HANDBOOK OF HUMILITY

Theory, Research, and Applications

Edited by
Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Don E. Davis,
and Joshua N. Hook

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INTRODUCTION

Context, Overview, and Guiding Questions

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Don E. Davis, and Joshua N. Hook

In this introductory chapter, we consider why humility is relevant for our time. We suggest ways that you might organize what the authors in this volume are going to tell you. Finally, we introduce each chapter briefly.

Context for Humility

A wave of cultural currents in both the United States and the world points to important shifts in society. Today, many people value the self highly relative to their value on other relationships or broader institutions.

Why Humility in an Age of Me-ism?

Jean Twenge (2006) dubbed the millennial generation "Generation ME." Probably, though, these trends began earlier. Tom Wolfe, in a cover article in *New York Magazine*, referred to Baby Boomers as the "me generation" (Wolfe, 1976; see also Lasch, 1979, who called the Baby Boomers' culture a culture of narcissism). Wolfe concluded his article like this:

> . . . they discovered and started doting on *Me!* They've created the greatest age of individualism in American history! All rules are broken! . . . One only knows that the great religious waves have a momentum all their own. Neither arguments nor policies nor acts of the legislature have been any match for them in the past. And this one has the mightiest, holiest roll of all, the beat that goes . . . *Me* . . . *Me*. . . . *Me* . . . *Me* . . .
>
> (http://nymag.com/news/features/45938/index13.html; retrieved December 21, 2015)

More recently, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks (2015) points to a rapid changing of the guard in the post–World War II era between two

competing visions of humanity and their accompanying narratives about how one develops moral excellence. Brooks asserts that the United States exchanged a crooked-timber tradition (i.e., "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made"; Kant, 1784), which assumes that people are inherently flawed (i.e., crooked timber) and moral excellence occurs when humans own and adjust for their limits, for a Romantic tradition, which assumes people are inherently good and moral excellence comes through protecting human innocence from corrupt systems of society.

Given the strong cultural currents that normalize attending to the self, is there any room for humility as a virtue? According to Brooks, the crooked-timber vision calls for humility to offset the natural bentness of humans, whereas Romanticism tends toward a me-centeredness that adores and trusts the self, perhaps too much.

Despite the strong cultural forces emphasizing individualism, psychological science has seen a recent surge in research on the virtue of humility. A PsycINFO search on January 1, 2016, revealed, in two-year increments, an accelerating number of indexed publications on "humility" over the past two decades (see Table 0.1). Several conclusions are clear. First, there is substantial existing theoretical and empirical work on humility. Second, the pace is accelerating. Third, the acceleration began about the time of the onset of the positive psychology movement (1999–2000), although the vast majority of empirical work on humility has occurred within the past five years. The first decade of the positive psychology movement (approximately 2000 to 2010) focused on a variety of positive mood states such as subjective well-being or gratitude. Even work on more communal virtues such as forgiveness was often justified based on

Table 0.1 **Number of publications indexed in PsycINFO for "humility" in two-year increments**

Years	*Number of publications in each period*	*Average annual publications in the period*
1900–1995	211	2.1
1996–1997	11	5.5
2000–2001	27	13.5
2002–2003	50	25.0
2004–2005	79	39.5
2006–2007	107	53.5
2008–2009	132	66.0
2010–2011	159	79.5
2012–2013	220	110.0
2014–2015	282	141.0

individualistic reasons, such as the benefits of forgiveness to individual physical and mental health. But a number of researchers appear to have realized the limitation of focusing on individualistic virtues without also attending to the quality of social bonds that tie us together in relationships and communities. This increase in other-oriented rather than self-focused virtues has accompanied increased work on humility.

How Can You Benefit from Reading This Book on Humility?

This book brings together the major writers and researchers who have written about humility, both theoretically and empirically. We have invited authors who study humility to reflect on the literature that has accumulated in their particular area of expertise. Some writers focus on the nitty-gritty of what humility is and what it is related to. Others reflect on the applications of humility in various contexts, including psychotherapy, organizations, religious institutions, and politics. As such, each chapter not only summarizes existing research, but also discusses implications for psychological and mental health practitioners. This is an academic book of thoughtful reviews on the *science* of humility. However, given the rapid changes toward individualism, which cut across all areas of life—including work, love, family, sexuality, and spirituality—we will not be too surprised if future works draw on this volume as a primary resource for understanding and translating the science of humility to a popular audience.

Our goal is to provide the definitive source of theoretical and empirical integration of scholarship on humility at this moment in this juncture of cultures. Thus, we believe that this book could influence people far beyond academic researchers in a narrow subfield of psychology. In fact, humility—with its emphasis on accurate self-perception, modest self-portrayal, and other-oriented relational stance, as well as a penchant for showing up (or hiding) when egos are strained—is at the core of a cluster of virtues that bind society together, including love, compassion, forgiveness, altruism, generosity, gratitude, and empathy. All of those virtues have at their base the other-orientedness that is facilitated by humility. We are writing this book for helping professionals, religious leaders, business leaders, and people who want to see more peace in their relationships, communities, countries, and the world.

Five Essential Questions

To guide your reading throughout these chapters, we present five foundational questions that we believe are important to understanding the science and practice of humility.

Essential Question #1: What Is Humility?

When a scientific field is new, many battles are fought over the best definition to use. Indeed, definitions are one of the fountainheads of knowledge, and how a researcher defines a construct often leads to asking different scientific questions. In the field of humility, authors still debate how to best define it. One question to think about in the forthcoming chapters is how to best define humility to allow scientific investigation to proceed rapidly. Are there certain characteristics that are common across most or all definitions? To explore how the various authors in this book define humility, we have asked each author to begin their chapter with their definition of humility (or at least clearly include their definition before the chapter's end).

We personally believe that humility has three core aspects. First, humility involves an accurate assessment of self, including an awareness of one's limitations. Second, humility involves a modest self-presentation. Humble individuals are not only honest in their self-assessment but seek to be honest in their self-presentation. Third—and this is perhaps the most controversial aspect of our definition—we believe that humility involves an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented rather than self-oriented.

Essential Question #2: Are There Different Types of Humility?

Humility is best observed in contexts where it is difficult to act humbly. Just as courage is difficult to assess until someone is placed in danger and is fearful, and forgiveness is hard to evaluate until one is deeply hurt or offended, humility is best observed when the ego is placed under strain. Given that many different kinds of situations can strain the ego, our team has come to the conclusion that there are likely different types of humility, and people may not necessarily possess all types simultaneously.

As you read, stay alert to different types of humility. Ask yourself whether you think the types of humility are unique or part of the same underlying construct. To the degree that they reflect the same underlying construct, a person could have *general humility*, which is a trait that extends across time, situations, varieties of ego strains, and types of humility. Or, to the extent that they are different, a person could have one type of humility but not others. For example, one type of humility that has received increased attention in recent years is *intellectual humility*, which includes an openness to modifying one's ideas and to negotiating ideas fairly. A second type of humility is *cultural humility*, which involves remaining open to cultural diversity and seeing the value in people of different cultures. Related to intellectual and cultural humility, we observe that other areas of intellectual disagreement might include political identification

and values (i.e., *political humility*). Because so much rests on politics, political humility might have an emotional overlay that some other types of humility might not have. Even more emotionally loaded might be the realm of religious convictions, practices, and commitments (i.e., *religious humility*). And depending on one's relationship with what one believes to be sacred, one might have *spiritual humility*. It is an ongoing question and debate about how best to conceptualize the various types of humility.

Essential Question #3: Can Humility Be Measured Accurately?

Another important area of focus in any science involves the measurement of the central construct. Early researchers struggled with the measurement problem of humility. An early paper by Tangney (2000) observed the obvious—that self-report measures of humility might be invalid because the very act of reporting oneself to be "very humble" might be akin to bragging. On one hand, some researchers have begun to question this assumption and point out the lack of empirical evidence for the "problem" (e.g., Ashton et al., 2014; Davis & Hook, 2014). On the other hand, even if a problem with self-report measures does exist, there is a way forward. Indeed, many constructs in psychology require confirmation of self-reports from other sources. For example, there is a rich tradition within personality psychology of comparing the accuracy of self-reports, other-reports, and observation of behavior or reaction-based measures (e.g., Funder, 1995).

Concerns about measuring humility using self-reports led investigators to develop several instruments (Davis et al., 2010). As reviewers describe what is known about humility in their respective research areas, often they draw from studies using one or two instruments. Pay close attention to the different measures of humility that investigators use. The items in a measure can predetermine what questions can and cannot be answered. Also, note whether there is agreement or disagreement among the sources of measurement. As research in the field of humility progresses, ideally there will be more consensus on how to best measure humility.

Essential Question #4: What Are the Predictors and Sequelae of Humility?

Humility has been linked with a variety of predictors, and several benefits are also associated with humility (e.g., personal, relational, and societal). Some predictors of humility are associated with the situation or context in which the behavior occurs. For example, situations characterized by conflict are likely to evoke nonhumble responses. Situations with high-demand characteristics for humility might lead to higher (e.g., hiring to work on a team, or being affiliated with an organization that emphasizes humility) or lower (e.g.,

military situations, police training, sport performance for elite athletes, self-presentations to receive awards, etc.) self-ratings or behavioral expressions of humility. In addition to situational factors, personality characteristics such as agreeableness or conscientiousness might make humble behavior more likely. Besides research exploring predictors of humility, a growing body of research has begun to explore what might follow humble behavior. For example, what benefits (e.g., personally, relationally, or societally) might be associated with humility? On the other hand, might drawbacks or negative consequences follow humble behavior? Thus, an important area of research involves exploring the situations or personality characteristics that make humility more likely, as well as the benefits or consequences that follow humble behavior.

Essential Question #5: Can Humility Be Developed?

If humility is a virtue that can lead to benefits for individuals, relationships, and society, an important question is whether humility can be developed. And another is, if so, how can we best cultivate humility in our own lives, relationships, and communities? Currently, there are few empirical studies of humility interventions. There is a rich historical tradition of promoting humility within certain religious traditions such as Christianity, in which humility is a cardinal virtue (see Philippians 2: 1–11). Christian approaches have emphasized other-oriented humility that derives from spiritual humility (i.e., humility in relationship to God). Thus, disciplines like prayer, submission to legitimate authorities, self-sacrificial acts, and service have been taught as ways toward humility. Secular methods of building humility also are available—inspiring stories of heroic humility (Worthington, 2007; Worthington & Allison, 2016) and examples of persistent humility and service to others (e.g., Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa). Interventionists have begun to investigate ways of promoting humility scientifically, often drawing on traditional recommendations. Look for these as you read this book.

Five Hypotheses about Humility

In addition to the five essential questions, our team recently proposed five hypotheses that we hope will be helpful as you organize what you are learning in this book.

Hypothesis 1: The Virtue and Vice Hypothesis

Humility is related to other virtues such as empathy, altruism, forgiveness, gratitude, and self-regulation. Likewise, humility has been shown to be *negatively* correlated with certain vices, such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy (which comprise the so-called dark triad), self-absorption, narcissistic

entitlement, high emotional reactivity (i.e., neuroticism), impression management, group dominance, right-wing authoritarianism, prejudice, antisocial behaviors, aggressive bullying, proclivity toward sexual harassment, deviant behaviors in the workplace, vengefulness, and the belief that the world is a competitive place. To what degree will you see evidence in the coming chapters for the virtue and vice hypothesis?

Hypothesis 2: The Social Functioning Hypothesis

Humility is (generally) a pro-social personality disposition. Humility strengthens most social bonds (social bonds hypothesis), promotes sacrifice for others (sacrifice-threshold hypothesis), buffers the social wear and tear of the competition on the relationships (social oil hypothesis), makes better leaders (humble-leader hypothesis), and yields more physically and mentally healthy partners (social health–transmission hypothesis). Look for ways these aspects of the social functioning hypothesis are or are not supported.

Hypothesis 3: The Humility-Health Hypothesis

To the extent that one is humble, one will experience better mental health and physical health outcomes. The mental and physical health benefits are hypothesized to accrue because humble people are likely to experience fewer disruptive negative interpersonal experiences and less interpersonal stress. Additionally, humble people have a disposition that is largely agreeable and conscientious. Indirectly, humility is related to better mental health, better relationships, and perhaps higher spirituality, all of which tend to have a positive impact on physical health. Seek evidence relevant to the humility-health hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: The Societal Peace Hypothesis

If a society is composed of more humble citizens, the society is likely to be more socially just (due to the other-orientedness of humility), less combative (due to less offense taking, more awareness of one's limitations, and more modesty, instead of provocatively presenting one's position), and more valuing of diversity (due to the other-orientedness of humility). Do you find support for any or all of these?

Hypothesis 5: The Satisfaction with Life Hypothesis

Humility will help people evaluate their life as satisfying even if they do not rate it as necessarily happier than others. Some humble people might be rejected by people who want them to fit in, might not pursue temporal pleasures that might make them happier, or might sacrifice for others excessively (e.g., care of elders with dementia). In those cases, people may rate their lives as satisfying but not happy. Is this hypothesis supported?

Other Important (But Perhaps Not Essential) Questions

1. **Are many people today—and we might ask this in particular about psychotherapy clients—actually concerned with being more humble?** Are people open to a wider cultural conversation about humility? Would clients be open to interventions to promote humility? Or is the orientation toward the self, so evident in the Boomers and the Millennials, something that might result in complete alienation if a therapist suggested humility as a goal of psychotherapy?
2. **Would more knowledge about humility fulfill legitimate needs?** In examining the types of humility noted earlier, it is clear that we need to know more about them. Would that knowledge be considered useful or a mere exercise engaged in by ivory-tower academicians?
3. **If people were more religiously humble, would there be less religious conflict and violence?** Religious humility speaks to the tensions that have recently intensified between radical Muslims—both within Islam and in opposition to other religions and people in secular societies. But aggression, violence, discrimination, and prejudice are not just present in radical Muslims. Those destructive tendencies permeate almost all religions and secular societies. Moderate and radical Muslims need to be in dialogue with each other to work out positions that moderate violence and prevent reactions against Islam. Muslims and people of other religions (or those embracing no faith perspective) also need to be in dialogue. From reading the chapters, can you make practical suggestions about how people of various faiths might increase religious humility?
4. **If people were more politically humble, might we have less gridlock in Washington, fewer political struggles within nations, and fewer wars?** Political humility is also necessary for a civil society. In the United States, the Democrats and Republicans have become increasingly polarized. Even within parties, polarizations have sprouted. Understanding how humility might help mitigate polarization has important implications for thriving and peaceful governments around the world. Can you find practical ways that political humility might be promoted?
5. **If people were more intellectually humble, might we be able to share ideas, find win-win solutions to problems, and be less intellectually arrogant?** Intellectual humility is necessary to have civil conversations and discussions that advance knowledge. Ideally, intellectual communities gradually work to correct biases, but this is not inevitable. Intellectual humility in individuals, as well as structures and processes, can help prevent communities from becoming increasingly entrenched. Can you see

ways to change communities as well as help individuals transform their own perspectives to promote additional intellectual humility?

6. **If people were more culturally humble, might they be able to improve international relations, make international business run more smoothly, and have better relations among the races?** Cultural humility is necessary for dealing effectively with multinational corporations, with the travel industry, in interacting and exchanging information across cultures, and within fields such as the helping professions in which a professional must understand the problems of many individuals from many different cultural backgrounds. In addition, recent years have seen a surfacing of racial and ethnic tensions and violence in the civil arena. How can we heal these ruptures in our social fabric? Does cultural humility provide an opening for a different conversation that allows both sides to consider their own misdeeds and contributions to the public conversations?
7. **If people were more relationally humble, might they have better relationships?** Relational humility refers to one's ability and capacity to prioritize the needs of the relationship. Thus, it is shaped differently in different types of relationships. It requires being sympathetic to the other person in the relationship and seeking to consider his or her fundamental needs, then, being other-oriented, shaping our behavior to elevate the other person's agenda. It involves creating a context in which sacrificing for the relationship becomes self-reinforcing because both partners invest heavily and appreciate each other. Thus, investing in the relationship becomes mutually reinforcing, as both partners grow in commitment and both enjoy giving to the relationship. Humility gives relationships the potential to thrive. Can you see ways in which relationships might be improved through partners cultivating more relational humility?

Research Agendas for Humility

The quantity and quality of research on humility has consistently accelerated over the last 15 years, as you will see upon reading the chapters in this volume. Numerous researchers are doing work on humility, but even more exciting, young researchers are looking for a field to which to devote their work. Many of those seasoned and young researchers write within these pages. Studying humility and providing more knowledge about it is a noble task. Part of the scientific study in any field is that problems are identified and solved and new problems are then identified. These new problems make up the research agendas identified in each chapter. As a reader, can you see additional research directions that the writers did not identify? Perhaps you can spot trends that synthesize research agendas from different chapters. Perhaps you can see critical fault

lines between positions that need to be defined and exploited. And, of course, we all seem to filter our reading through our own research agenda, so how do the suggestions throughout the book stimulate new ideas you can apply in your own work?

The supply of research on humility and demand to know more about humility are coalescing. The field needs consolidation so that researchers have clear research agendas to guide the next generation of theories, research instruments, and studies. We invite you to read actively, having your mind and heart engaged so that you, too, can make a contribution (or additional contributions) to this emerging field. Perhaps you will be drawn to a particular question, type of humility, or arena for application. Perhaps you will become a researcher or thoughtful scholar. Perhaps you will be an activist who can transform political, religious, or relationship conflict. We believe that the following pages provide invitations for thought, and we are glad you are on this journey with us.

Organization of the Book

We now lay out the logic of the book's chapters by summarizing each part. We do not try to provide equal-length mini-abstracts for the chapters. Rather, we just hint at what you might find in each.

Part I: Theory, Definitions, and Measurement

After this present introductory chapter, we jump right into exploring the meaning of humility. We begin with voices from other disciplines that have been thinking about and discussing humility for several years—philosophy and religion. Both philosophers make distinctions between humility and competitors. Philosopher Murphy (Chapter 1) draws a distinction between a kind of degraded humility that most people find morally disgusting and a kind of admirable humility that involves a moral value. In modern times, many people turn up their noses at the idea of humility, and Murphy argues that perhaps that contempt might be for the wrong kind of humility, not humility as a moral value. He thinks of humility as involving three separate parts: focused attention, a strong sense of the role of luck in one's own life, and empathy or compassion. Roberts and Cleveland (Chapter 2) regard humility as an intelligent lack of concern for self-importance. They acknowledge that theirs is a controversial view among philosophers. They distinguish their view from humility as understood to be such things as small-mindedness, low self-esteem, low ambition, restraint of undue ambition, dogmatic ignorance of one's excellence, nonoverestimation in self-evaluation, owning one's limitations, and inattention to one's virtues. Roberts and Cleveland suggest—and we agree—that philosophical work is a crucial stage in any empirical investigation of a new construct.

Religions have also thought long about what forgiveness is. Porter (Chapter 3) is joined by five religious scholars who describe humility and its importance from the viewpoint of the five major world religious. These summaries help educate all of us in this age of religious pluralism—and promote understanding needed for us to develop more religious humility. At the end of the chapter, Porter wraps up the summaries with an integrative and critical discussion. He concludes several things. First, humility seems to be a universally appreciated positive trait that is needed by people and that derives from a transcendent view, usually provided by religion—which raises the question of whether humility can be experienced and understood outside of a religion. Second, these religions seem to agree that humility does not involve a low view of self, but rather an accurate view of self.

Next, we have contributions on what is known about different types of humility. Church and Barrett (Chapter 4), in discussing intellectual humility, tentatively suggest a surprising and provocative twist on what general humility might be. Political humility (Chapter 5) is discussed by Worthington. In today's polarized political climates in many countries (and between countries), the development of political humility might—if it could happen—move us a notch toward more peace in the world. Mosher and his colleagues (Chapter 6) discuss cultural humility. The importance of respecting different cultures has become a hallmark of the early decades of the twenty-first century, so this chapter is extremely timely. Davis and his colleagues (Chapter 7) provide a discussion of relational humility—which assumes that to talk about humility always implies an observer, either the self or another person. Relational humility, then, is about humility specific to particular relationships and thus, for many of us, is the most relevant of all types of humility. We aren't all involved in intellectual, political, religious, or even cultural debate. But we are all in multiple relationships, and perhaps more relational humility might prevent some social grenades from exploding more relationships more often. To round out the section on Humility 101, Hill and his colleagues (Chapter 8) share a comprehensive review of the potentials and pitfalls of ways of measuring humility. Measurement is at the heart of understanding in science, so this is a crucial topic for keeping abreast of and making sense of scientific findings about humility.

Part II: Predictors, Correlates, and Sequelae of Humility

Leman and his colleagues (Chapter 9) review research describing personality predictors and correlates of humility. Much of this research has used the HEXACO-PI (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Leman et al. describe the HEXACO model of personality. They note associations of honesty-humility with psychopathy, risk taking, and antisocial processes. They also summarize positive associations

between humility and prosocial processes like cooperation and forgiveness. They review findings using other measures of humility in light of some measurement issues.

Van Tongeren and Myers (Chapter 10) tackle the other end of the situation-person array of causes, examining a social psychological view of humility by beginning with the common finding of a positive self-attributional tendency. They examine motivations, biases, and functions of such biases in regulating relationships. They describe ways to reduce the self-enhancing bias.

Green and his colleagues (Chapter 11) use interdependence theory (Thibault & Kelley, 1959) to delve into the situational aspects of humility, namely relationship factors involved in whether people act humbly or not. They describe humility as a transformative relational process whereby individuals move beyond selfish preferences to consider their close partner's well-being, thus building commitment, trust, relationship satisfaction, and persistence in relationships.

Toussaint and Webb (Chapter 12) and Leach and Ajibade (Chapter 13) consider mental and physical health and spiritual health, respectively. Both chapters address the correlations with humility but also the consequences or sequelae of humility. Humility has a number of positive effects on individuals. Most of those involve better mental health. There is a surprising lack of research on humility and physical health even though that is an important connection. Leach and Ajibade demonstrate how humility has proceeded from spiritual stances and how spiritual humility can also be a necessary way of enhancing one's spiritual life. In addition, spiritual humility can be affected by and can affect relationships, which are related indirectly to better mental and physical health. The sequelae of and consequences of humility—properly understood (harken back to Chapters 1, 2, and 3 on the other-discipline perspectives on humility as well as the way authors have defined humility throughout)—seem largely positive, though it is clearly not always positive.

Part III: Applications of Humility to Relationships and Treatment

Humility can be promoted or cultivated (1) to enhance and enrich relationships, people, or organizations; (2) to help resolve difficulties in relationships, people, or organizations; or (3) to prevent problems from developing. In this third part of the book, authors consider how applications that promote or invite humility might look. To start considering applications, we observe the well-known statement attributed to Freud that normal people can do two things more facilely than can people with psychological difficulties—to work and to love. So, we begin with Dik and his colleagues (Chapter 14), who have studied humility in the context of career development. Bridging the gap between enhancing and remediating, their insights could be used to enhance career

performance or to aid in career counseling. Garthe and her co-authors (Chapter 15) have used the vulnerability-stress-coping model as an integrative framework to view the social oil hypothesis, which helps us apply how to get along in romantic, family, friendship, and (yes) work relationships. DeWall (Chapter 16) considers humility in writing for and speaking to large undergraduate populations about scientific subjects. The importance of both intellectual honesty and modesty of one's scientific claims is stressed, as well as the importance of recognizing that being a teacher can influence students toward higher virtue. Wallace and her colleagues (Chapter 17) discuss the role of humility throughout organizations. This involves humility in leaders, teams, and workers. There are times when humility is called for in organizational life. But there are also times when it might hurt organizations and damage the productivity of the organizations. Wallace et al. explore these conditions.

Two research teams have considered direct interventions to boost humility. Ruberton and his colleagues (Chapter 18) have studied *states of humility*, what can influence them, and what influences they have. They argue that treating humility as a state can enhance research on immediate causes and correlates of humility. There might be conditions in which being in a humble state might affect relationship outcomes. This team has investigated brief interventions to promote self-affirmation, gratitude, and awe. People having those experiences increase self-esteem, reduce self-focused defensiveness, deflect focus from the self to the importance and value of others, increase self-concept accuracy, and promote connectedness to others. On the other end of the spectrum, Lavelock and her colleagues (Chapter 19) describe a randomized controlled trial and replication that increased *trait humility* using a seven-hour self-directed workbook. Importantly, though, the humility exercises also increased forgiveness, self-control, and patience and decreased trait negativity without addressing these qualities directly in the intervention. All of the interventions in the first half of Part III are aimed at enhancing people's experiences through promoting humility. However, it is also possible to promote humility with a therapeutic mind-set.

Chapters by Davis and Cuthbert (Chapter 20), Sandage and colleagues (Chapter 21), and Drinane and her colleagues (Chapter 22) examine humility within psychotherapy. We find that humility is a virtue that permeates the psychotherapy process. Davis and Cuthbert look at humility as a facilitative quality for psychotherapists. To help patients, psychotherapists must have the humility to listen and not assume they know the person just because they know the person's diagnosis. Sandage and et al. consider humility throughout the conduct of psychotherapy. Drinane et al. consider what happens when offenses involving various identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, or religion), called

microaggressions, occur in psychotherapy (and in broader social contexts). For those involved in psychotherapy, couple and family counseling, pastoral counseling, or even lay helping, humility is a must.

In Chapter 23, Griffin and his colleagues consider humility's role in preventing (and treating) service-related moral injuries that people experience by being pressured into acts that violate their own inner moral standards. Humility is seen as a resilience-promoting, harm-inhibiting quality that can help people be immune to some moral dilemmas, treat moral failures that have occurred, and prevent problems from lasting, even when they have been experienced.

Following these chapters that have described research on humility, in the epilogue, we will revisit our essential questions and core hypotheses. We will try to draw conclusions to firm up, synthesize, and supplement much of the learning you gained by your reading. And, we might even provide some insights that you did not think about in your engaged reading of the chapters.

Moving Forward

We hope you find this book to be both interesting and useful. Leading scholars from several disciplines have contributed and offer their unique perspectives on the topic of humility. It is interesting to see the connections and themes across chapters and also to note the unique offerings from each writing team. Instead of calling our last section of this chapter a traditional "Conclusion," we know that this is actually just the beginning of your expansion of knowledge and understanding about humility.

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Part I

THEORY, DEFINITIONS, AND MEASUREMENT

1

HUMILITY AS A MORAL VIRTUE

Jeffrie G. Murphy

I have spent most of my academic career writing on the philosophy of punishment and related issues such as mercy and forgiveness. So when I was asked to contribute an essay to a volume on humility, I was surprised at being asked and unsure that I could bring to bear my own scholarly expertise and focus to the topic. After some reflection, however, I came to think that many of the things that I find morally deplorable about America's so-called system of criminal justice (Murphy, 2014) can in part be explained by a lack of humility, and so I was drawn to considering humility in more depth and in a context not limited in scope to criminal law.

Humility is a complex concept that cries out for interdisciplinary inquiry. Psychology and the brain sciences have much to teach us about what can be learned through controlled empirical inquiry, but I think that the humanities have much of value to teach us about humility as well. This, at any rate, will be my assumption in what follows as I bring to bear both philosophy and imaginative literature as sources of illumination on the topic.

Unlike scientists, philosophers tend not to open their discussions with a formal definition of the concept in question, since a central part of their inquiry is to understand the concept in all its messy detail. A definition of sorts might emerge at the close of their inquiry, but to start with one risks (to use Herbert Hart's fine phrase) "uniformity at the price of distortion" (Hart, 1994, p. 38).

One thing that philosophers tend to do, as a part of their conceptual analysis, is to draw distinctions. Indeed, one of my first philosophy teachers said that the drawing of distinctions is the occupational disease—perhaps even the occupation—of philosophers, so I will begin by suggesting that several different things can be meant by "humility" and that different conceptions of the value of humility will depend upon which sense of "humility" one has in mind. I will here have space to draw just one distinction—a distinction between a kind of degraded humility that most of us now deplore and a kind of admirable humility that will be the primary object of my inquiry in this essay. There are those who have contempt for humility and it is very likely that what I have called the degraded kind is what they have in mind.

Uriah Heep: Humility as Behavioral Servility

Consider, as one example of humility, the kind of humility embodied in the character of Uriah Heep in Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield*. Most current readers of this novel find Heep, in his fawning and manipulative claims of being "'umble," loathsome—a man who gives them the creeps. His kind of humility certainly does not make him a decent person—indeed, quite the contrary—and he certainly would not be used as an example of humility by those who claim that humility is a virtue.

Of course, there are those who would like to see humility as an unambiguous virtue and always use the word "humility" as an honorific designation. They will say that Heep is not truly humble at all, that he is simply faking humility for his own advantage and that it is a misuse of language by him and others to call him humble.

I think that this move is too quick and a mistake. In highly class divided societies people of lower social orders will be expected to be extremely deferential and even obsequious to their "betters" and will be criticized—or even dismissed from service—for lacking what will be called (with, given the norms of the day, no misuse of language) appropriate humility. This is a behavioral and not an internal conception of humility. Heep, given his lower class origins, in this sense really does truly regard himself as humble; and he is in fact humble in this behavioral sense. What he has learned, alas, is that his kind of humility—a humility that causes him to seethe with resentment at those with class power over him—can lull his "betters" into a false sense of security to such a degree that he can manipulate and steal from them. He captures this very well as he describes what he was taught as humility in his childhood and "education":

> How little you think of the rightful 'umbleness of a person in my station, Master Copperfield! Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a great deal of 'umbleness—not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be 'umble to this person, and 'umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters!. . . . 'Be 'umble, Uriah' says father to me, 'and you will get on. It was what was always being dinned into you and me at school; and it's what goes down best. Be 'umble,' says father, 'and you'll do!' And really it ain't done bad!
>
> (Dickens, 1983, p. 639)

When made more fully aware of Heep's background and the way in which this background has formed his personality, many people will become less harsh in their judgments of him, and may even come to pity him. They will at least think that simply describing him as loathsome does not do justice to the moral complexity of his character and situation.

Humility as a Cluster Virtue

My view is that it is a different and morally valuable kind of humility that allows us to revise the hasty negative judgments we are initially inclined to make about people such as Heep and to scale back the suffering, if any, we may think they deserve. I will suggest that this humility involves three main aspects: attention, a strong sense of the role that luck has played in one's own life, and empathy or compassion. Since each of these aspects can be regarded as themselves virtues, I am inclined to view humility as what might be called a "cluster virtue"—a virtue to be analyzed as composed of all three of these. They can, of course, bleed into each other, but I think it is useful at the outset to sharply distinguish them.

Immanuel Kant and Iris Murdoch

Before exploring these three virtues (by which I mean a trait that makes a person possessing it a better and more admirable person than if he did not), let me first indicate the philosophical framework that will guide my thinking about them and their relation to humility. This framework is essentially Kantian (with some assistance from Iris Murdoch, 1971) and will draw primarily on Kant's thoughts expressed in his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1960) and his *Doctrine of Virtue* (1996). I have also been influenced by Jeanine Grenberg (2005) for both an excellent survey of the philosophical literature on humility and a rich discussion of Kant's contribution to our understanding of that topic, and by Norvin Richards (1992) for the best general philosophical introduction to the topic of humility as a virtue.

Central to my largely (but not exclusively) Kantian account of humility is his doctrine of Radical Evil (Kant, 1960). Although the phrase "Radical Evil" is now generally used to refer to mass atrocities such as the Holocaust, this is not Kant's usage. By "Radical Evil" Kant means a depravity inherent in all human nature. Such evil is, in essence, the unavoidable tendency within all human beings to subordinate morality to the demands of what Kant calls "the dear self."

I do not think that by the phrase "the dear self" Kant means merely ordinary selfishness of a kind that seeks to promote the welfare or happiness of the person engaging in the conduct itself—although this is certainly a part of

it. I believe he would also include those who act, even at considerable cost to personal happiness and well-being in the ordinary sense, out of loyalty to evil principles—a Nazi soldier, for example, who remains at his post that is under attack from Allied forces and willingly suffers painful wounds and ultimately death to make sure that a final trainload of Jews is sent on its way to the extermination camp at Auschwitz. This is still an act corrupted by the "dear self," however, since it represents an act of a self (a self of evil although principled desires) that has chosen to follow its own desires without properly subjecting those desires to appropriate moral scrutiny and having them vetoed on the basis of such scrutiny.

Such Radical Evil can never be totally overcome by human beings (it is a kind of secular equivalent to a doctrine of original sin without the bizarre notion of inherited guilt), but its impact can be constrained to some degree by the three virtues constitutive of humility that I noted earlier. Let me now briefly explore each of these.

Attention

One of the most moving passages in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, at least for me, is when old Lear—suffering on the storm-tossed heath the torments of lost status, abandonment by family, hunger, and bitter cold—has an epiphany of self-transformation when he notices (for the first time in his life) the suffering of others, sees an equality with them, and seeks to assist them in the small ways he still has available to him. He says to his Fool (1997, p. 298):

> In, boy, go first—You houseless poverty—
> Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.
> Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
> And show the heavens more just.
>
> (Act III, Scene 4)

Being aware only of his status and power as king, Lear had previously never even noticed those around him as people of a moral worth and dignity equal to his own. If he paid any attention to them at all, it was only to see them as useful

for his amusement or service—to see them, in Kant's language, as means only and never as ends in themselves.

The philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch, influenced by Simone Weil, made the concept of *attention* central in her analysis of morality. By speaking of attention, Murdoch did not mean simply superficially noticing other people as bodies to be ordered around, ignored, or even mistreated—depending on one's whims of the moment—but attempting to see each person in depth and as sympathetically as possible. She refers to this kind of attention as *just and loving attention*, and gives a rich example of such attention in an often-quoted passage. She describes a mother, M, who initially feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, D, regarding her as lacking in refinement and dignity—pert, familiar, brusque, rude, tiresomely juvenile. But then:

> Time passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D. . . . However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: "I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again." Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. . . . D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on.
>
> (Murdoch, 1971, p. 17)

Of course this attempt to see in a good light what appear to be a person's bad qualities will not always work. The person's qualities may really be bad. But to at least try is an important kind of humility—to have as one's primary disposition an attempt to see others at their best and not at their worst. We would all welcome this applied by others to our own case, and the world would be better—less hard and cruel—if this disposition became common. Not everyone possesses this disposition of just and loving attention, of course, but I think it is a virtuous trait in those who have it (as Lear came to have it) and is one that those who do not have should at least attempt to acquire. How one might make such an attempt will be discussed later in this essay.

Recognition of Luck

There is often deep insight in clichés, and one such insight is to be found in "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Many people who have attained a certain level of success and happiness in their lives—money, status, professional, or

athletic accomplishments, etc.—have a tendency to overestimate their level of actual desert for these accomplishments and thus fail to see the role played in them by what John Rawls called "luck on the natural and social lottery" (Rawls, 1971, pp. 74–75). The circumstances of one's natural genetic endowment, upbringing, and education; the fact that important mentors gave their favors to them rather than others; and many other factors over which these people had no control played a significant role in what they have accomplished. This does not mean that they should take no legitimate pride in what they have done with the hand they were dealt, but an awareness of all this good luck should make them avoid taking excessive pride in their accomplishments and have the insight and modesty to give thanks for the good fortune that helped to make them possible.

Many such people, however, not only feel no gratitude for their good fortune but come to think that their status or accomplishments make them somehow *better as human beings* than ordinary people. As the recent scandalous behavior of successful athletes illustrates, they may come to feel a special sense of entitlement to do things that mere mortals should not be allowed to do. And the larger celebrity-worshiping society itself, alas, often gives them a pass on their behavior. Even within the academic and business and legal worlds we often find this attitude present in those of great fame and accomplishment—not universal by any means, but more prevalent than it should be.

One of the worst ways in which such a self-perception of entitlement can manifest itself is the presence of a smug sense of such purity and superiority that such people begin to hold others who are poor or who have done wrong (such as Uriah Heep) in total contempt, happily accepting for them suffering out of all proportion to what—all things considered—they actually deserve. We see this in America in the attitude of many people toward those who are poor or who have committed crimes—dismissing the former as nothing but "welfare chislers" and advocating (or at least being totally indifferent to) excessive punishments or unspeakable prison conditions for the latter as no more than what they deserve.

Finally, it is all too common for those who have not done certain wrongs to feel an unjustified certainty that they are righteous and thus can hold in utter contempt those who have fallen. If one seeks to persuade them to soften their harshness by reminding them of Jesus's counsel to "let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her" (John 8:7), they will simply respond "but I am without sin with respect to the kind of sin found in drug dealers, rapists, torturers, and murderers so it is perfectly OK for me to cast the stones." They say this without any consideration of the possibility that, had they had the opportunity and the temptation, they might have done things just as

bad, and that it is not for nothing that the Lord's Prayer contains the plea "Lead us not into temptation." They are rather like those who, never having been in battle or endured torture, smugly condemn as "cowards" or "traitors" those who run from battle or who cooperate with the enemy under torture.

Consider as an example of descent from virtue into depravity the confession of Doctor Miranda in Ariel Dorfman's powerful play *Death and the Maiden.* Miranda had for many years been a conscientious physician and family man—a generally kind person. He was then asked to serve as a physician for interrogation sessions under the dictatorial regime then in power. (We are to imagine that this is Chile under Pinochet.) His role is to make sure that the interrogation is not so severe that those being interrogated will be rendered incapable of cooperation or even killed. Since it was not really possible to refuse such a request under the regime in power, he agreed and thought that his task was consistent with his role as a physician. He was at first shocked by the torture and rape that took place in the sessions, but still believed that those being treated in this way were better off with his care than if he refused to play his physician role. Soon he began to be drawn into this web of evil, however, and became a rapist himself. He described the process of his descent into evil by saying that at first he told himself that he was just a doctor saving lives by making the torture stop if he thought it would lead to death. Eventually, however, he started to participate in the torture and rape himself, and found that he really liked the freedom of acting out every fantasy he had ever had with no fear of consequences and with the support and even encouragement of all of those he worked with and for.

So here is a man who had spent most of his life as a decent human being and caring physician until, given circumstances in which he could do evil without restraint, he began raping, sodomizing, and otherwise torturing women—being able to say in his defense only that he had never killed any of them.

Dorfman's play is based on actual occurrences in Chile during the Pinochet regime. For those inclined to mistrust literature, however, some reflection on the famous Milgram Experiments would be in order (Milgram, 1974). In these experiments it was revealed that ordinary "nice" people would be willing to impose great pain upon others when normal social reinforcers against doing this were not present and when encouraged to do so by the authorities controlling the experiments. Also worth reading in this regard is Christopher R. Browning (1992) and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (1996).

In summary: Our excellences are often to some degree a function of good luck, and our goodness may be at least in part a function of our good luck in never being in circumstances that present irresistible temptations to evil. This should encourage a certain degree of humility but, given our great capacities

for self-deception, it often will not. As Nietzsche famously said, " 'I have done that' says my memory. 'I cannot have done that' says my pride, and remains inexorable. Eventually memory yields" (Nietzsche, 1989, p. 81).

Much of what I have tried to convey in this section has been well captured in this passage from Kant's (1960) *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*:

> [People] may picture themselves as meritorious, feeling themselves guilty of no such offenses as they see others burdened with; nor do they ever inquire whether good luck should not have the credit, or whether by reason of the cast of mind which they could discover, if they only would, in their own in-most nature, they would not have practiced similar vices, had not inability, temperament, training, and circumstances of time and place which serve to tempt one (matters which are not imputable) kept them out of the way of these vices. This dishonesty, by which we humbug ourselves and which thwarts the establishing of a true moral disposition in us, extends itself outwardly also to falsehood and deception of others. If this is not to be termed wickedness, it at least deserves the name of worthlessness, and is an element of the radical evil of human nature, which (inasmuch as it puts out of tune the moral capacity to judge what a man is to be taken for, and renders wholly uncertain both internal and external attribution of responsibility) constitutes the foul taint of our race.
>
> (pp. 33–34)

Iris Murdoch expressed a similar thought in saying, "We are all mortal and equally at the mercy of necessity and chance. These are the true aspects in which all men are brothers" (1971, p. 72). As a result of this susceptibility, we are all subject to failures of knowledge due to culpable failures of attention or insufficient appreciation of the role that luck has played in our lives—particularly when we are judging the wrongs of others and what suffering we may think they deserve. This shows that what might be called epistemic humility is also an important part of the mix.

In my own familiar context of criminal law, Judge Richard Posner (1995) has counseled caution and humility (without using the word) before making overly harsh judgments about prison inmates and what they deserve:

> There are different ways to look upon the inmates of prisons and jails in the United States . . . . One way is to look upon them as members of a different species, indeed as a type of vermin, devoid of human dignity and entitled to no respect. I do not myself consider the . . . inmates of American prisons and jails in that light. We should have a realistic conception of the