



# Abraham Lincoln: A Wise and Just Servant Leader Motivated by Natural Law Principles, Faith, and Virtue

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One can hardly doubt the servant leader's contribution toward a more just society. Well-researched are the virtuous qualities of the servant leader. Not as well explored are the steadfast convictions and principled beliefs driving the servant leader's reasoning. This paper explores Abraham Lincoln's conviction of beliefs and steadfast principles primarily noted in his 1860 Cooper Union speech through the lens of natural law theory that serves as a foundation for his servant leadership style. It further asserts in companion to virtue in the servant leader is the principled belief in justice and unity that contributes to a *just* and flourishing civil polity for all. It is hopeful that this study of Lincoln's servant leadership, rooted in natural law, could benefit society in improving race relations, *just* public policy making, and *just* public leadership.

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In leadership, a virtuous character matters, and how well a political leader reasons matters; its quality determines the pursuit of just or unjust policies. In vogue within leadership scholarship today is the role virtue plays in leadership; what is not in vogue is the matter of "good," or in the Thomistic sense, "right" reasoning. In today's post-modern culture, one might critically respond, "who or what determines right or good?" Yet, invariably from the ancient days to the present day, leadership—specifically servant leadership—yields a bountiful harvest of influence and goodness, such as justness upon the lives of others, communities, and polity when reasoning aligns well with the virtuous character of a political leader. It would be Cicero and Saint Thomas Aquinas, in their philosophical and theological discourse, would detail this important relationship between virtue and reasoning (MacIntyre, 1988). This relationship is important if one were to assess the moral quality of a leader's character and decision-making. Few historical and present-day people exhibit in their leadership evidence of

right reasoning and virtuousness if one were to evaluate leadership decision-making to include policymaking through the lens of natural law theory. Studying one's positive historical leaders, their motivations, worldview, and origin of reasoning can provide today's public and political leaders immeasurable insight into leadership that touches the heart of all generations and social-cultural backgrounds in terms of serving its citizens with justness that benefits all people. In particular, and for this paper, public and political leadership focusing on natural law could benefit race relations, just public policymaking, and *just* public leadership in general.

One such historical servant leader who was committed to justness, based on his reasoning stemming from natural law sentiments, is the decades-honored President Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln would reflect the wisdom of the natural law thinker and practitioner of virtue that was unlike politicians of his day, those before him, and those who came after him. Consistent with the theology of Aquinas, Lincoln's highest duty was to lead in the humblest humanly conceivable way according to William Wolf (1959) to fulfill what he believed was the will of God. Lincoln's life and leadership exhibited the fear of God reflected in Proverbs 9:10 (*King James Bible*, 1989) which sets one on the path of wisdom. The actions and decisions Lincoln would take to become president of the United States and fulfill his duties would transform his reputation from a politician to a servant leader. He would be a servant of a *just* cause, one that would bring to fruition—although with great personal and collective cost—freedom for the slave. Through personal and political suffering and trials, he would become one of the most admired American presidents in American history. The very nature of who Lincoln was in spirit and mind, albeit his human frailties, would catalyze his moral pursuits.

This paper will discuss, through a natural law theory lens, Lincoln's reasoning—his right or good reasoning, that is, the relationship between the "ends" he served or *telos* (conviction of fulfilling God's will), virtuousness (specifically justness), and servant leadership (seeking to protect the unalienable rights of the slave) as both candidate for president and as president to better understand its role in servant leadership. Specifically, exploration of Lincoln's more distinguishing and major decisions and speeches, such as his February 27, 1860 Cooper Union (CU) speech delivered at the Cooper Union Institute provides an opportunity to better understand the motivation and first causes of Lincoln's leadership. Lastly, this paper focuses on how public and political leaders can utilize this information in their servant leadership development. Important in arriving at these conclusions, analytic methods utilized for this paper relied heavily upon hermeneutic approaches, such as phenomenology as well as social-rhetorical methods. Lincoln's social-historical context and Lincoln's sense that the nation could slide backward rather than press forward over time toward the abolition of slavery provides the context leading up to his CU speech. It would be this speech that, according to Miller (2008), would secure his Republican presidential nomination, having also already provided a consistent moral argument in his speeches on slavery up until that point.

## Seeking to Understand Lincoln's CU Speech

Although Lincoln's overall beliefs toward slavery were established (Miller, 2008), his answers to solving this issue did not appear to be settled, either from the moment he sought a political vocation, during his time as an Illinois U.S. representative, his time seeking a federal Illinois Senate seat, or during his time as a U.S. president, or lastly through the end of his life as president of the United States. Lincoln deeply believed in justness toward all people. Further, the level, vigor, and convictions of his belief toward the abolition of slavery and its ultimate determination to eliminate it from American institutions is analogous to a war drum that beats louder and louder until war commences. To better understand Lincoln's views toward the morality of slavery in greater depth, discussed are two hermeneutic approaches to understanding Lincoln's speeches and actions. The first one involves phenomenology, the process of attempting to understand what Lincoln believed to be true as it relates to the moral "rightness" of the institution of slavery, of which he would use reason as a guide in his servant-leader decision-making. The second one involves a hermeneutic approach in seeking to understand the role that sociological factors and Lincoln's historical context played in his views on slavery, and thus, his public policy telos and mediating servant leader qualities encouraging his policy telos.

## The Phenomenology of Lincoln's Views on Slavery

Hans-George Gadamer (George, 2021) argues that to understand something is to experience it as true or the truth; it would not result from scientific method-type analysis. Thus, a hermeneutical interpretation of Lincoln's CU speech that references the Declaration of Independence would conclude that Lincoln's understanding of those unalienable rights penned in the Declaration of Independence, guaranteeing unalienable rights, would be the same rights endowed to all people equally. As such, these unalienable rights given and taken away by God only would also then mean a certain freedom for all, regardless of one's skin color. One might rightly deduce that Lincoln's CU speech, having deeply resonated with his audience, would also be viewed as truth in their estimation. Not only in their mind would they be confident of the truth, but also in their heart when reasoning, that it is natural to all people, echoes such a profound agreement as to the rightness of an argument and belief. This would be evident throughout America's northeast region as newspaper reports, such as those that not only shared with readers his speech, but also shared reactions to his speech. There was no lack of listener enthusiasm regarding Lincoln's moral aptitude extolled in his speech. A *New York Times* article dated the day of the speech, February 27, 1860, makes mention of Lincoln's extensively research-supported speech that took months to research, and as such, it electrified his hearers (Lincoln, 1860/2004). William Cullen Bryant, who introduced Lincoln for this important speech, spoke of Lincoln as one of the vanguards of liberty fighting the barbarism of slavery and of whom was not afraid to use their own hands to till their land rather than rely on the hands of slaves

("Republicans at Cooper," 1860). It was evident that those who knew Lincoln and those who heard Lincoln's speech, that Lincoln would be the epitome of the rising crescendo cultural attitude toward the longing to end slavery, which Lincoln would diligently fight to win that cause over subsequent months and years. Lincoln's CU address was an expression of his moral understanding, given his learning toward the matter, not only within human reasoning but the reasoning that understood God's divine purpose for humankind. For example, just as the Jews asked how such a man as Jesus attained such learning without training (*King James Bible*, 1989, John 7:15), one might also have been perplexed by Lincoln's well-articulated moral sentiment and argument questioning the institution of slavery noted in the CU speech, especially in his words to those in the South, whereby he argues that nowhere in the U.S. Constitution was slavery mentioned and, to his fellow Republicans regarding having the effect of reversing divine rule if they did not address this wrong (Basler, 1953). Through presenting an argument on the U.S. Constitution that also has its roots planted in the Declaration of Independence based upon natural law (Strauss, 1953, and Jaffa, 2012, as cited in Fornieri, 2016; Skousen, 2006), as well as addressing divine rule, Lincoln is integrating a moral argument whose origin is the law of God.

As such, the moral undertones of his reasoning within this CU speech require an interpretation that honors Lincoln's beliefs and worldview of God as a primary influence behind those assertions if Lincoln believed in those very unalienable rights articulated and expressed within the Declaration of Independence. But one may desire to know how these unalienable rights express themselves in the reasoning of how the late 1880s ought to view slavery as well as those very actions and steps a political leader might take to eradicate slavery if it did indeed contradict the nature of God regarding true and unalienable rights. It is in this context that Lincoln's words and decisions flowed from those natural laws emanating from divine and eternal laws he believed were the truth set forth by the Judeo-Christian word of God, not necessarily the tradition of the faith.

The phenomenon of Lincoln's reasoning sourced in what he believed was the truth is comparable to the theology of Aquinas and the philosophy of Aristotle, especially considering Lincoln's character of virtue and desire for unity. It would be his duty in a Ciceronian way and as president to absolve discrepancies and the misalignment between the Declaration of Independence's unalienable rights and the practice of slavery whereby he sees himself in a Lockean way as a trustee or steward of these unalienable rights and the common good; it was according to Miller (2008), a vast trust that those who were free gave him. It would be a matter of conscience culpability if Lincoln had not sought to address the unjust practice of slavery. Exploring Lincoln's guiding worldview would require a multidisciplinary approach to understanding Lincoln as a candidate for president and as president. Thus, in a Gadamerian way, exploring the phenomenon behind one's actions would require the use of multiple disciplines to better understand the whole picture, lest, according to Gadamer, one loses

the “whole of life” without exploring the multiple varieties of disciplines of knowledge by focusing on one discipline (Jasper, 2004). Hence, seeking the whole of Lincoln’s view toward slavery and the decisions he must make as president requires studying Lincoln through some of those multiple integrated lenses that, according to Jasper (2004), Gadamer ventured into, such as *theology* (that is, Lincoln’s views toward God and his relationship with God), *legal theory* (Lincoln’s use of reason and argument), or perhaps another discipline I recommend, *political philosophy* (Lincoln’s use of power to attain ends). Lincoln, an epitome of having the faculty of thoughtful reasoning, seems to take a Thomistic approach toward reasoning when it comes to his mindset, who, according to Jasper (2004), notes of Saint Thomas Aquinas, would deem necessary to have a God-centered rather than human-centered focus behind one’s reasoning. For Lincoln, this God-centered approach would serve as a foundation for the multitude of ends of his reasoning, whether it be his behavior, relationships with others (friend or foe), or even policymaking. Lincoln’s hermeneutic appears to be like the philosophy of Martin Luther, whom Jasper (2004) notes believed a hermeneutic of the Bible would be set free from substantiating church theology and instead allowing the Bible to serve as a sole arbitrator toward tradition while also considering the reader’s own experience as it relates to a meaning of the text. Lincoln’s analysis of what the Founding Fathers believed, noted in his CU speech, is an example of the plain interpretation of Scripture to support his reasoning in the very message he wished his listeners to understand. It would be why the effect of Lincoln’s reasoning is rooted in right reason that is accordingly associated with divine and eternal law that bears upon the witness of all cultures. In this case, according to Cantril’s 1965 study on human need and desire for freedom across multiple nations (1965, as cited in Christians & Traber, 1997) found as a consistent human value the freedom to act upon ideas to improve their self and their context, and freedom to make and act on choices.

### **Using Social-Rhetorical Methods to Analyze Lincoln’s CU Speech**

Lincoln’s CU speech further presents an opportunity for scholars of leadership to utilize socio-rhetorical methods to provide further insight into what Robbins (1996) asserts is important in the social-cultural analysis of a text so that one can better understand what the author seeks to communicate to others; this analysis is accomplished through exploring time-specific social roles, institutions, codes, and relationships among people. Within the social-historical context within which a leader makes decisions on a wide variety of issues, policies, etcetera, understanding the language of the writer or speaker is also helpful if more insight into a particular phenomenon is necessary.

Understanding language, according to Robbins (1996), might reveal who one’s friends and enemies might be. As an example, in Lincoln’s CU speech, one will find that Lincoln speaks to three distinct groups: the president and “fellow citizens of New York,” Southerners, and Republicans (Lincoln, 1860/2004, pp. 2, 6, 9). And, seeking to explore how his social-historical context informed, influenced, or mediated his message, can provide further insight into what Lincoln was thinking, what he believed, and why

he was willing to fight with every ounce of his being to not only try to keep the Union together but also end the institution of slavery. It is with these methods of inquiry in trying to understand such a complex political leader and servant leader that this paper strives toward as a goal. The inclusion of a discussion of these methods is to provide servant leaders with the significance of understanding our ways of knowing the truth we possess in our heart and mind, what we share with others, and further identifying with those very beliefs of servant leadership that we believe to be true as a phenomenon in our leadership development that is necessary to become a better servant leader. Understanding what we believe and sharing with others what is by nature a good servant leader provides a rich opportunity to produce a culture of servant leaders. Consequently, the reason to study servant leaders, such as Lincoln, is that it methodically lends insight into the nature of servant leadership. As with the leader today, the established social-cultural norms and roles pervasive in a society are not also without those winds of changing values pressing upon important societal institutions. And, if human history teaches us anything, it is that changing the status quo in those institutions embedded in the economic and social system would change the very way people live and interact with others and would indeed cause upheaval and stress for some people in society. For Lincoln, the northern abolitionist stance would find a friend in him. Yet, at the same time, he knew that the brewing anger of those in the southern states, recognizing abolition was on their heels after his CU speech, would require a very calculated and careful strategy if he wished to maintain a united nation. Progress toward preventing the spread of slavery was occurring through recent significant legislative and judicial decisions.

### **Lincoln's Realism: The Increasing Institutional Support of Slavery**

Lincoln understood the reality of slavery expanding in 1860 when he decided to run for president. The Compromise of 1850 would at least limit the spread of slavery into new territories; however, shortly thereafter, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 would allow territories under the guise of the Declaration of Independence's doctrines of popular sovereignty that, according to Lincoln, believed that the Democratic Stephen Douglas perversely called upon the principle of self-government to decide for themselves if it would be a slave state or not (Goodwin, 2005). One might think in retrospect that postmodern reasoning, if this philosophical age had occurred earlier and was in existence in Douglas's time, might have been a basis for Douglas's perversion of the important principles of popular sovereignty and self-governing sanctioning state rights to determine one's status in life as a slave. Jasper (2004) writes of Jacques Derrida, the postmodern hermeneut that deconstructs language to the extent that there is no standard bearer such as God to provide the meaning in life, nor is there reasoning. While Derrida's thinking on the postmodern mind is at work in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, his philosophy speaks to the unreasonable and irrational mind that has plagued humankind since the fall of man – that is, that humans can easily pervert those concepts meant for good, such as self-governance and popular sovereignty to irrational

reasoning oriented toward the oppression of others. It is no wonder that Lincoln, who received his standards from a natural law orientation embedded in the Declaration of Independence (Goodwin, 2005) and his understanding of the Bible, would find views such as Douglas's worth addressing, refuting, and worth fighting against as a matter of law and policy, recognizing that natural law is the driver of his moral and legal philosophy. Consequently, Lincoln found it quite easy to speak of Douglas's interpretation of the Declaration of Independence as perverse; in the end, the Kansas-Nebraska Act would therefore reawaken and provide purpose for the Republican Lincoln's interest in running for the Illinois state Senate race (Goodwin, 2005), especially after the unjust 1857 Dred-Scott Supreme Court decision. In a sense, these events provided the resolve Lincoln needed to lead with fervor those moral ends that comported with his biblical worldview.

Unfortunately, for Southerners, moral and ethical reasons for abolishing slavery would not be a predominant value among its political leaders and overall population. As noted earlier, Lincoln would address Southerners in his CU speech. As with any other system whereupon practices that oppress and take advantage of others, it was not so difficult for Southerners and some Northern service organizations to irrationally justify their stance on the institution of slavery by seeking to tie it to legal and moral grounds. According to Faragher et al. (2003), referencing biblical scripture – albeit incorrect exegetical and hermeneutical interpretation – and finding it existing in Greek or Roman history were just a couple of rationalized reasons for slavery. Further, the economic reliance upon slavery to support the expansion of cotton production in America and abroad, due to the invention of the cotton gin, only reinforced slavery (Faragher et al., 2003). However, for a leader guided by a deep conviction based on a moral foundation, these reasons would not meet the muster of sound reasoning. By the 1830s, abolition would become a national movement through the work of different reformers (Faragher et al., 2003). Yet, according to Degler (1984), the changing culture would not end heavy-handed, government-sponsored retaliation against citizens and groups promoting freedom. Needed was a form of virtuous leadership that could move all citizens and leaders of various groups to collectively move in a direction that would yield the momentum necessary for long-lasting cultural change.

The constant struggle and fears expressed between the north and south regarding slavery would result, as noted in part earlier, in several legislative acts including the Compromise of 1850, Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, a very unjust Dred Scott Supreme Court decision, and continued rebellions such as that of John Brown (Faragher et al., 2003); these events, for the most part, would be responded to and addressed eloquently with fervor in Lincoln's CU speech. The South would view Lincoln's victory as an imminent threat to their commerce, economy, and way of life so much so that upon Lincoln winning the presidential election, southern states, one by one, would secede from the union (Faragher et al., 2003). Lincoln's views toward the moral wrongs of slavery would not waiver, however. Not only is this evident in his CU

speech, but also other correspondence. Just a couple of months later in May of 1860. in a letter written to the Massachusetts Dr. Theodore Canisius concerning German-speaking citizens, mentioned that Lincoln deplored “the oppressed condition of the blacks” and, as such, it would be inconsistent of him to approve of “any measure that infringes upon the inalienable rights” of any person “born in another land,” or who may “speak a language different from his from his own” (“Political,” 1860, p. 2). Lincoln’s commitment toward protecting inalienable rights for all people regardless of one’s race and language is not a customary practice throughout human history, yet, as noted earlier, according to Cantril (1965, as cited in Christians & Traber, 1997), the desire to be free is a desire that all humans share. As such, it is important to discuss the natural origin of this common desire of all humans rooted in the natural law tradition that since the beginning of humankind is embedded in the DNA of human reasoning. And part of leading people in a way that promoted those rights shared by all is an indicator of great leadership practiced by those throughout history who have brought significant social change to societies and nations alike.

### **Lincoln’s Jurisprudence Rooted in Natural Law**

Jurisprudence, exploring those significant questions behind the philosophy of law, such as what law is, whether it is bad, good, or based on custom (Grilliot & Schubert, 1992) is a natural process that humans engage in. Human reasoning has not necessarily yielded consistency in defining what exactly natural law is. It can be, however, more easily identified when human laws infringe upon natural laws that human beings know, by their innate sense of reason, are wrong. When humans determine that actions (whether individually or collectively) are unjust, there is a strong conviction to address those wrongful actions. More modern-day examples might include the tension between the state and its citizens, such as state-mandated COVID-19 vaccinations and individual privacy and self-determination and liberty. When any group or individual perceives another entity, such as the state, as unjust in their policy or laws, humans will inevitably seek a resolution to these perceived injustices. While one’s philosophizing may not have the character of calm and focused study of the laws itself and, in fact, may take on quite aggressive and uncivilized behaviors of those not in power, there is a degree to which the offended party believes in their gut that something is unjust about the relationship or action. Whether or not leaders or citizens have practiced a form of reasoning that yields right reasoning (discussed later) is an entirely different matter in that the offended party believed another transgressed a natural right law. It is, for this reason, why we turn to John Locke’s philosophy on natural rights before turning to Lincoln’s views.

John Locke (ca. 1689-1690/2011) argues in his *Second Treatise of Government* that natural liberty does not allow enslaving others or themselves, and people, in this sense, have a “double right” of freedom, first in their person and second, as a right to inherit “his father’s goods” (p. 100). These rights are rooted in eternal law and extend the



application to and limit the power of those in authority regarding these rights. For example, rulers are subject to the laws of God and nature and cannot be exempt or provide an exemption from the obligation to eternal law (Locke, ca. 1689-1690/2011). Deduced then is that only God can take away natural rights sourced in God. And, while God has given the world in common to all people, God has also allowed people to make the best use of what has been given in common. For example, people as their own person who with the labor of their hands can rightly say that its result is the right to own their property, also then further supporting the right of inheriting the result of the father's goods that results from the work of the father's hands (Locke, ca. 1689-1690/2011), of which of course cannot occur if slavery exists. As a result, a grave injustice against freedom in one's person affects not only the present generation but all enslaved progenies. For Locke (ca. 1689-1690/2011), it is the government's duty then to restrain people from invading the rights of others and further punishing those for transgressing the rights of others to maintain peace among people. Lincoln understood this duty well.

Lincoln, in his CU speech, albeit reasoning through the rule of law, also applies nicely the construct of natural law when he arduously refutes the court's decision (inferring the Dred Scott Supreme Court case) that the U.S. Constitution considered slaves as property (Basler, 1953) of another. In analyzing and interpreting the Douglas-Lincoln debates, Dyer (2010) asserts Lincoln's assessment of the Dred Scott decision was based on moral principles grounded in human nature, which also guides the U.S. Constitution, and then also goes on to explain William Wolf and Reinhold Niehbur's arguments as to the importance of understanding Lincoln's political ideology through his theology. After a comprehensive review of Lincoln's rhetorical views through a theological lens, Dyer (2010) presents nicely Lincoln's political philosophy as the theological axiom between America's Constitution and those natural rights given by God to all people. Further, as indicated throughout Lincoln's political life, of which Wolf (1959), in his work *The Almost Chosen People*, provides a thoughtful review of Lincoln's faith, religion, and views toward providence. Gleaned then from the work of Dyer and Wolf on Lincoln's theology and applied the topic of leadership, one not only gains a better idea of Lincoln's political philosophy, but also how he would lead by character and sound reasoning as a servant leader. As a servant leader, Lincoln led with a moral and creative imagination rooted in his understanding of who God is and how God works with His Creation to bring about His ends and purposes established albeit the fickleness and fallen human condition that some people might believe would be difficult to utilize when it comes to fulfilling God's plans. Albeit human frailty is common to all including Lincoln, it would be the worldview lens through which Lincoln would seek to lead and make those important decisions that had significant consequences for a nation. According to Wolf (1959), those decisions that were moral in nature and dependent upon foundational principles, Lincoln looked to God in making those decisions. Accordingly, his Christian faith would provide the divine space through which Lincoln would strive to align his will with God's will, and in the process

of doing so, it would result in a form of reasoning that, according to MacIntyre (1988), the natural law theologian Aquinas and philosopher Aristotle would call right reasoning. But before arriving at this important topic of right reasoning, needed is a brief exploration of Lincoln's theological beliefs.

### **Lincoln's Source of Right Reasoning: Not by Creed, But by God's Word**

Phenomenologically important to the origin of Lincoln's servant leadership, e.g., having acknowledged God's supreme government, Lincoln's reasoning, and decision-making according to Wolf (1959) was developed through his unyielding desire to do God's will rather than relying on human understanding. With God as the origin of Lincoln's motivation to lead as a servant to a sovereign God and through God's purposes and power rather than man's through their political power and might, Lincoln's servant leadership is quite different from the norm of leadership utilized within political settings. Given Lincoln's worldview, it was incumbent on Lincoln's mind to address the very problem of slavery. It would take every ounce of his being to be humble before God and even lose his own life as a result, to fight for the cause of freedom for an oppressed people who could not fight for themselves within the current political and judicial system. Lincoln, thus, was on a determined path to correct the lie America was living due to enslaving Black people, which was contrary to the Declaration of Independence (Wolf, 1959).

As it relates to Lincoln on the emancipation of slaves (albeit stated after becoming president) and further providing a historical contextual understanding of Lincoln's beliefs, Wolf (1959) provides two examples of Lincoln's views toward emancipation. First, Carpenter notes Chase Steward was a witness to Lincoln himself and stated that he would make a solemn vow to God to declare slaves free if General Lee were "'driven back from Pennsylvania.'" (p. 17). Second, Gideon Welles's diary, published by *Atlantic Monthly* (1909, as cited in Wolf, 1959), notes that if victory was given in a forthcoming battle, the emancipation of slaves would follow. His commitment and focus on God were notable on many occasions, and this would determine his philosophy behind several problems he needed to address. When it came to understanding slavery and self-government, Lincoln saw a clear distinction between the two based on his understanding of God's word. For example, Lincoln made it known that whites were able to self-govern, yet against an ancient faith of all beings having been created equally when one governs himself and another (as with slavery) it would be considered despotism, not self-governance; therefore, slavery could not be morally right in Lincoln's view, as it would go against deeply held beliefs that consent of the governed is a natural right (Wolf, 1959). In another example, Lincoln draws upon both divine and natural law during a debate with Douglas at the 1854 Illinois State Fair. According to Goodwin (2005), Lincoln invokes the Declaration of Independence in criticizing the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a perpetuation of slavery that takes away both self-governance and governing another man without the other's consent and further arguing that the

spread of slavery would prompt war against the Declaration of Independence. Further, by rejecting slavery and nullifying a law that was not just, Lincoln reflects what Koterski (2002) notes of Aquinas's theology regarding human law's necessity of having a foundation in divine and eternal law. Lincoln's leadership, thus, is not dictatorial or coercive, but instead deeply respects the individual agency of others who consent to his leadership due to his unyielding servant's heart committed to the promotion of equality and justice.

Lincoln's conviction further was consequently grounded in his reasoning of divine law as applied to natural law and, subsequently, human law, an alignment among each level of law that Aquinas would articulate in his work, *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas presents his answer to the question of whether or not there is in us a natural law by noting that the rational creature's natural inclination in acting toward a proper end (that is, eternal law) is known as natural law (Aquinas, ca. 1265-1274/1947). Understanding Aquinas's concepts of proper ends and natural inclinations appear on the surface as a complex concept to master. However, Deutsch et al. citing Strauss (as cited in Fornieri, 2016) note the necessity of genuinely knowing what is true in making normative judgments. This true standard, in Lincoln's mind, was the foundational belief and worldview behind the words of the Declaration of Independence which would then exhibit the wisdom of God. This wisdom and knowledge of God would require proper practices, behavior, and holiness, as well; to know God, according to Ray Vander Laan (2006), is to have the same character as the rabbi (or teacher) as they walk with God. Intertwined then together is both reason and virtue rightly centered and focused on God's divine law that would serve as the central focus of Lincoln's servant leadership mindset. This relationship between reason and virtue, understood throughout the ages, is evident in the philosophy of Aristotle, Cicero, and Aquinas.

### **Virtue Guiding Right or Rational Reasoning**

Virtue is an important characteristic in leadership and can determine the quality of the leader's actions and decisions; thus, drawing from the classical literature on the topic can be quite valuable in one's analysis of the quality of Lincoln's ethical and servant leadership quality. For example, Aquinas's (ca. 1265-1274/1947) natural law informing human law is also congruous to Cicero's rule of law philosophy (Ebenstein & Ebenstein, 1991) asserting the validity of law for all nations and times. Also important to this discussion is Cicero's philosophy regarding virtue and what it takes to develop virtue. Cicero believed that all humans, regardless of race, could attain virtue if they found a good guide (Ebenstein & Ebenstein, 1991). Aristotle's beliefs also include this philosophy. Aristotle referred to the relationship between virtue and reasoning as right reasoning or rational reasoning, and Aquinas would assert that right reasoning would require education in virtue and moral development and friends who are willing to teach virtue (MacIntyre, 1988). Differing from Aquinas's predecessors, however, was determining who might be the best teacher. Because the precepts of natural law are an

expression of divine law, God in his sovereignty is the best legislator and teacher of humankind (MacIntyre, 1988). Aquinas, having followed Aristotle's philosophy in part, also importantly differs from Aristotle as he regards the natural inclination of a person to lean toward moral evil, noting that it would be God's divine grace that would provide the ultimate remedy of this natural inclination, according to Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* (MacIntyre, 1988). For Lincoln, his ultimate teacher of virtue was God. While Lincoln has flaws, as with all humans, one cannot disagree that Lincoln's virtuous character oftentimes was beyond reproach. Those virtues Lincoln extolled throughout his life, given this analysis of his life and experiences, specially developed under the fire of trials he faced, which included patience, docility, honesty, decency, righteousness, and kindness. In response to the newly chosen Republican candidate Lincoln, the Michigan Republican State Committee would say that the West could not find a more fit candidate than Lincoln, given his "exuberant vitality . . . rude strength . . . cordial heart . . . straightforward honesty, manly firmness and intellectual vigor of the Western character" ("The Nominations," 1860, p. 1).

In reading several accounts of Lincoln's life, one could estimate that he was a teacher and model of virtue, which would lead to good reasoning, obeying God, and further motivating him to bring about justness for those who were enslaved. His right reasoning guided by virtue is necessary for a genuine servant leader. The servant leader bound by duty to virtue further echoes Cicero's philosophy noted in his work *On Obligations* (ca. 44 B.C.E./2000) what is necessary to encourage duty to others and what is a necessary foundation for right reasoning. Cicero argues that there is a true law that is universal and eternal whose commands result in natural duties toward others rather than necessarily natural rights, which also guide one to discern what is good and what is evil – respectively, that which is in harmony and not in harmony with human nature (Koterski, 2002). This significance of right reason bounded by virtuousness, which is difficult for humans to accomplish on their own, necessitates characterizing Godly virtue as not only the nexus or mediator for right reasoning, but also for servant leadership. Lincoln's virtue and duty to others serve as a model of virtue, and inherently a leader of virtue with a profound duty to others serves as a model for those who desire to lead in such a fashion as Lincoln did.

Lincoln did not develop these virtues overnight but developed them throughout his life. It was in trials and difficulty through the loss of those he loved, struggles with depression, etcetera while engaging his conscience and spirit to determine to do good, that he grew in virtuousness. Lincoln understood throughout his life that the source of all comfort was God. While others who grew up with different trials, hence forging a more negative response such as that with the life of Hitler or others facing similar challenging childhood situations, this was not the case with Lincoln. Lincoln's childhood and adult trials would prepare him to become the virtuous leader he needed to become to pursue with conviction the end of slavery in a world and country that did not as easily see the same depravity in slavery as Lincoln did. His bearing toward

justice and justness historically has blinded people in terms of having a lack of zeal toward such virtue. It would only be through the William Wilberforces of history who took hold of the cause of abolition to such a degree that it would cost a leader dearly – whether in health or death – for doing such.

A virtuous character disposition such as Lincoln's does not occur without yielding one's mind and will toward that which is virtuous and good. According to Bonaventura, a difference between conscience and synderesis is that God has implanted in each human heart the ability to judge in a right manner, avoid evil, and instead do what is right through one's will ("Synderesis," n.d.). Lincoln's judgment was right, and his disposition was to follow good rather than evil. Although Lincoln loved people and conversation, he took time to study, pray, reflect, and think to guide his decisions and behavior in a right manner rather than an evil manner. Lincoln's virtuous disposition is necessary for him to reason well as a leader. Further, he held in deep regard the rule of law as well as the spirit and foundation of truth behind those laws. In writing his CU speech, noting again that it took several months for him to research and write (Lincoln, 1860/2004), one could only imagine Lincoln's commitment to ensuring his words were found to be an accurate statement of historical truth and veracity regarding what each Founding Father believed in when framing the U.S. Constitution. The commitment of his will toward regarding the good, as it relates to truthfulness, is evident in his analysis and communication of his findings within his CU speech, and it further indicates how important to servant leadership is the ability to communicate and convince one's hearers of the leader's reasons for a position or course of direction a leader desires to take.

### **Virtuousness As a Nexus Between Natural Law and Servant Leadership**

Virtuousness allows people to have a proper perspective of themselves in relationship to others, and as a result, the person will focus on others more if their desire truly is to serve the needs of others. This focal point on others girded in virtuousness that yields judging or reasoning rightly occurs when the political or public servant sees himself as a steward or trustee of its citizens. The notion of the ruler as a steward or trustee is a position that Locke (ca. 1689-1690/2011) takes and affirms that the extent of legislative power that government is entrusted with uses only to those ends that secure the property of people. Locke further notes regarding subordination of commonwealth powers that government trust may be forfeited when a legislative body acts contrary to that trust given to them. Lincoln, as a time-tested and established reputable trustee or steward of the unalienable rights of every person, would increasingly, throughout his life, become more adamant about the emancipation of slaves. His conviction as a younger politician, who was continuously molded by his beliefs that God could allow the perpetuation of slavery to exist, grew to a point when he finally yielded to God's divine law that slaves must be emancipated; if he decided otherwise, America, according to a reply of Lincoln to an emancipation memorial presentation by Chicago

Christians September 13, 1862 (as cited in Ostergard, 2008), may meet God's divine judgment to a nation that oppresses others. Jaffa (as cited in Fornieri, 2016) affirms that Lincoln often cited Thomas Jefferson's warning of divine punishment regarding slavery noted in Koch and Peden's (1993, as cited in Fornieri, 2016) work published on Jefferson's writings. Consequently, Lincoln laid hold of his predecessor's warning. As noted earlier, the time was ripe for change as more people believed in the moral evil of slavery; thus, Lincoln had a keen sense of insight into the past, why society had not changed course [most likely due to its tendency toward inaction], and insight and foresight of what may come if slavery was not de-institutionalized. These capacities are important to the servant leader who has a deep understanding of human want, will, nature, and being, measured against God's standards rather than man's standards.

Patterson (2003) notes servant leaders are visionary in the sense that the leader sees the vision of a person in an organization "as a viable and worthy person," (p. 4). and as a result, will assist another in attaining that state. This sentiment is like that of Lincoln's vision on a more macro scale in terms of seeing all people viable and worthy as people free from enslavement. Lincoln's vision, however, would mirror God's vision for humankind which, as noted already, merges eventually with God's created order noted in the book of Genesis, Chapter 1 (*King James Bible*, 1989) that his created human beings would rule over the beasts of the field rather than over one another when it comes to subjecting to one another. It would be Jesus Christ himself that would note that man desires to rule over one another, but if one were a follower of Jesus, they would need to serve one another as noted in the book of Mark in 10:43-44 (*King James Bible*, 1989). Lincoln, while earnestly desiring to save the Union would only see a turn of events when he became committed to emancipating the enslaved person. It is quite common to read that Lincoln's top priority was to save the Union and not end slavery, and while there are several arguments for this sentiment, one cannot dismiss (nor Lincoln himself if he were alive) that the primary reason the Civil War began was the South seceding from the Union due to a fear that Lincoln would end slavery for good (Faragher et al., 2003). The Civil War, too often called a needless war, was not a needless war at all, but was a necessity, given such depravity of man through ill or wrong reason rooted in vice and holding on to that vice so tight that it would take a war to break its hold. Lincoln's vision of a united nation was not a vision without justice for all; a united nation could not exist under the injustice of slavery throughout perpetuity and progeny that is contrary to both natural and divine law. In considering God's providence over humankind and Lincoln's use of the Declaration of Independence as a basis for leading all people toward freedom, any slavery would contradict God's will and, in this defiance of God's justice, would be judgment for the whole nation, not just one section of the nation (Wolf, 1959). Justice for Lincoln is not something that has a life of its own but is instead deeply rooted in whether it agrees with God's will and laws, whether in action, deed, policy, or law it comports with God's divine and eternal law. To strive to analyze slavery outside of this lens results in the very perspective of injustice in which those in the South and even the North were entrenched. If justice, as a characteristic of

discernment, is a corresponding virtuous characteristic of the servant leader noted in Lanctot and Irving's (2010) work, then required of serving another is the leader understanding God's divine laws and principles. The book of Proverbs, as noted earlier, would call this *wisdom*—its requisite is fearing the Lord (*King James Bible*, 1989, Proverbs 9:10). Wisdom, according to van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015), is the facet of foresight and stewardship in servant leadership. Lincoln's actions reflect humility before God born out of diligence in serving God. In other words, his character and reasoning were not void of attention and commitment to learning. Applying MacIntyre's (1988) understanding of Aquinas's theology to Lincoln's philosophy results in the conclusion that Lincoln's reasoning was not of deficient education incapable of exercising sound practical reasoning. If one were to take this principle to heart, then it would be appropriate to deduce a lack of true virtue and its development in those who supported slavery, and as a result, in supporting slavery, they would have lacked sound reasoning. Having a lack of education in virtue, however, is not enough to excuse the irrational or insufficient knowledgeable person a pass on accountability. Aquinas, reflecting on the book Deuteronomy and the Apostle Paul's writings, asserts that human beings knowing God's standards regarding justice through His law are to be accountable to that knowledge (MacIntyre, 1988). Specifically referring to Paul's exhortation in Romans 2:15 (*King James Bible*, 1989) that the law is written on the heart of a person might then bring into question, "why then does a person need training or an education?" An answer may lie in part that while the law (e.g., divine law) is written on the heart of a person, it does not mean that the person will act upon what is right, but may reject it, and as such, allow a person's reasoning to lead him or her astray from what is good. Resulting is the practice of vice, that which is contrary to good, and that which leads to ill or wrong reason, such as that of defending and rationalizing slavery.

The most important virtuous characteristic of the servant leader is one who has a compassionate love for others in a way that encourages servant-leader behaviors that empower others, are authentic, provide stewardship, and provide direction (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Within a society, Hooker (as cited in Locke, ca. 1689-1690/2011) writes of justice and charity requiring a foundation and obligation of mutual love among people that form duties owed toward one another. Accordingly, without obligating people to love one another through ongoing servant leadership, it is difficult then to create a society of justice and charity. Several instances in Lincoln's life, too numerous in number to detail sufficiently here, exemplified well virtues of love, justice, and charity. Goodwin's book, *Team of Rivals* (2005), encapsulates these examples in the historical account of Lincoln's leadership, with the title of the book referencing who it was Lincoln would select as members of his Cabinet. Most political leaders today would find it quite difficult to muster the fortitude to pursue such a cohort. However, because Lincoln did muster the capacity to select these individuals as part of his Cabinet, he personifies an unmatched ability to harness the necessary talents, skills, and abilities to select those he believed would assist well in serving all Americans, serving ultimately

as a trustee of those endowed unalienable rights expressed within the Declaration of Independence and enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.

### **Encouraging Servant Leadership That Is Grounded in Natural Law**

It is hopeful this paper accomplished its goal of communicating the significance of Lincoln's servant leadership analyzed through the lens of natural law using phenomenological and social-cultural-historical methods. This work only provides a small snapshot of who Lincoln was in spirit, intellect, virtue, and desire. If anything at all from this analysis that could provide for further exploration or integration into one's servant leadership development, it would be perhaps considering the following sentiments as points for starting one's journey toward integrating what our great thinkers of the past considered was necessary for a good and excellent life, of which many already realize when it is dependent upon virtuousness, it has the capacity to influence others positively. Consequently, principles gleaned from this study to guide the servant leader (regardless of which sector they lead in) include: 1) knowing the importance of studying God's Word and allowing it to transform the leader, 2) focusing one's mind toward the development and practice of virtuousness, which relies upon virtuous teachers committed to helping others grow, 3) allowing virtue to guide one's reasoning toward right and good actions, 4) learning to recognize when irrational or wrong reasoning has taken hold of leaders or followers, 5) seeing oneself as a steward or trustee of the rights of others with a duty toward one another to take to heart the importance of those rights shared in common with others, 6) making moral decisions using standards of what is good before God, 7) seeing others as those made in the image of God and treating them as such, 8) making course changes when needed and not being afraid to do so, 9) recognizing that a course of events is not always discernable, but there is a purpose God wills to occur that is fulfilled through the course of human events, therefore necessitating a commitment toward goodness and justice regardless of the situation, and 10) learning to lead with wisdom. As one can conclude from this list, this focus of servant leadership is not necessarily just a relationship one has with others, but the relationship that one has with serving God. While some scholars and students may find this discussion on Lincoln as a servant leader outside the contemporary literature on servant leadership, it is hopeful that this discussion will engage leaders in exploring the moving force behind good servant leaders who have a history of utterly understanding what drives their decision-making and thoughtful leadership toward others.

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#### **About the Author**

Dr. Jacqueline Faulhaber's experience has included helping organizations in for-profit, government, and church sectors become more effective in reaching their vision, mission, goals, and objectives. She served in the Air Force and currently serves as a senior lecturer and advisor for the University of South Dakota in the Political Science Department, and as an affiliate faculty member at Johnson University's School of



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