences, firmly believing that their sins had been forgiven them by purchasing these documents, Luther was greatly troubled for the souls of his sheep. After much thought, he decided to act and called on his learned colleagues to debate the issue of indulgences and reject this immoral practice. On October 31, 1507, the eve of a major church holiday, All Saints—when thousands of pilgrims and church dignitaries would attend sacred services in the Castle Church of Wittenberg—Luther pinned 95 theses to the church door. Written in Latin, they were intended for the consideration of educated church and secular leaders but were almost immediately translated into the vernacular and spread like wildfire throughout Europe. For example,

1. When our Lord and master Jesus Christ said, “Repent,” he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
42. Christians are to be taught that the Pope does not intend that the buying of indulgences should in any way be compared with works of mercy.
43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences.
45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God’s wrath.
71. Let him who speaks against the truth concerning papal indulgences be anathema and accursed.

82. Why does not the Pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? [A reference to the construction of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome.] The former reason would be most just, the latter is most trivial.

88. What greater blessing could come to the church than if the Pope were to bestow these remissions and blessings on every believer a hundred times a day, as he now does but once? [A reference to special sales on certain days.]

It is well-known what transpired next. The church rejected Luther’s challenge, excommunicated him in late 1520, and in the imperial Diet of Worms, in May 1521, he was stripped of all his civil rights and marked for execution. Fortunately, his benefactor, Frederic the Wise, the powerful Duke of Saxony, saved his life by hiding him for a year in one of his fortresses, the Wartburg Castle. There Luther translated the New Testament from the original Greek into modern German, a monumental task that not only made it possible for literate people to read the scriptures for themselves but also established the basis for the modern, unified written German language.

Since the Catholic Church rejected the reforms proposed by Luther, he had no choice but to break its formidable power and establish the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church, which to this day dominates much of northern Europe. Space and time prevent me from enumerating all of Martin Luther’s considerable reforms. Let me state in closing, however, how indebted we Latter-day Saints are to this courageous reformer. We esteem him gratefully as a prominent forerunner of the Restoration. Numerous statements by Church leaders underline the vital role Luther played in preparing the way for Joseph Smith and the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On this Halloween, this holy evening, let us not merely enjoy the candy but also remember this great man, a favorite son of our Heavenly Father.

—HANS-WILHELM KELLING,  
PROFESSOR OF GERMAN

# 95 Better Reasons to Celebrate Halloween






# DIGNITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

## OR

### How to Overcome Your Inner Seventh Grader



#### A CONVOCATION TALK BY

# TRENT HICKMAN

We can learn a lot about how to treat one another by reflecting on Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and our own most embarrassing seventh-grade blunders.

THIS SEMESTER, I again taught Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which on March 3 celebrated its 50th anniversary of publication. At the book's conclusion, the narrator, in conversation with his friend Bernard O'Hare, predicts the world's population will reach seven billion by the year 2000. Envisioning all of these people, the narrator muses, "I suppose they will all want dignity."<sup>1</sup>

Each time I teach Vonnegut's novel, I think about this assertion. Do we all want dignity? Do we all need dignity? What to tell you, some of whom studied Vonnegut's words with me, about dignity?

This thinking led me to a vivid recollection of one of the most undignified times of my life: my seventh-grade year at Nevin Platt Junior High in Boulder, Colorado. Perhaps this is because my youngest son, Isaac, is now in the seventh grade. Isaac is maybe the nicest kid I have ever known—cheery, optimistic, mostly guileless—and as his dad I confess that watching him enter the meat grinder of seventh grade has been difficult for me. When I was a seventh grader, I was not the impressive physical specimen you might see before you now but a skinny kid whose stretched-out

**THE  
TRUTH IS**  
that as we  
more fully  
enter the world,  
we find out that  
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never left  
seventh grade.

T-shirts hung on him fairly unattractively. Like Isaac, I was friendly, kind, and smart—or at least I like to remember I had all these qualities—and to make matters worse, I was my family's oldest child, which meant that I entered seventh grade alarmingly unaware of what awaited me.

The keenest distillation of those unknown horrors was seventh-grade PE class. First, we had to change our clothes in a locker room, and too late I found out that no one really wore that athletic supporter that all the boys were supposedly required to use. After I endured a day of brief mockery, I adjusted my attire, but there was no escaping gym class itself, which for the boys meant several weeks of wrestling. All of us would be asked to sit around a huge circle printed on a padded mat, and after some brief instruction about wrestling's rules and techniques, the gym coach would shout out two boys' last names, ask them to enter the circle, and at his whistle's blast, wrestle until one of us pinned the other or a certain amount of time elapsed. The coach would repeat this Darwinian drill with other pairs through the end of class. Names, whistle, takedown, pin—over and over again.

Much to my chagrin, the coach shouted out my name early into our first wrestling session. He matched me with a boy whom I didn't know since we hadn't attended the same elementary school. Presumably this boy's school had been at the other end of a magical beanstalk because whatever he had going on could only be described as

glandular—early onset of puberty or some other malady that left him a teen behemoth. Moreover, as I could observe even before the fateful blast of the whistle, this man-kid sweated profusely, which all but eliminated any chance that I could successfully grapple him and which introduced a special ick factor that turned my already-fluttering stomach. In mere seconds, this gargantuan pancaked me, and there I lay soaked in the syrup of his prodigious perspiration. Surely, you think, this had to be the nadir of my early seventh-grade year, right? Nope. Day after day, the coach paired us in the padded panopticon. “Hickman,” he cried, as once again the mammoth boy stood to meet me, the two neurons in his lizard brain firing one-two-one-two at the whistle's blast, propelling him toward me with his punishing draft horse legs and his weird, wet glow.

As time and again I picked myself up out of the oil slick my slight frame and the boy's beefy body left on the padded mat, I assure you that all I wanted was some dignity. I didn't even care if I won—that would have been nice, I suppose, but inasmuch as it was a virtual impossibility, I would have simply settled for something to save some face in front of my friends, anything that didn't look like me running for my life with a dripping Goliath one more grab-and-smash away from my crushing loss. You've probably heard that stupid saying that “pain is just weakness leaving the body.” You know what? Sometimes it's just pain, and you hope that it doesn't puddle around you to deepen your humiliation.





We all want dignity, don't we? In my American Literary History class, one of the texts I most like to teach is Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, a fine sample of some of the literature produced during the Civil War and a masterful example of American oratory. At the time Lincoln delivered the speech, the Civil War was a mere month away from its formal conclusion. As such, Lincoln could have used the occasion to rub the Confederacy's nose in its inevitable defeat, but Lincoln chose instead to remind his audience that people on both sides of the conflict "read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. . . . The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes." Lincoln concludes with these famous words:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.<sup>2</sup>

Lincoln understood that what people finally wanted was dignity and a fair shake—to start anew, to put bad ideas and poor decisions behind them while saving some face. He also saw that the path to this shared dignity comes through its precursor, civility—the act of treating others with graciousness even if we disagree with them or find them or their views unpalatable.

As students of the humanities, I hope that in our mastery of languages, literatures, and philosophies we also learned why dignity and civility both matter. It would be a tragedy if in teaching how to think, to analyze, to write, and to persuade all we have done is to weaponize students to attack, to defame, to demean, or otherwise to eviscerate intellectually those with whom we don't see eye-to-eye or to take down those whose skills with language, reason, and thought are not as fully developed. "Who is my neighbor?" a smug lawyer asked Jesus.<sup>3</sup> I turn that question to you: is your neighbor someone who holds different political views than yours? Is your neighbor an anonymous troll on an Internet message board? Is your neighbor the boorish guy at work whose uncouth nature nauseates you? The truth is that as we more fully enter the world, we find out that many adults never left seventh grade. They feel that their cliques, their name-calling, and their viciousness helps them to get ahead in life, and sometimes it does, as they get the laughs at the party or beat you for the promotion. But let us choose civility so as to afford all people their dignity, with malice toward none, with charity for all,

**BUT LET US** choose civility so as to afford all people their dignity, with malice toward none, with charity for all, whether we feel they deserve it or not.

whether we feel they deserve it or not. That way, when sometimes we falter and revert to our worst seventh-grade selves—and we all will at some point—we can hope for the grace of similar forgiveness, love, and charity to come our way from civil people around us who have enough character not to take advantage of our weakness.

As I've gotten older and wiser, I've learned to imagine my wrestling nemesis not as the caricature of the story I shared but as an actual human being with complex character. It has occurred to me, for instance, that perhaps PE class gave this oversized seventh grader a moment to shine at a time when he craved the respect of his peers as much as I did, stabilizing his own shaky self-esteem and soothing untold anxieties. Hopefully, he grew up to have a heart as big as his body and hopeful for the future. Maybe civility and dignity first emerge in charitable imaginations of each other like these as we push past our preconceptions into new possible perceptions of our nuanced lives.

*Trenton L. Hickman is an associate professor of English and delivered this speech at the College of Humanities April 2019 Convocation. To watch the convocation ceremony, including this speech, visit <https://humanities.byu.edu/hickman-convocation-address/>.*

1. Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell, 1969), 212.

2. Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, shorter 9th ed., edited by Robert S. Levine (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017), 1:802.

3. Luke 10:29.



# A GOLDEN RULE FOR GRADING

## Grades are a sensitive subject for more than just students.

**I** TAKE JESUS AT HIS WORD in the Sermon on the Mount. I think He really meant it when He said that if someone strikes me on one cheek, I should offer the other cheek to be struck or not, as the striker chooses. Of course, there's also a principle behind the specific example of cheek striking and turning that I accept on a more general, self-regulating level: that when someone attacks or does me wrong, I should take responsibility for my response by, first, not reactively imitating the aggressor's action in the way I respond; and, second, recognizing that people can act aggressively on a sudden impulse of fear that turns to anger, responding in such a way as to give the aggressor the chance to review and

perhaps revise their first act in a second, more controlled, (re)considered action. To be sure, my actions often don't live up to this principle very well, and sometimes not at all. At the same time, I think that this principle really should govern my actions, and so it has presence and weight in my moral consciousness and conscience.

I also think Jesus really meant it when He said: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”<sup>1</sup> Not judging is hard for me, too, but my problem with it is that it’s not just that I don’t live up to this command and the principle that informs it. Rather, it’s also that my job as a professor and administrator at BYU requires me to judge. I judge my students when I grade their performance in class or when I evaluate their applications for admissions or scholarships.

As a department chair, I judge my colleagues in annual performance reviews and applications for promotion and tenure. I know that a grade I give a student or a decision I render on a promotion file doesn't necessarily represent my judgment on their existential worth. But given the real benefit or harm such a decision can exercise in their lives, given the lasting effect such decisions have, given the fact that my decisions matter a great deal to the people I evaluate, and given that they affect the relationship I am already in with them when I make such decisions, it seems to me that "judgment" is the most accurate word I can use to describe what I do in these dimensions of my job.

I'm aware that in his translation of the Sermon on the Mount, Joseph Smith

by Joe Parry



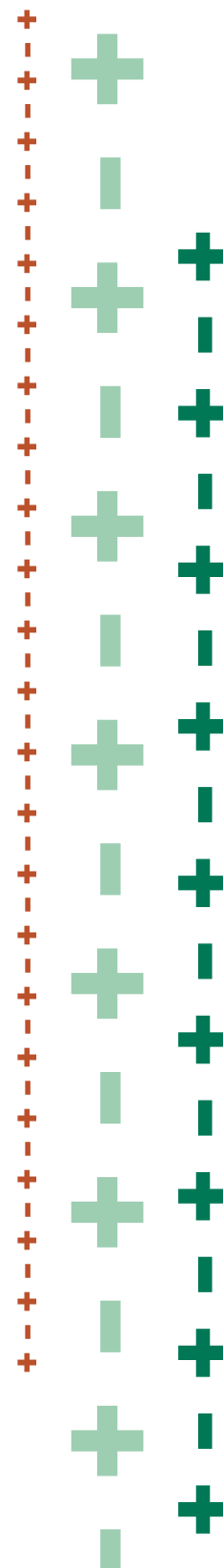
rendered this verse differently: Jesus declared, “Judge not *unrighteously*.”<sup>2</sup> However, Joseph translated Jesus’s Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi to say, “Judge not,” just like the King James Version, and Joseph never corrected it later.<sup>3</sup> For that matter, the Joseph Smith Translation has never been canonized by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I also understand that you and I make judgments, including moral judgments, all of the time, and it seems that we must do so in order to make decisions about what we will and won’t do. None of this changes what seems to me to be Jesus’s prohibition to judge, other than to make it yet another of the many paradoxes that his teachings seem to embrace, rather than eschew.

I and many of my colleagues would be very happy to teach without grading. I have some colleagues at BYU and elsewhere who have even experimented with teaching classes in such a way as to allow students to grade themselves. And even though we recognize the good that grades can do—their incentivizing function alone seems to make students work harder and better than they otherwise would—we know that grades are a very imperfect way of helping students learn, improve, and succeed. They say some things about a student’s ability, the quality of his or her effort, and, by extension, can reveal something about the student’s character and maturity. But there are other things grades don’t communicate. They don’t, for instance, accurately represent

how much a student has learned, nor do they account for the kind of differences in students that are the result of factors and forces outside the students’ control—genetics, environment, and culture—that can significantly affect student preparation, ability, and performance.

In fact, even if I grant that it is possible to judge my students righteously, I have fundamental concerns with the lack of a robust, systematic ethical theory or practice in grading that happens in higher education.<sup>4</sup> Grades matter to students, and for that reason alone we need to think carefully about the ethics of grading. But an even more important reason for thinking about the ethics of grading is that these ethics apply to human relationships, something the Lord considers not just important, but sacred. Grading affects and conditions the relationships between student and teacher and between students and each other. And while grades certainly represent the quality of individual students’ work, performance, attitude, and efforts, they also in some measure evaluate the relationships in which the education and evaluation take place. I at least know that the quality of my relationship with students can positively or negatively impact the grades they receive. That makes grading a fundamentally moral activity, whether I recognize it or not.

I think it’s important for me as a professor to be an intentionally ethical grader and to admit to myself that as a grader I fail at being completely ethical because of my own and the



**Grades matter to students, and for that reason alone we need to think carefully about the ethics of grading.**



## But a Golden Rule for grading also means that I, my colleagues, and society as a whole need to work a bit harder at coming up with a better system.

system's fundamental imperfections. But even as He told me not to judge, the Lord taught one of the most important ethical principles in his mortal ministry, so important that it is addressed in several places throughout the New Testament and His teachings as recorded in 3 Nephi: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. / For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."<sup>5</sup> The principle on offer, of course, is the principle at the core of the Golden Rule, which Jesus explicitly states only 10 verses later: "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets."<sup>6</sup> We pay special attention to the Golden Rule in Christianity because of the Lord's last comment here. "The law and the prophets," or all of revealed scripture, can be distilled into this crucial moral principle of action: treat others as we want to be treated by others. Interestingly, the Savior makes the same claim about the importance of His reformulation of the Ten Commandments into Two Commandments:

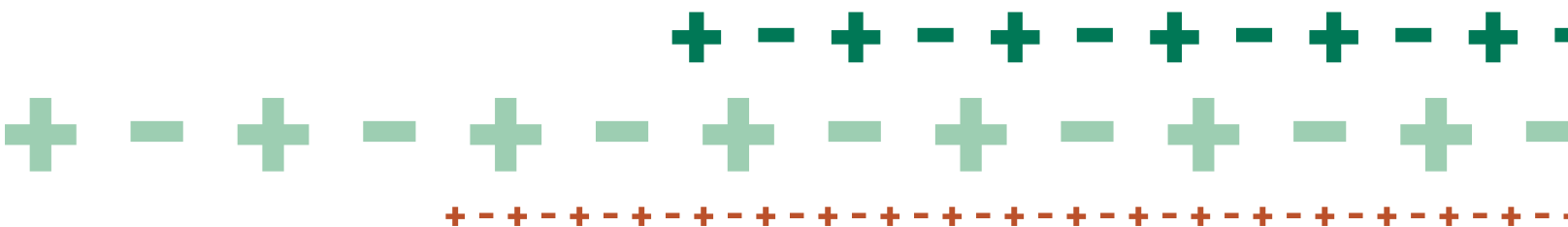
Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,  
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.  
This is the first and great commandment.  
And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy  
neighbour as thyself.  
On these two commandments hang all the law and  
the prophets.<sup>7</sup>

The "Two Great Commandments," the Golden Rule, and the "judge not" command are each complementary ways in which the Lord distills all that He has revealed into a comprehensible ethical principle.

What I take this to mean for grading as judging, then, is that it must answer the moral imperative to love others as I love myself, which perhaps in more practical terms means treating others as I would be treated by others. What would grading my students as I would be graded look like?

Here's one thing it means in my personal practice: I've come to think that it is unfair for me to grade students on tasks that they have not been able to practice first. I don't know how to do something the first time I try it. Why would I expect anything different from my students? When I taught an historical survey class, I used to assign short papers for each period (a paper on Ancient Greece and Rome, a paper on the Middle Ages, and a paper on the Renaissance). Because I wanted my students to learn something from each period, it made sense to grade these papers equally. But this doesn't make sense to me anymore because no matter how much or even how well I tell the students how to write a good paper, their first paper is inevitably a kind of practice paper—a chance to find out in practice how I evaluate their writing, their thinking. So, now, sometimes I use the first paper as a practice paper; I give them some credit for a good-faith effort, but it doesn't seem fair to me that the grade they get on that first paper equal the grade they get on their third paper, after some practice and feedback. And, sometimes, I have the students do a number of short, less formal writing assignments as a way of prepping for a more formal paper due towards the end of the semester.

But a Golden Rule for grading also means that I, my colleagues, and society as a whole need to work a bit harder at coming up with a better system. In the meantime, we could change the way we rely on grades as a shortcut in moral thinking and evaluation. I wish grades didn't mean as much as we make them mean. I probably worried a few years off of my life over them when I was in school, and I hurt for my students when I see the same worry and disappointment in their faces and bearing. Grades shouldn't mean as much as they do; they shouldn't be taken as a summary judgment of someone's ability, character, or even as a measure of the effort a student put into a course. I really wish we would treat them as formative assessments that don't necessarily stay on one's record forever but are







helpful at the right time in the right place to help students progress and mature—kind of like we do in the Church. I’m so glad that my deacons quorum grades haven’t dogged me all of my life.

Given the very different things that grades mean from discipline to discipline and from class to class (sometimes even in the same discipline), I like what Christopher Knapp proposes, what he calls the “Relative Performance” system of grading, which essentially means that grades should only represent how a student’s performance in a class compares to the other students’ in that same class.<sup>8</sup> Now, I confess that I don’t like his apparently easy acceptance of grades as essentially a competitive measure between students. I would like to find a way of measuring student achievement and performance that doesn’t simply rank people from highest to lowest because such measurements, once again, don’t accurately convey how much a student learned nor account for involuntary and inherent differences of ability, preparation, support networks, et cetera in students. But what is nevertheless attractive about what Knapp proposes is that grades would not and could not be seen as absolute measures of student knowledge and ability. His system wouldn’t allow what some programs do now: define exactly what their majors should know in classes and in the program as a whole, thus rendering grades in their classes and programs as fixed, immovable measures of how much of that knowledge one can demonstrate on an

exam, regardless of different backgrounds and capacities in students and teachers.

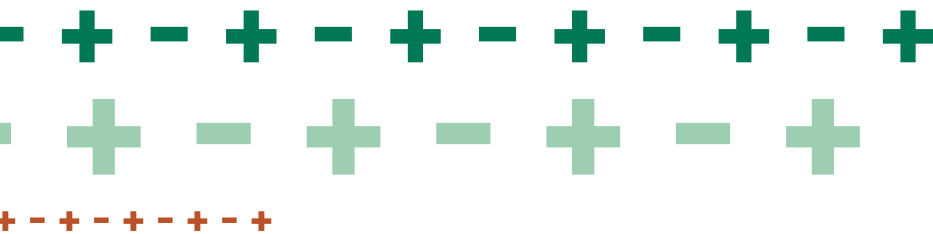
Like Knapp, I think this kind of absolute, fixed standard of grading is wrong for a number of reasons, but one of these reasons is worth mentioning here: if student learning depends on my teaching, how could I ethically believe that grades are only a reflection of the quality of my students’ work, and not also of the quality of my teaching? When I grade papers, for instance, I let the students show me what is possible: the best student papers tell me what was reasonable to expect for an A paper in my class, under my tutelage. I derive other levels of achievement from the rest of the class. For that matter, we, as teachers, would do our students a greater service by teaching them how to assess, and perhaps even judge, themselves.

I think learning how to judge ourselves is something that the Redeemer of the world would like all of us to learn. We talk about this sometimes when we share our opinions in gospel conversations about what will happen at the Last Judgment—that we’ll judge ourselves, rather than receiving some unexpected judgment from the Divine Bench. But I still see our Advocate with the Father playing a more active and, indeed, a more advocative role. I don’t think the Lord has any desire to play the role of the objective judge who administers some kind of absolute standard. I think He judges us as our advocate, as someone who is rooting for us to succeed. As President J. Reuben Clark said at BYU

in 1955: “I feel that [the Savior] will give that punishment which is the very least that our transgression will justify. . . . I believe that when it comes to making the rewards for our good conduct, He will give us the maximum that it is possible to give.”<sup>9</sup> I strive to have that very attitude in my grading and judging because that is how I want to be judged.

*Joe Parry is a professor in the Department of Comparative Arts & Letters and the outgoing department chair in the Department of Philosophy.*

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1. Matthew 7:1.
  2. Joseph Smith Translation Appendix, Matthew 7:1–2. Emphasis in original.
  3. 3 Nephi 14:1.
  4. I agree with Christopher Knapp that professors have neglected to examine carefully the ethics of our professional practices, like grading, which, for example, professional medical practitioners have had in their discipline. See his “Assessing Grading,” *Public Affairs Quarterly*, no. 3 (July 2007): 21:275–94, for a good discussion of this problem. I refer to his solution later in this essay.
  5. Matthew 7:1–2 and 3 Nephi 14:1–2.
  6. Matthew 7:12 and 3 Nephi 14:12.
  7. Matthew 22: 37–40, italics omitted.
  8. Knapp, “Assessing Grading,” 283–85.
  9. J. Reuben Clark, “As Ye Sow,” recorded May 3, 1955, as a BYU Devotional, Provo, UT, [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/j-reuben-clark\\_je-sow/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/j-reuben-clark_je-sow/). Also quoted by Vaughn J. Featherstone in his October 1980 General Conference address, “Forgive Them, I Pray Thee,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1980/10/forgive-them-i-pray-thee?lang=eng>.



## ALUMNI UPDATE

In a recent College of Humanities alumni survey, we asked how grades affected you as a student and if you ever encountered a test that taught you something profound about yourself. Below is a selection of your answers.

**N**EVER ASSUME an outcome! I remember studying really hard for a test, only to come down with a head cold. The medication I took helped a lot . . . until I became seriously drowsy during the test. When I trudged up to read the test scores posted on the door (this was pre-Testing Center), I found to my amazement that I had one of the highest scores in the class. I thought, “Maybe I should take cold medication before every test,” but of course I never did. I learned that although I always needed to prepare well, sometimes life was going to throw a curve ball. I should not assume a miss—because often the swing still connected, and in a grand way!

**A**CADEMICALLY I performed just well enough. I spent my BYU career feeling intellectually inferior. This was the test of all tests.

Here are a few things that I learned about myself. 1) I love God and He loves me. 2) I can do hard things but only with Divine help. (I have no doubt it was nothing short of a miracle that I passed French.) 3) My hard things are most often different from other people's hard things.

**B**EFORE my first CHEM 105 weekly quiz, someone stole my textbook, and the bookstore was sold-out. All copies at the library were also checked out, and no one would loan me theirs, even for a few hours. There was no possible way (this was 1977) to counteract the effects of that theft and [lack of] study.

When quiz day arrived, despite my signing the honor code and intending to keep it, I took many of my answers from a classmate's observable quiz sheet. I cheated. Yet, I felt entirely justified, given my attempts all week to acquire and study that first chapter and the apparent callousness of both my professor and the other students. Afterwards, however, I felt pretty bad. I vowed 1) to never cheat again, regardless of the extenuating circumstances, and 2) to learn how to extricate myself from such scenarios by legitimate, informed means (such as dropping the course, even if that meant an extra semester at school).

From that experience and commitment, and from my subsequent life, I have learned that unjust circumstances abound, that justification for being dishonest is often compelling, and that honesty is not always rewarded. Rather, it often comes with a painful cost. I have learned that integrity—full integrity—hosts a small, pricey, mostly anonymous club, whose members understand and deeply respect each other.

## OBITUARIES



Dee Gardner  
Linguistics

DEE GARDNER, a selfless, compassionate, master teacher, passed away peacefully at home in Springville, Utah, on January 8, 2019. He joined the Department of Linguistics in 1999. His return to school after a decade of mortgage banking, says his family, “was motivated by the desire to improve people's lives.” And improve lives he did. His meticulously crafted research in applied linguistics will support many who are learning, teaching, and researching English as a second language for years to come. Dee always accepted his assignments with the welfare of others in mind. His students' success was principal to everything he did, and he never lost sight of the fact that students were the reason this university exists. Even in his waning days, as he struggled with ALS, Dee continued to reach out to help students and colleagues in the department. He will be missed, but his influence for good will be carried forward by the many whose lives he improved.



Mariolina  
Johnson  
French &  
Italian

MARIOLINA ESPOSTO JOHNSON was born in Penne, Italy, March 19, 1957. She spent her youth in Pescara, Italy, and was baptized in 1976. Later she moved to the US, where she married Mark Johnson. The Johnsons moved to Orem when Mark was hired to teach art history at BYU in 1987. Mariolina also joined BYU in 1998, becoming a respected and beloved teacher and colleague as a part-time Italian 202 and 321 instructor. She was adviser for the Italian House and directed the Italian Writing Lab, and she helped her husband on innumerable study abroad programs to Italy and Europe. An indefatigable worker, she participated in many craft fairs, where she displayed her beautiful crochet work. She passed away October 25, 2018, after a valiant fight against cancer. She is survived by her husband Mark, four children, and seven grandchildren. In her honor and remembrance, the BYU Department of French & Italian has named the Italian Writing Lab after her.



THE HABIT of being a lifelong learner has nothing to do with grades. I was inspired by the discussion and passion of my professors and made lists of books I wanted to read and topics I wanted to learn more about *after* I finished my degree when I would have more time. I've added to my lists as life went on, and while I haven't read everything on my lists yet, I've made a small dent. At this point, I don't even remember what my grades were.

WHILE AT BYU, I had a nearly perfect GPA in my major in the College of Humanities. I knew I was capable, intelligent, and qualified to be there. But my career goals in medicine required me to study courses outside my degree, and in these courses I was consistently average. It was discouraging to have these outcomes in the sciences. At times I considered changing my career plans, as I felt I should pursue my strengths. One day in my Spanish literature class we read a story about a prostitute that challenged my norms and comfort zone. As the discussion evolved about our assigned reading, I gained new insights about life and empathy as a disciple of Christ. This one lesson has helped me pursue my calling in medicine despite feeling average at times. My facility for the humanities now is a blessing daily as I confront complicated topics and difficult situations and am able to empathize with my patients and their families.

I SUPPOSE that some specific teachers really helped me learn how to think critically or more deeply about things, and “learning how to think” has been important throughout my life. But I’m not sure how much grades played a part. I think they taught me a lot about guilt, responsibility, and obligation—but not much about learning. Those other things are often important to get us into a place where we can learn, but I think that grades and learning are rarely correlated.

I have gotten A’s in classes where I learned almost nothing and poor grades in classes where I learned a lot. So much depended on the teacher and the subject and my level of engagement, which often depended on how well I was getting along with my roommates! This sounds ludicrous so many years later, but when you are out on your own for the first time, navigating these social relationships has an impact.

## RETIREMENTS



Chantal Thompson  
French & Italian



Grant Boswell  
English

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

HOW DID a study of humanities at BYU affect your life? How do you apply the humanities daily? We'd love to hear about the classes, teachers, books, ideas, or experiences that have made a difference to you.

Please share your story in 50–200 words, and we will consider it for publication in a future issue of the magazine. Email [humanitiespr@byu.edu](mailto:humanitiespr@byu.edu). Submissions may be edited for length, grammar, appropriateness, and clarity.

# Judging Assumptions

In the Gospels, Jesus challenges assumptions about the religious life.

By Thomas B. Griffith

I HAVE a hard time making decisions, which is a problem for a judge. I wince when I recall the scene in *A Man for All Seasons* in which Thomas More rebukes Will Roper: “Two years ago you were a passionate churchman. Now you’re a passionate Lutheran. We must just pray that when your head’s finished turning, your face is to the front again.”<sup>1</sup> I take some solace in learning that Lincoln “was not a quick study,”<sup>2</sup> and that Washington was “never a man of lightning-fast intuition or sudden epiphanies,” but “groped his way to his decisions.”<sup>3</sup> It’s hard work to make judgments.

Mormon warned us of this.

In his explanation to “the peaceable followers of Christ” how to judge between good and evil, there is the sense that it isn’t as easy as one might think.<sup>4</sup> Some will confuse the two. And so, the Lord teaches us in the temple that we learn

best how to distinguish between the two—how to make judgments—based on our own experience, which sometimes involves sorrow. And in modern scripture He teaches us that the Holy Ghost—a valuable guide in making judgments<sup>5</sup>—works on our heart *and* our mind.<sup>6</sup> One without the other is incomplete and maybe even dangerous. Rational criticism is vital, but can be arid. Emotions are indispensable, but unaided by reason can lead to recklessness.

I first read Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *The Remains of the Day* on vacation at the beach. It is not a good beach read. I was hoping for light and breezy. It was a gut punch. I was too much like that butler in the English manor house who was trying his best to serve a master he had every reason to think was a different and far more noble person than he turned out to be. The butler had no way of knowing that his assumptions were wrong until he took a journey away from his comfortable and predictable life on the manor. Which made me worry. What if my assumptions about what is good and what is not are as mistaken as the butler’s? After all, assumptions are untested. They are not the product of the type of exacting scrutiny Mormon warns us is necessary. And as Paul commands followers of Christ, we are to “test everything.”<sup>7</sup>

Which brings me to this year’s course of study at church. As we read the Gospels, I wonder if we miss much of their raw power because of our assumptions. Do we assume that the message of Jesus is simply to pray, study scripture, and attend church? To be sure, those are activities in which He wants us to fully engage. We know that from inspired counsel. But perhaps the authors of the Gospels had something more in mind. David Bentley Hart writes that they were driven to write their accounts because they believed that “history has been invaded by God in Christ in such a way that *nothing can stay as it was*. All terms of human community and conduct have been *altered at the deepest levels*.”<sup>8</sup> Does the Jesus we encounter in the Gospels present that challenge to us? If not, maybe our assumptions impede our discipleship. It was Dorothy Sayers who drew the longbow at church-going folks who misjudge Jesus:

The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore—on the contrary, they thought him too dynamic

to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him “meek and mild” and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.<sup>9</sup>

(My apologies to pale curates and pious seniors!) Nowhere is the insight of Hart and Sayers more powerful than the only place in the Gospels where Jesus tells us something about *His* judgment. There is only one trait that

distinguishes the sheep from the goats in Matthew 25. The sheep ministered to societal outcasts, who Jesus calls “my brothers and sisters.” The goats did not.<sup>10</sup> Jesus may have a different view of spirituality than we do. President Eyring does. He teaches that spirituality is primarily about being the type

of person who is looking for ways to help others, then praying and acting that way.<sup>11</sup> Or as the literary critic Terry Eagleton put it:

Salvation turns out to be an embarrassingly prosaic affair—a matter of feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, and visiting the imprisoned. It has no “religious” glamour or aura whatsoever. Anybody can do it. The key to the universe turns out to be not some shattering revelation. . . . The cosmos revolves on comforting the sick. When you act in this way, you are sharing in the love which built the stars.<sup>12</sup>

C. S. Lewis observed that the Sermon on the Mount works on our assumptions about life with the force of being hit in the “face by a sledge-hammer.”<sup>13</sup> A punch in the gut. A sledge-hammer to the face. Judging our assumptions can be painful.

*Thomas B. Griffith, a BYU humanities graduate, is a judge on the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit. He has served as BYU general counsel and as legal counsel to the US Senate.*

1. Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 31.

2. James M. McPherson, *Tried By War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 2, 3.

3. Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2010) 292.

4. Moroni 7:3, 14.

5. John 16:13.

6. Doctrine and Covenants 6:22, 23; 8:2, 3; 9:8, 9; 11:12, 13.

7. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints* [Salt Lake City, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2019]).

8. David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), xxiii, xxiv (emphasis added).

9. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos* (New York: Harcourt, 1949), 5, 6.

10. Matthew 25: 31–45.

11. Henry B. Eyring, *To Draw Closer to God: A Collection of Discourses* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 110, 124.

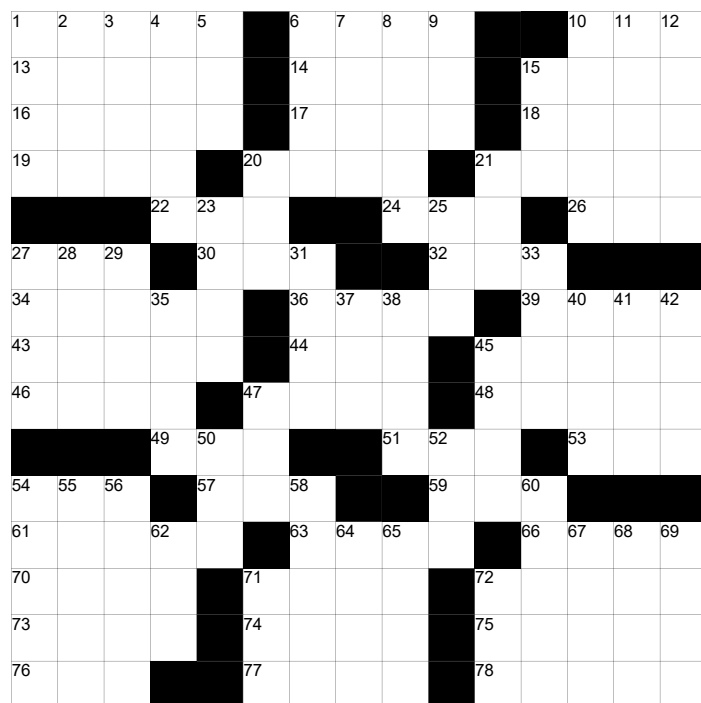
12. Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95.

13. C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 182.



## Prime Choice Select

By Fred Piscop

Check your answers on page 3 or visit us online at [humanities.byu.edu/magazine](http://humanities.byu.edu/magazine).

## ACROSS

1. Runway \_\_
6. Capable
10. Cud chewer
13. O. Henry literary device
14. "\_\_\_ not; I am with thee"
15. Golfer's warning
16. To try a small sample
17. 10K or marathon
18. Lacking manners
19. Gen. Robert \_\_
20. All \_\_ and no play makes Jack a dull boy.
21. \_\_ stiff
22. MLB Triple Crown stat
24. \_\_-mo replay
26. Take a stab at
27. Front end of a bray
30. Go public with
32. Recede, as the tide
34. The deepest place
36. Hawaiian strings, for short
39. Change the decor of
43. \_\_ one's salt
44. Place to park
45. Philadelphia hoopster, for short
46. Patella's place

47. Assessment
48. Signified by the dove
49. Canine command similar to "Shake!"
51. Thurman of *Pulp Fiction*
53. May honoree, informally
54. Tiger Woods' org.
57. \_\_ de plume
59. Abbr. on an attorney's card
61. Welles of *Citizen Kane*
63. Got a glimpse of
66. Tech support caller
70. Laundromat load
71. "All children, except one, \_\_ up."
72. Petrol quantity, in Britain
73. Cheese in a red coat
74. Realtor's measure
75. With no toppings
76. Marina del \_\_, Calif.
77. Off-weeks in the NFL
78. *Funny Girl* composer Jule

## DOWN

1. Tiny arachnid in dust
2. Taken by mouth
3. Prescribed amount
4. Walk on stage
5. Chemical in drain cleaners
6. Jackson 5 hairdo
7. Yogi or Boo-Boo of cartoons
8. Is deficient in
9. Bard's "before"
10. Old-fashioned for "date"
11. "\_\_ in the courtroom"
12. Like an untended lawn
15. To and \_\_
20. Nintendo game console
21. Go for floating apples
23. Gala affair
25. Electric guitar pioneer \_\_ Paul
27. Dove's antithesis
28. Black, to poets
29. Literary governess Jane
31. Straight edge
33. Runny French cheese
35. Part of a staircase
37. Bout ends, for short
38. "\_\_, Brute?"
40. GRE, LSAT, MCAT, etc.
41. Erte's art style, for short
42. City near Provo
45. Places for massages
47. Binary system base
50. Raggedy \_\_ doll
52. Club \_\_ (resort chain)
54.  $x^5$  or  $x$  to the fifth \_\_
55. Seventh \_\_
56. Metallurgist's analysis
58. Marvin Gaye's "\_\_, Mercy Me"
60. Heirloom bed covering
62. Resistance unit
64. Olden days
65. Merino mothers
67. \_\_ up past your bedtime
68. March 17 slogan word
69. Philosopher Descartes
71. Chew the fat
72. Predecessors of CDs

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For information about giving to the college, please contact any dean, department chair, director, or coordinator. Thank you.

THE REPORT CARDS appearing here belonged to Enos Bennion, a student at Brigham Young Academy (BYA) at the end of its first decade. Note that they were addressed to Enos's father, a practice that is now illegal without signed student consent under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA.

Student privacy laws are just some of the latest changes in higher education having to do with grades. Many historians have documented the shift from oral to written examinations beginning in England during the Industrial Revolution. A significant result of this shift became the standardized grading system, which may have been employed as early as 1785 in the US, a lifetime before the founding of BYU. By the time the senior Bennion had seen his son's (6 out of 10) physics grade in 1885, reported by both James E. Talmage and Karl G. Maeser, one can imagine that Enos might have felt it was too late to question the authority of a number. However, 134 years later, this issue of *Humanities* raises that question. Given that teaching and grading are neither exact sciences; that both students and faculty feel extreme pressure, if not discomfort, regarding grades; and that Jesus Christ taught us to "judge not," how do we account for our imperfect, longstanding methods of assessment?

Whether his father was disappointed in these report cards or not, Enos was awarded a Special Certificate in Bookkeeping from BYA as part of the High School Class of 1886. He later managed a store, founded a bank, started an oil company, and presided over a utilities corporation. It seems easy from our perspective to conclude that grades had little, if any, negative impact on Enos's future success. But we all know from experience: to Enos, it certainly must not have felt that way at the time!

**BRIGHAM YOUNG ACADEMY.**

Provo City, Utah. *Oct 16* 1885

To *Mr. S. R. Bennion* Following specifications  
represent the efficiency of *Enos Bennion*  
a student of the *Academy* Department for *1*  
Term, *X* Academic Year, according to the Record for said  
term. The maximum mark is 10.

SPECIFICATIONS.	EFFICIENCY	SPECIFICATIONS.	EFFICIENCY
<i>Punctuality</i> .....	<i>9 1/2</i>	<i>Grammar.. Rhetoric</i> .....	<i>7 1/2</i>
<i>Order</i> .....	<i>9 1/2</i>	<i>Composition</i> .....	<i>7</i>
<i>Theology</i> .....	<i>9</i>	<i>Arithmetic</i> .....	<i>—</i>
<i>Reading</i> .....	<i>—</i>	<i>Geography</i> .....	<i>—</i>
<i>Orthography</i> .....	<i>—</i>	<i>Penmanship</i> .....	<i>9</i>
<i>Bookkeeping</i> .....	<i>8</i>	<i>Algebra</i> .....	<i>7</i>
<i>Physics</i> .....	<i>6</i>	<i>Geology and</i> .....	<i>7</i>
.....	.....	<i>Astronomy</i> .....	<i>7</i>
.....	.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....	.....

No. of days present *44* After-hour excuses *1*  
Permissions granted to attend parties *—*

KARL G. MAESER, Principal.  
*J. E. Talmage* Secretary of Faculty.