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Being Unimpressed with Ourselves: Reconceiving Humility

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Abstract I first sketch an account of humility as a character trait in which we are unimpressed with our good, envied, or admired features, achievements, etc., where these lack significant salience for our image of ourselves, because of the greater prominence of our limitations and flaws. I situate this view among several other recent conceptions of humility (also called modesty), dividing them between the inward-directed and outward-directed, distinguish mine from them, pose problems for each alternative account, and show how my understanding of humility captures truths present but exaggerated in several of them. Responding to some problems for my view, including what I call "Driver's Paradox" (i.e., the strangeness of someone's proclaiming 'I'm humble!'), I suggest that some over-ambitious claims about our moral responsibilities may indicate a lack of proper humility. I discuss the relationship of the character trait of humility both to what humiliates and to what humbles, concluding with consideration of the background assumptions against which, and the circumstances in which, humility may reasonably be classified as a moral virtue.

Keywords humility · modesty · underestimation · humiliation · humbling · virtues · Driver, Julia · Flanagan, Owen · Roberts, Robert · Taylor, Gabriele · Snow, Nancy

Introduction. A Conception of Humility (Modesty) as a Moral Virtue

The humble are those who are unimpressed with their own admired or envied features (or admirable or enviable ones), those who assign little prominence to their possession of characteristics in which they instead might well take pride. They are people for whom there is little personally salient in these qualities and accomplishments.[1] That is the suggestion I offer and wish here to explore. More exactly, I propose that we understand someone to be

[1] Humility, which I will treat as identical with at least some of the states we also call modesty, thus involves both affective and doxastic states, what someone cares about and also what she concentrates on intellectually. Of modesty, Nuyen insists it is "unhelpful to equate it with humility." However, he explicitly concedes that "[w]ithout further argument, I take it that humility involves an underestimation of one's achievements." (Later, he puts the point more weakly, equating humility only with a "low [not necessarily an under-] estimation of one's worth with respect to some ideal." (Nuyen, 1998, pp. 101, 108) Below, I rebut both the account of humility that Nuyen's article presupposes and the conception of modesty it defends. So, the issue should remain open whether, properly conceived, humility is the same as one of the things we name 'modesty'.

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humble about (with respect to) her being *F* (e.g., one or more of her talents, skills, and virtues, her achievements, her possessions, ancestors, and so on with other possible grounds of pride) if, only if, and to the extent that, she has a stable, deep-seated, and restrained disposition to play down in her own thinking, self-concept, and feelings – and therein to de-center, to (place in the) background, (not to stress, focus on, make much of, relish, or delight in) – the significance of her being *F* and, because of that, similarly not to stress in her self-concept her liberties, options, entitlements, and privileges.[2] She has the virtue of humility, at least, when this disposition is not excessive and is grounded not in any contemptuous dismissal of others and their talents, skills, and so on, but either in her commitment to personal moral self-improvement or in her concern that other persons and factors get due recognition (from herself and others) for their part in her having F, and also in her reasonable appreciation of the magnitude and significance of her own failures, imperfections, flaws, weaknesses, dependency, and limitations, as well as her duties and responsibilities.[3] This mental state will normally be reflected in her conduct, including her conduct toward others. She is, moreover, a humble person *tout court* just when she is humble about *enough* of her (real or self-imputed) good features and is not very proud of any of them. We can then say that she is unimpressed *with herself*.[4] (This group of features can be sufficient either because of its quantity or because of the importance of its members in comparison with that of other features.[5])

This account helps explain why, as Roberts and Wood note, the virtue of humility is opposed to the vices of conceit, vanity, egotism, haughtiness, condescension, superciliousness, pomposity, pretension, narcissism, self-importance, arrogance, hubris, impudence, insolence, etc. For no-one can manifest these flaws without being mightily impressed with herself or some of her respected attributes. Because of humility's natural connection to the project of moral self-development, it also points immediately to reasons why humility is judged a moral virtue.

[2] Driver thinks she finds a similar account in the recent literature. "Recently, G. F. Schueler has suggested that the modest [humble] person is someone who doesn't care about his or her genuine accomplishments insofar as they are his or her accomplishments." (Driver, 2001, p. 23) In fact, however, the position Schueler's text advances is different in a significant way from that Driver imputes to him. He writes, "[M]y suggestion is this: Someone who is genuinely modest ... doesn't care whether people are impressed with her for her accomplishments. That is, she lacks a certain desire or set of desires, namely, that people be impressed by her for what she has accomplished." (Schueler, 1997, pp. 478–479) The crucial issue for my account of humility/modesty, in contrast with Schueler's, is not whether or how much someone cares about others' view of her, but rather the ways in which she intellectually and affectively attends to herself. This concerns her doxastic and affective states, while Schueler designates his own "a form of desire account." (Schueler, 1997, p. 481)

Prof Yang Xiao, now of Kenyon College, has suggested to me in conversation that, at least in Confucian thought, such conduct as someone's downplaying her achievements lest certain others get insufficient credit for their contributions or others feel ashamed of themselves for lesser achievements, also counts as humility. I think these goals may be internal to some kinds of humility, but the conduct is humble only derivatively.

[3] This grounding will usually comprise both causal maintenance and justification, but it is the motivational connection I have chiefly in mind. I should make it explicit that I do not claim that someone humble about a feature or achievement cannot also be aware of, pleased with, or grateful for it. She just cannot make too much of it in her thinking about herself; it cannot, in general of itself, dominate or be salient there, though there may be reason on particular occasions for her to attend to it.

[4] "Being humble about [some] traits is not necessarily to be a humble person, since we easily overlook our failings and compartmentalize disparate aspects of our lives. In the same person, humility about flaws can easily coexist with arrogance about merits. But arrogance about merits disqualifies you from being considered a humble person." (Snow, 1995, p. 210)

[5] A humble person need not be humble about everything but if she takes great pride in her own most striking talent, or takes excessive pride in any, she can hardly count as possessing the character trait of humility.

Some Alternative Conceptions of Humility/Modesty[6]

We can classify some of the more important available views of humility or modesty as either inwardly-directed or outwardly-directed. In accounts of the first type, someone's being humble about something is seen primarily as a matter of the mental states with which she is inclined to respond to herself and her envied features. In the latter, it is thought to consist chiefly in the actions with which she is disposed to react to other people and their assessment of or contribution to her successes. My own suggestion about the nature of humility is of the first type. In this section, I will first sketch several alternative inwardly-directed conceptions of humility in the current literature, and then some outwardly-directed conceptions of humility, which take humility to be a matter chiefly of the actions someone takes in response to other people's estimation of her. In the next section, I critically evaluate some current views of both sorts.

Humility as someone's underestimating her good features Julia Driver maintains that, "The modest person underestimates his self-worth to some limited degree ... [and] is ignorant to a certain degree of his self-worth.... A modest person could still have a rather high opinion of herself, just not as high as she is entitled to have."[7] So conceived, humility consists in what Driver calls a "dogmatic disposition to underestimation of self worth," and thus involves both what Owen Flanagan helpfully calls a "strong ignorance-condition," i.e., someone's not knowing that she is modest (has the moral virtue of humility), and a "weak ignorance-condition," i.e., her not knowing her own worth and accomplishments.[8]

Humility as someone's not overestimating her good features Flanagan suggests that humility consists in a person's "nonoverestimation" of her own worth and accomplishments: "the modest person may have a perfectly accurate sense of her accomplishments and worth but she does not overestimate them. "[9] Humility thus "involves the manner in which

[6] Driver concedes that "humility is closely akin to modesty [because t]he humble person has a tendency to avoid vanity, arrogance, boastfulness, and so on." (Driver, 2001, p. 114) Nevertheless, she thinks them different because "a humble person, unlike a modest person, can paint an accurate, though perhaps unflattering, picture of herself [while t]he modest person needs to underestimate." (Driver, 2001, p. 115) Plainly, this way of distinguishing humility from modesty presupposes Driver's own underestimation account, which is no less problematic when offered explicitly as an account of modesty than it is for humility. It is strange to think modesty a virtue when it requires not simply ignorance but what Driver calls "a dogmatic disposition" to it, which seems to be epistemically vicious.

[7] Driver, 2001, pp. 18, 19.

[8] Driver, 1989, p. 378; compare Flanagan, 1996, p. 174. Also see Anscombe's interpretation of Sidgwick, to whom she attributes the view that "humility consists of underestimating your own merits." (Anscombe, 1958) In fact, Sidgwick claims only that this is "generally said" and "the common view," but rightly holds it "somewhat paradoxical" and "seem[ingly] strange" that this should be a virtue, because in "the opinions we form of ourselves ... as in other opinions we ought to aim at nothing but Truth." (Sidgwick, 1907, pp. 334, 335) What merit he attributes to what he takes to be this "common view" of humility lies in the good effects he finds in repressing our tendencies both to "self-admiration" and to demanding of others signs of their admiration for us. However, he insists both these effects need to be limited, lest they interfere with self-respect or foster insulting omissions. (Sidgwick, 1907, pp. 335, 336) In its emphasis on the dangers of wanting others' admiration, Sidgwick's view of humility resembles those of Schueler and of Roberts and Wood, discussed below. In its concern lest self-admiration prompt us to the kind of "complacency" and "contemplation of our own merits" that thwart our pondering an "ideal ... sufficiently high" (and how far short of it we fall) "as is thought to be indispensable to moral progress," his view resembles mine.

[9] Flanagan approvingly discusses this account at Flanagan, 1996, p. 176.

the modest person sees herself and experiences her worth and accomplishments ... [and] there is no need for the modest person to be ignorant of her worth and accomplishments."[10]

Humility as someone's knowing herself and her good features Humility is sometimes thought to consist in a person's self-knowledge, accurate appreciation or view of herself and her features, etc., especially, in comparison with others. According to Norvin Richards, "Humility turns out to be a matter of having oneself in proper perspective ... [which consists in] understanding those things [i.e., "yourself and what you have done"] rightly, in the face of various temptations to exaggerate. It is not puzzling why this accuracy should be virtuous, especially if it is hard-won."[11] In a related way, a religious writer maintains that humility "leads people to an orderly love of themselves based on a true appreciation of their position with respect to God and their neighbors.... Moral humility recognizes equality with others. Yet humility is not only opposed to pride; it is also opposed to immoderate self-abjection."[12]

All these I classify as inwardly-directed accounts of being humble, because they focus on the mental states with which someone responds to her own good features. We can also distinguish several outwardly-directed conceptions of humility. They locate it in the behavior with which someone is disposed to react to people's evaluations of her, of her good features, or of her own contributions to having them.

Humility as humble deportment Humility (modesty) might be thought to consist in someone's exhibiting certain (humble) "behavior" or in "understatement" of her good features in dealing with others. Driver mentions but rejects both of these. (I treat them as one because understatement is itself a form of verbal behavior.)

Humility as unconcern with others' opinion Robert Roberts and Jay Wood have recently argued, "Humility, as vanity's opposite, is a striking or unusual unconcern to be well regarded by others, and thus a kind of emotional insensitivity to the issues of status.... The humble person is not ignorant of her value or status [here the authors explicitly distance themselves from Driver's account], but unconcerned about it and thus inattentive to it."[13]

[10] Flanagan, 1996, pp. 176, 178.

[11] Richards, 2001, pp. 816–817. He puts the point a little differently earlier. In his book, he took humility to be a kind of self-understanding that consists in "an inclination to keep one's accomplishments, traits, and so on in unexaggerated perspective, even if stimulated to exaggerate." (Richards, 1992, p. 8)

Snow reasons to a similar conclusion: a person's "knowledge of [her] limitations is proper to humility. Consequently, humility is a form of self-knowledge." (Snow, 1995, p. 211; also, at the same place: "To be a humble person is to recognize your limitations.") However, the conclusion does not follow from the stated premise, as someone may be overly impressed with her own skill, sped, ancestry, or whatever, while also seeing their limits. I can know that many people are or have more *F* than I do, where *F* is a feature or achievement I value, while still making too much of, preening over, the extent to which I am or have F. In any case, in what seems to be her canonical account, Snow offers a different view: "Humility can be defined as the disposition to allow the awareness of and concern about your limitations to have a realistic influence on your attitudes and behavior." (Snow, 1995: p. 210) This latter position has some similarities to my own, though I think it more accurate to say that someone is humble insofar as, because of certain moral commitments, she is disposed not to emphasize her good points in light of her acknowledged limitations, failures, etc.

[12] Hardon, 1985, p. 183.

[13] Roberts and Wood, 2003, p. 261. Also see Schueler: "The modest person is indifferent to how people regard her for her accomplishments (i.e., [entitled to credit] as producer of these accomplishments).... She will, as I said, simply not care whether others are impressed by her for her accomplishments, skills, or whatever." (Schueler, 1997, p. 480) Again, "A modest person lacks a certain desire (the desire to be evaluated highly for her accomplishments)." (Schueler, 1997, p. 483)

They see humility as opposed not only to the vice of vanity, however, but also to that of arrogance, adding that "the person with the humility of unarrogance [sic] ... is relatively inattentive to the ego-exalting potency of his entitlements."[14] (Note that Roberts and Wood are discussing the epistemic virtue of humility, which may be different from the moral virtue.[15])

Humility as someone's equitably distributing credit for her achievements For A. T. Nuyen, "to be modest is to be equitable with respect to one's achievements... [Such a person is] equitable when it comes to self-evaluation.... Being equitable, modest people want to proportion [sic] the credit to all those who have a share in one's success."[16] So conceived, someone's humility is her treating other people justly in according them recognition for their part in contributing to her successes, for "an achievement is almost invariably not

[14] Their final, compound conception of the intellectual virtue of humility seems to be captured in this passage.

> What then is intellectual humility? ... [Our] analysis suggests it is an unusually low dispositional concern for the kind of status that accrues to persons who are viewed by their intellectual communities as intellectually talented, accomplished, and skilled, especially where such concern is muted or sidelined by intrinsic intellectual concerns – in particular the concern for knowledge with its various attributes of truth, justification, warrant, coherence, precision, and significance. It is also a very low concern for intellectual domination in the form of leaving the stamp of one's mind on disciples, one's field, and future intellectual generations. As the opposite of intellectual arrogance, humility is a disposition not to make unwarranted intellectual entitlement claims on the basis of (supposed) superiority or excellence. (Roberts & Wood, 2003, p. 271)

So conceived humility, (a) when it contrasts with arrogance as well as (b) when it contrasts with vanity, is seen as essentially outwardly-directed, consisting in someone's concern with her claims against others in form (a), and in her concern with own status in comparison with theirs in form (b).

Note that Roberts and Wood also hold that humility consists in something different insofar as it contrasts with vanity from that in which it consists insofar as it contrasts with arrogance. It is problematic to hold that humility really is irreducibly doubled in the way to which Roberts and Wood appear to be committed. If it is then, notice, there is nothing in which humility consists, only that in which it consists in relation (i.e., in contrast) with one thing or another. This, however, is problematic, raising the question of just what is this 'it' that contrasts with both? In a similar way, Hartmann seems to have held more generally that each moral virtue is really a synthesis of opposed values, presenting this as an interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. "*Aidos* [roughly, humility] is the capacity to be ashamed of oneself, and at the same time it is the limitation of shame, the latter as opposed to the conduct of the bashful, the former to that of the shameless.... Greatness of soul in particular is perhaps the purest example of such a decomposition [of virtue into a synthesis of contrasting traits] in its dual position with regard to smallness of soul and to vanity; in opposition to the former it is justified moral pride, self-respect, in opposition to the latter, [it is] the modest consciousness of one's own moral being." (Hartmann, 2003, reading p. 414 as supplemented at p. lvi) Likewise, "the seemingly antinomic relation between humility and pride is therefore easily broken down.... [G]enuine pride and genuine humility evidently belong necessarily together, re-enforce each other, and can exist only in synthesis.... Each by itself is unstable, is without balance." (Hartmann, 2003, pp. 300, 301)

[15] How is the moral virtue of humility, which is my focus, related to the intellectual virtue of humility, which is the focus of Roberts and Wood? One possibility is that there are two traits, T1 and T2, such that T1 is a moral virtue and T2 is an intellectual virtue. Another is that there is just one trait, T, which is excellent in two different ways, both epistemically and morally. I suspect the latter is more correct, and that the epistemic virtue of humility is just being humble about certain things. If so, then there is more substantive disagreement between their side and mine than is first apparent.

[16] Nuyen, 1998, pp. 106, 108.

entirely due to one's own effort.... Equity requires that one acknowledges the role that other people and favorable circumstances play. "[17]

Humility as someone's abasing herself before other people We should note that not all outwardly-directed views of humility are modern. Aquinas may have held such a view, as when he wrote that humility consists in "a praiseworthy self-abasement to the lowest place," or, similarly, that "it belongs properly to humility that a man restrain himself from being borne towards that which is above him."[18] That is, it is a matter of low aspiration, of self-diffidence (as contrasted with self-confidence), of voluntary and cheerful subjection or submission to others.[19]

Problems in These Accounts of Humility/Modesty

Humility does not consist in underestimating oneself Someone's underestimating her accomplishments, skills, talents, etc., is not required for her to be humble, *pace* Driver. A person might recognize but still be humble about them, taking little pride in them. Nor is her underestimating them sufficient for humility, for she might nonetheless make a great fuss of those she thinks she has, boasting of them, puffing herself up, swaggering, etc. The issue, pace Driver (and Flanagan), seems to be her *affective and volitional* response to her self-ascribed good features, not her *beliefs* about them. In addition, of course, we normally think that moral virtue ought to be cultivated, truth sought, and self-knowledge deepened.[20] Yet, someone who cultivates the self-underestimation of herself that Driver calls humility would flee not just true belief but self-knowledge.[21]

[17] Nuyen, 1998, p. 107. While this passage makes mention of the contribution of "favorable circumstances" in addition to that of other people, and this phrase is repeated later on the page with one reference to "luck" as an example, the bulk of Nuyen's account is that modesty is giving credit to other *people* and not to any impersonal contributions. More important, because Nuyen follows Aristotle in insisting that equity is a kind of justice, it is inconsistent for him also to hold that modesty can extend to crediting luck and other impersonal factors. For, as modesty is a form of equity and equity a kind of justice, it follows that, since justice deals only with relations among persons, so too must modesty be so restricted.

[18] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 161, art. 1, 2.

[19] Also see Aquinas, *S.T.*, II-II, q. 161, art 6, on Sts. Benedict (*Rule*, ch. 7), Anselm, and Matthew.

[20] "And so he [Pelagius] decides, and rightly decides, that humility should rather be ranged on the side of truth, not of falsehood. Whence it follows that he who said [in Scripture at 1 John, 1], 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,' must... not be thought to have spoken falsehood for the sake of [maintaining his] humility... . [B]y the addition of 'the truth is not in us' he [the Scriptural author] clearly shows... that it is not at all true if we say we have no sin, lest humility, if placed on the side of falsehood, should lose the reward of truth." (Augustine, *Treatise of Nature & Grace*, ch. 38 on alternative division: ch. 34) Driver's underestimation conception of modesty/humility does not quite "range" it with falsehood. However, by making humility a "virtue of ignorance," it does displace the virtue from "the side of truth" and entails that someone who gains that virtue therein) "lose[s] the reward of truth."

Driver leaves it unclear just why humility should be a virtue. Her final view seems to be that "a tendency to rank and estimate [one's own] worth relative to [that of] others... is destructive [and t]he modest person is one who does not spend a lot of time [in such] ranking... [possessing] a charm similar to that of an unaffected person." (Driver, 2001, p. 27) However, to make such "charm" the basis for classifying humility as a moral virtue is to proceed down the Humean path where any trait "agreeable to others" suffices and many trivial features of personality and comportment get promoted. Moral virtues are usually thought to be human excellences and, Hume notwithstanding, this requires something more (and different) from what it takes to be a good party guest.

[21] Flanagan makes this point at Flanagan, 1996, p. 176–177; for Driver's response, see Driver, 2001, p. 28–30.

... nor in not overestimating oneself The fact that someone is not as good a *R* (or as good at *V*-ing, or as good in *Q*) as she thinks does not preclude her being humble (and acting humbly), since she may nonetheless play down her (self-attributed) accomplishments, compliments, reputation with a respect to her being a *R* (or her *V*-ing or her being *Q*). So, *pace* Flanagan, someone's overestimating her good attributes is compatible with her being humble. Also, someone might accurately see her achievements but still make too much of them, strutting about, for example, or being disposed to do so. Moreover, Flanagan's "nonoverestimation" view says too little about what *is* true of the humble person, especially about the attitudinal responses that *constitute* her being humble. (It also lacks detail on what her "experiences" need to be.) Plainly, having accurate evaluative beliefs about oneself does not suffice for humility.

... nor in self-knowledge, with or without its results Any moral virtue ought be a character trait, a disposition to feel, want, prefer, and choose, not simply a doxastic or cognitive state. Likewise, telling us only to what sort of attitudes (e.g., appropriate self-love) humility leads is not yet to say what it *is* essentially. In any case, accurate self-appraisal is neither necessary nor sufficient for humility, contrary to this view.

... nor in any form of deportment Driver correctly rejects these accounts because neither accommodates the obvious fact that someone may merely act modest without actually being modest.[22]

... nor in unconcern with others' opinion The counter-examples of Narcissus's complete self-absorption and the Nietzschean Overman's (or Master class's) disdain for others' slights, praise, or fawning, suggest that this condition is not sufficient for humility.[23] Roberts and Woods indicate that someone's unconcern with others' opinion of her and with her influence on them constitutes humility, "especially" when born of love of truth and justification. However, this undermines the counter-examples only if we assume that people as self-engrossed as Narcissus or as uninterested in others as is the Overman cannot be even partially motivated by interest in truth. There is little evident justification for that assumption. The problem here is that humility is not, as they hold, something that consists chiefly in how someone responds to others' view of her and her successes, but rather in how she herself responds in her own mind.

[22] Driver, 2001, p. 18.

[23] Driver offers a similar counterexample in arguing against Schueler's position that the humble ("modest") person does not care for others' opinions of her. She also suggests that Schueler's view cannot accommodate the person, perhaps a political leader, who rightly wants to be admired because the success of her good cause depends in part on her own ability to command admiration. (Driver, 2001, p. 23) This example may also cause trouble for the position of Roberts and Wood. (Note, however, that while such a person does make much of her good qualities, insofar as she does so for a special reason and contrary to her inclination, my view does allow her to count as humble.)

At one point, Schueler says even a "complete misanthrope," who does not care what people think about anything, would lack humility if she "still cares whether she evaluates herself highly because of her accomplishments," clarifying that, in the relevant clause of his preferred definition, "[the term] 'people' should be read as 'anyone', not as 'others'." (Schueler, 1997, p. 479, note #23) The narcissist counter-example will not work against this sense of unconcern. Nevertheless, the mark of the humble person is not that she does not care whether she prides herself on her good features, as Schueler thinks, but that she does not so pride herself. Someone who exalts herself in this way is vain, not humble, and that she does not care only makes it worse, not better.

... nor in a person's equitably apportioning to others credit for her achievements Nuyen's conception implausibly allows a humble person to give credit to others for their contributions to her success, but still to boast about it and gloat over her own hand in it. For that matter, the truly humble person, unimpressed with herself and her success, may nonetheless fail, as from innocent inattention or miscalculation, accurately to accord recognition to others. What matters for her humility is not that she gives others scant recognition (for example, by accident), but that she does not do it from vanity, does not act from being greatly impressed with herself and focused on her own enviable features.

... nor in self-abasement Some of the things to which Aquinas points are not internal to the moral virtue of humility as such, but are parts of specifically religious life.[24] It is when occurring in this context, for example, that he praises "subject[ing]" oneself to superiors and even to equals and inferiors. Similarly, Benedict's rules are for certain cenobite monks (i.e., those in monastery), and the same is true of treatments in St. Anselm and others. Moreover, even in this sort of context, some of the conduct praised is plainly important only as indicative of or conducive to virtue, and is not morally virtuous as such. (Think, for example, of Benedict's Rules for laconic speech, quiet voice, lowering one's eyes, resistance to laughter, and so on.)[25]

Humility as Being Unimpressed with Oneself: Contemporary, Historical, and Theoretical Context

The view of humility offered here bears some resemblance to other contemporary accounts, but with important differences. Gabriele Taylor defines humility by saying that "the man who accepts his lowly position as due him is the man who has humility."[26] Max Scheler called humility "a constant inner pulsation of spiritual readiness to serve at the core of our existence, an attitude of serving towards all things ... letting go of our self ... voluntary self-effacement."[27] James Spiegel suggests "the humble person's 'low self-regard' may be taken in a performative sense, such that one *plays the role* of the unworthy or *assumes* the position of the lowly through her behavior, words, or self-conception."[28] Nancy Snow writes that "To be humble is to recognize your limitations, to take them seriously, and thereby to foster a realism in attitudes and behavior regarding self and others. Humility can be defined as the disposition to allow the awareness of and concern about your limitations to have realistic influence on your attitudes and behavior."[29]

[24] *S.T.*, II-II, q. 161, art. 6, obj. 1, 3, 4.

[25] This applies especially to exaggerated recommendations in Benedict's "Rule", such as that one (everyone?) ought "to believe and acknowledge oneself viler than all" and "to think oneself worthless and unprofitable for all purposes." (Aquinas, *S.T.*, II-II, q. 161, art. 6, obj. 1) Note that, taken literally, the former rule would necessarily enjoin most people to false belief. Presumably, this is also the charitable way to understand such a text as the "Litany of Humility" attributed to the early 20th Century cardinal, Merry del Val. It contains such lines as these: "From the desire[s] of being esteemed, ... consulted, ... From the fear[s] of being humiliated, ... despised, ... ridiculed, Deliver me, Jesus" and "That others may be chosen and I set aside, ... preferred to me in everything, ... [and even] become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should, Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it." (Socias (1995), p. 304)

[26] Taylor, 1985, p. 17.

[27] Scheler, 1981, p. 210.

[28] Spiegel, 2003, p. 133.

[29] Snow, 1995, p. 210.

However, Taylor's account seems to exclude any possibility of humility in the highly esteemed and well-placed, who may most need it. Scheler's overstresses the possible impact of someone's humility on her actions and in her relation to others (for example, in disposing her to serve them). This is to the neglect of our question of that in which it essentially consists. Spiegel's proposed understanding of humility does not sufficiently exclude pretense and self-deception. And Snow's does not go far enough, because someone's recognizing her limitations is consistent with her also overemphasizing her good features. None of these views recognizes that humility consists chiefly in internal dispositions of a largely non-cognitive nature.

Michael Ridge maintains, "being disposed to de-emphasize one's accomplishments [and other features] is necessary but not sufficient for modesty." It becomes sufficient, he thinks, when someone is so disposed "for the right reasons," which are that she does not "car[e] too much about whether she is esteemed" and "gets everything to which she is entitled," nor too little about whether others underrate her accomplishments or overlook her responsibility for them.[30] She is modest only when she is "disposed to de-emphasize both her accomplishments and any [other] traits that might be taken as entitling her to special benefits," where this disposition "consists of two elements. It includes [both] a disposition to refrain from going out of your way to stress the significance of your accomplishments, and ... a disposition to correct others if they have an inflated conception of [them or] ... of your responsibility for them." A person's humility, then, is her tendency to de-emphasize her accomplishments by "going out of her way" neither "to emphasize" them nor to correct others' underestimation.[31]

Still, the differences between Ridge's view and mine are sharp and significant. Ridge misconstrues humility/modesty as a second-order matter of how someone responds to others' actual or possible judgment of her accomplishments, etc., and her responsibility for them. True humility, however, characterizes someone's own first-order attitude toward these things. It is fundamentally inwardly-directed, not outwardly-directed: a matter of how large these matters loom in a person's thinking about herself, of how much and how she cares about them herself, not of how much she cares about others' judgment of them, let alone, what she is inclined to *do* to correct them.

Historically, a conception like the one suggested here developed and won endorsement within Christianity because of some specific Christian doctrines. Our natural 'endowment' is there seen as really a gift from God. Hence, insofar as someone's good action comes from her natural gifts, the act is more to God's credit than to hers. (Note that a person's declining to take credit for her good features is a principal way of downplaying them and their significance.) In contrast, insofar as they are morally culpable, our vicious actions come from our free choices, not from God's doing. Any of us falls infinitely short of God's goodness and power. God gives us life so we can, of our own will, pursue an integrated and pervasive orientation back to God, which is a lifelong project. Any of our isolated achievements (including acquired virtues) pale, then, into comparative insignificance. Likewise, all of us fall far short of what human nature can achieve morally and, Christians believe, *has* already achieved in the lives of Jesus and Mary. These two are traditionally exemplars of humility. As each is regarded to be sinless (and Jesus at least is partly conscious of his freedom from sin), their humility could not of course consist in stressing their moral flaws. However, my account allows a person's stress on her limitations and nonmoral failures to count as humility, and each of these exemplars both has human

[30] Ridge, 2000, pp. 271, 275, 281.
[31] Ridge, 2000, pp. 273, 277.

limitations and knows it. It is important that the theorist accommodate paradigms of humility in this way, whether or not she accepts the theological views in the background. Nevertheless, humility as here conceived could make sense as a moral virtue even separated from some of these religious and metaphysical specifics. In the ancient world, of course, Socrates seems to have exemplified humility in the sense here defended, and the Stoics admired him for it.

While Hume notoriously mocked the religious view that humility is a moral virtue, we should note that humility as conceived here could well fit his own criteria of being not only useful but agreeable both to oneself and others.[32] Any such secular position can also justify, even noninstrumentally, an attitude in which the subject properly counts her good features and achievements as little, and properly concentrates (especially, in a motivating way, rather than in one that Richards derides as a dispiriting and "depressing") on her faults and the need for improvement.

This Approach Captures a Truth in Each of the Rejected Conceptions, while Avoiding Its Difficulties

A person's being (moderately) unimpressed with her good features may (but *need* not) help *cause* the doxastic (even "dogmatic") underestimation or ignorance of them that Driver sees as modesty, though here again the connection is not a necessary one. As we conceive it, genuine humility should help keep a person from overestimating herself and her achievements, etc., as Flanagan sees, but this is not its defining characteristic. Richards is right to think that accurate (comparative and noncomparative) self-appraisal is also likely to characterize the humble person though, *contra* his claim, it does not have to. Someone's downplaying her good features in a temperate way removes some obstacles to accurate self-appraisal.

Such humility may well lead to ordered love of self and neighbor, to equality, and so on, without *being* them. A person's assigning her good features little prominence in her self-concept, etc., is likely to (but *need* not) lead her to act in characteristic ways, including understate her good qualities when conversing with people, though it may not have this effect. The disposition in someone (temperately) to play down her own good features should, and often will, ground and motivate her to be unconcerned about others' estimation of herself and her achievements, etc., as it will often incline her to accord other people due credit for their own contributions. So there is truth in the claims of Roberts and Wood, and in Nuyen's as well.

Moreover, the spiritual projects of self-abjection envisioned by Saints Thomas Aquinas and Benedict go beyond the moral virtue of humility. As described, many of these aims and projects are excessive (or, perhaps, defective) in ways that render them both morally and intellectually vicious; hence, there must be an element of pretense here, as when a pitcher throws *as if* trying to hit the backstop in order more reliably to hit the catcher's glove. Likewise, many of us may need to live *as if* we were really contemptible, if we are to overcome our tendency to excessive self-esteem and thus achieve the mean wherein lies our real objective and true virtue. The same applies, I think, to Anselm's calls to "acknowledge oneself contemptible, ... to convince others of this, ... to wish them to believe it, ... [and] to love being [contemptuously] treated."[33] Nevertheless, given their assumptions and context (which I share), we *do* merit contempt for much of what we do and fail to do. Moreover,

[32] I find these criteria of Hume's highly problematic, for reasons I make clear below.
[33] See Aquinas, *S.T.*, II-II, q. 161, art. 6, obj. 3.

these attitudes and even projects may make sense and, *pace* Richards, should not be dismissed as "self-loathing" (which Aquinas, et al., would surely deem a sin) or as "depressing" (which they would correctly regard as too passive and self-indulgent a response).

Finally, Taylor, Scheler, Spiegel, Snow, and Ridge come still closer to capturing humility. To the extent someone is reasonably unimpressed with herself and her good features and focuses instead on recognizing her weakness and correcting her flaws, she is more disposed and likely to "accept [a] lowly position" as "suitable," to "let go of the self" and stand poised to serve, to act as if "unworthy," to be more realistic about herself in light of her acknowledged limitations, and to play down her successes not only in her own mind but also by taking little interest in stressing them to other people or revising their assessment upwards.

A Puzzle in Self-Attribution (Driver's 'Paradox')

It may be objected that my account of humility/modesty could allow someone to say and even believe that she is humble, which some find paradoxical. Indeed, both Driver's underestimation account, and the understatement account she rejects, seem motivated largely by noticing that there is something quite "odd" in proclaiming 'I am humble.'[34] Someone who says *just* this does therein give us reason to doubt the truth of what she says, to doubt that she is humble. That is because her statement manifests none of the downplaying of her good points in acknowledgment of her limitations and failings that, on our account, is the core of humility.

Nevertheless, context matters here. We are less likely to doubt her humility if she proceeds, for example, to add:

(1) '... but humility is not really (much of) a virtue,'[35] or
(2) '... but I have a lot to be humble about,' or
(3) '... but I have few other important virtues, talents, etc.'

Any of these indicates she thinks as a humble person does, emphasizing her bad points in her own mind rather than her good ones.[36] Still, Driver is correct that something seems "odd", paradoxical, in the humble person's even *believing* she is humble, whether or not she says it (to anyone).[37] True, if this belief largely exhausts her relevant thought about herself, then it follows that she is *not* humble, on our account. That is because she is not

[34] Immediately after stating her "'underestimation' account of modesty," Driver begins her defense with the following claim. "A desired feature of any account of modesty is that it explain the oddity of [the utterance] ... 'I am modest,' [which] seems to be oddly self-defeating." She suggests that her uttering it would make some think she "was joking" and others that she "was being nonsensical." (Driver, 2001, p. 17)

[35] Flanagan makes the related point that the world's fastest runner may know her comparative speed, but nonetheless be modest because she thinks this is "less significant than others do" or owing largely to luck. (Flanagan, 1996, p. 176) Notice, however, that this response concerns her knowledge or ignorance of her good features and accomplishments (what Flanagan calls "the weak ignorance condition") rather than her knowing/not knowing that she is humble/modest. Driver's paradox, in contrast, has the latter, "strong ignorance condition," as its focus.

[36] For more considerations against the purported paradox, see Flanagan, 1996, pp. 173–175.

[37] Benjamin Franklin was aware of this problem. He worried that his pride was so great that "even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility." (Franklin, in Hooke, 1999, p. 162–169. I am grateful to Prof. Harper for this quotation.) Could Franklin have been correct? Might someone be proud of her humility? Perhaps so. If, as I think, a humble person is one who is generally humble, sufficiently humble about enough things, then perhaps it could be that her humility is one of the things about which she is not humble (and even proud).

someone who, in viewing herself, tends to downplay her good qualities in light of her bad ones.

Again, let us look to varying contexts. Suppose we are reading Jones's diary. We might doubt her humility when we read 'I am humble,' but change our opinion as we read other entries where she enumerates her faults or dwells on them. Suppose we are acting as Jones's psychological counselor or moral/spiritual advisor. We might ask her to list her good qualities, and recognize she is correct and honest in including humility, while also recognizing her humility in her fuller self-assessment. (In these cases, notice, we *draw* the subject's attention to her good points, which is consistent with her humbly tending on her own not to dwell on them.)

In a similar way, there is something odd in the idea that a humble person might say or think, 'I am excellent in these ways...' Again, contextual features like those above can accommodate such cases, allowing the humble some recognition of their own good features, so long as they do not stress them or take much pride in them. We should also take note of such formalities as "I humbly ask your forgiveness."[38] Someone can, of course, act V-ly without being a characteristically V person, where V is a virtue. So, for someone thus to say that she is acting humbly is not necessarily for her to affirm that she is (characteristically) humble. Still, there is something odd and off-putting to our ears in someone's thus pointing out the humility of her own behavior. The case is complicated by the fact that this formula has come to sound so stuffy that it is all the more ironic that it seems to laud the speaker's own modesty. Presumably, however, what has now calcified into a cliché was originally a genuine act of self-abasement, of a person's humbling herself before another, not one of praising her conduct (and, by implication, herself). Understood in this way, the remark in its original robustness may provide another counterexample to Driver's paradox.

I take no stand here against Driver's main contention that some virtues require ignorance rather than knowledge. Plainly, such epistemic virtues as intellectual courage, discipline, patience, perseverance, modesty, and steadfastness, presuppose that their subject is still moving toward belief, or is shakeable in it, rather than having full possession of knowledge about a given matter. Further, the traditional theological virtues of faith (confidence in the truth of God's assertions) and hope (trusting in God's reliability in keeping promises) presuppose that the subject does not know certain things. Note, however, that these are all what we might call 'contextual virtues', that is, they are excellent ways of responding to situations where various cognitive limitations are assumed. Within those circumstances, these virtues are to be cultivated. That is not to say that the cognitive limitations themselves are goods, things to be cultivated or sought. By contrast, if Driver were correct that humility/modesty consisted in a kind of underestimation ("ignorance"), then to strive to attain it would be to seek a kind of ignorance.

An Objection to Conceiving Humility as Being Unimpressed with Oneself

What I have called 'Driver's paradox' could be construed as a counter-example to my account of humility, which allows that a humble person might know her good features and even recognize that she is humble. My response to Driver thus constitutes a partial defense of my position. I will here treat just one additional objection: that the disposition I call humility is not a virtue but a pathological condition. Against this contention, I wish to apply some work of philosopher Robin Dillon, though I do not claim that she would endorse this

[38] Snow, 1995, pp. 203, 204.

employment of her arguments. Though Dillon barely mentions humility as such (or the disposition with which I identify it), I think humility may be a causal (perhaps even a logical) precondition of several phenomena she values.[39] These include such backwards-justified matters as deserved *self-reproach* and deserved *self-punishment*. "[B]eing hard on oneself... isn't [always] pathological or egocentric.... The power and persistence of negative self-assessments manifest the value one places both on the things one has harmed and on being a certain kind of person.... [I]n feeling ashamed one holds onself accountable for betraying one's standards and values."[40] The same holds true, I should say, in being humble. As Dillon notes, self-reproach and self-punishment can be good to the extent that they: (a) reaffirm virtues and norms that the agent has sometimes violated, (b) *preserve the continuity of the agent's self* and integrity when she renews her affirmation of consistent standards, (c) help to enable and *justify the agent's self-respect* by manifesting her continued commitment to decent moral principles (resisting the temptation to revise her standards to match her conduct), and (d) motivate the agent's *repentance*, *atonement*, and *self-improvement*.

Thus, while some people will regard as a bad thing someone's appreciating her moral faults in the ways I see as a part of humility, Dillon seems to me closer to the truth in finding it valuable and appropriate for a person, within bounds, to "be hard on [her]self." Plainly, as I have indicated throughout, it is necessary to rule out as instances of genuine humility a person's excessive, obsessive, or dispiriting focus on her own flaws or limitations. That is not moral virtue but psychological pathology. In any case, we should note today some forms of consequentialism and neo-Kantianism are also very demanding in ways that could in principle lead to despair and even self-loathing. Shelly Kagan has argued that some neo-Kantian positions may be very 'demanding' morally in a way similar to radical utilitarianism, and some have claimed that Kant's "imperfect duties" exclude any supererogation, making for a very demanding morality.[41] I do not mean to endorse all this, and below enter some reservations about overly demanding conceptions of morality on the grounds that they may be contrary to humility. My point here is simply that there is a virtuous modesty in recognizing the limits of one's moral role, not arrogating to ourselves the task of perfecting the universe, and some of those who spread blame for the world's shortcomings may manifest this virtue's absence.

An Implication of My Account: Modesty about Moral Tasks

Although, as conceived here, the humble stress their own moral responsibilities and play down their liberties, privileges, and rights, my account can also reveal the elements of immoral *hubris*, self-importance, arrogance, and audacity within some technophiles' expectation that they can eliminate human ills. Further, it shows what can be not just dangerous but vicious in their impatience. Likewise, it can illuminate what is presumptuous in the extreme, 'overdemanding' utilitarian view (found notoriously in Peter Unger and Peter Singer, but also approached by such Kantians as John Hare) that we are at fault morally so long as anyone suffers whom we could have saved without causing even more suffering. To think we have such extensive obligations is not just moral error; it can reflect hubris (in the form of over-ambition) in the moral life, and thus can itself be vicious.

[39] Dillon, 2001, pp. 69–71, 73.
[40] Dillon, 2001, p. 69.
[41] See Kagan (1984, 1989) and Hale (1991). Kant himself makes his theory sound highly demanding, as when he writes that, for any person, "his duty at each instant is to do all the good in his power." (*Religion within the Bounds of Reason, Ak* p. 72)

This problem is not limited to explicitly moral reasoning. Along similar lines, Judge Richard Posner advocates a form of "pragmatic adjudication," which holds that it is the responsibility of the (presumably only appellate) judge to determine the law by "weigh[ing] the [comparative] consequences" of various decisions: "his responsibility is to use the resources of text, history, and precedent to help him reach practical results that are responsive to the needs of the present day."[42] Against this, however, we need to remind ourselves that the judge's responsibilities in her professional role are not this capacious, and this view of jurisprudence arrogates to the judge powers far beyond and in tension with the essential limited, and limit*ing* one of figuring out the meaning and application of texts and precedents. As is true of an umpire in baseball, the long-term consequences of the judge's determinations are beyond her proper concern or purview.

A kind of moral modesty (i.e., modesty about the moral realm), usually overlooked nowadays, involves our recognizing the limits of our own moral tasks. When someone deliberates in the manner of the overdemanding moralist, her agency (there conceived, demeaningly, merely as causation), her actions, and their effects, all loom too large in her moral vision. There can be a kind of moral self-importance and self-centeredness in those who often accuse advocates of a more limited view of our moral duties – especially, believers in so-called moral side-constraints – of that vice.[43] The virtuous will want to do more than they are required to do. However, it is no virtue to think it wrong not to do more, and that error may indicate moral arrogance.

Still, the person of genuine benevolence is never content with (and therein complacent or self-satisfied about) her own virtue. Precisely qua benevolent, she is directed at and focused on others' welfare (including her serving them well), not on her own virtue. She is not interested only in *the goodness of* her desires (preferences, etc.), but even more in *the goods that* she desires. That is *not* to say that she ought to see her virtue as merely of *instrumental* importance to achieving good results. Rather, being focused on another's welfare is itself *part* (constituent) of her being (virtuously) benevolent toward her. As David Ross saw, the moral virtues are non-instrumentally desirable, even if also instrumentally desirable.[44] The nature of the virtues is such that someone's own virtue never properly serves as a resting point for her. Moral ambition is itself virtuous, but only within due limits.

Humiliation and Humbling

Humiliating someone is treating that person (another or oneself) as having lower status than she does. It degrades its victim. It might seem that humiliation is an appropriate response to those with inflated self-images, but it is not, because it consists not simply in treating someone as having lower status than she *thinks* she has, but as having lower status than she in fact has. So, not all that someone finds humiliating really is; sometimes what she considers *infra dig*. is just treating her more realistically than she would like, refusing to play along with her inflated view of herself.

Still, it is often morally objectionable to respond to someone with an inflated self-image by treating her in a way designed to make it all too obvious that the agent esteems her less than she does herself. It may be an immoral and ineffective way of deflating her

[42] Posner, 2002.
[43] See, e.g., Pettit, 1997.
[44] Note that, while they are non-instrumentally desirable, *pace* Hurka, virtues cannot be intrinsically good. (Hurka, 2000, ch. 1) That is because anything's being a virtue depends on and derives from its making its bearer somehow good. (Aristotle, *N.E.*, bk. II, chap. 6)

pretensions. The recipient is likely to perceive the treatment as unkind and contemptuous, and she may be correct. Though the agent's conduct need not be contemptuous, it may well be an unkind response, insensitive if not malicious. For this and other reasons, such conduct can breed resentment and so stifle its recipient's moral and doxastic reform. Alternatively, as the Ninth Edition of Webster's dictionary points out, "humiliating" (s.v.) behavior can be "extremely destructive to another's self-respect." I can be humbled by circumstances (see below), but humiliating me, in its literal use, requires a personal agent. Where 'humility' etymologically stems from *humus* (earth, soil), so that a humble person sees herself as lowly, humiliation goes further. It degrades someone. It is, as we say, 'treating her like dirt.'

As being humbled is not the same as being humiliated, neither is it the same as *becoming humble*. Humbling experiences do not automatically suffice to make a person humble, but they can facilitate and provide some warrant for humility.[45] Snow distinguishes two senses of 'humility' and suggests a related distinction among "humbling experiences." First, "'Narrow humility'... is humility about specific personal traits perceived as deficiencies"; in contrast, "'existential humility' ... goes beyond [such narrow humility] ... to include an aspect of the human condition in general, human finitude." Likewise, "To be humbled in the narrow sense is to be appropriately pained by or to feel sorrow or dejection because of the awareness of personal deficiencies," and "to be humbled in the existential sense is to be made aware of the limitations of the human condition."[46] Her own personal traits are not the only things about which a person can be humble, in my view. Nor do I think we ought so closely to tie being humble*d* to feeling sorrowful or dejected. Rather, our humbling experiences are ones that more dramatically confront us with the limits even to our good features, with our failings, faults, and so on, in such a way that we come to see ourselves as (metaphorically) low, closer to the *humus* that gives the term its name. This can and ought, though it need not, lead people concerned with their moral improvement to downplay their merits and focus more on the limitations and flaws in themselves.

Nicolai Hartmann, who holds an extreme version of a view like mine, wrongly claims that we ought not be humbled by others' goodness. First defining modesty in regard to other people as "reticence in the presence of [their] worth, due to the consciousness of one's own unworthiness," he says, "What modesty is in relation to others, humility is as an inner form of character itself ... the consciousness of falling infinitely short of the mark, in which all comparison with others is ignored. It measures one's own moral being by perfection, as this is understood, by divinity, as the moral ideal." On this basis, he avers, "man does not feel humility in the presence of man – that would be false humility, self-degradation, servility."[47] The humble person is unimpressed with herself because she knows and is struck by how seriously she falls short. However, *pace* Hartmann, the standard need not be an absolute one – "perfection" – and there is little reason to insist it cannot be properly occasioned by reflection on human exemplars. This might be justified and humbling admiration rather than "self-degradation, servility."

What Grounds Are There to Consider Humility a Moral Virtue?

A moral virtue is a trait that normally helps make people, either constitutively or causally, good morally (that is, virtuous in their moral relationships). A trait can still be a virtue because of this general tendency, even if it fails to make that characteristic contribution in a

[45] "Someone who has been humbled... will not necessarily become a humble person." (Snow, 1995, p. 219)
[46] Snow, 1995, pp. 207–209.
[47] Hartmann, 2003, pp. 299, 300.

given person (perhaps because of her situation, personality, or projects). Hume and Sidgwick famously questioned the traditional view that humility is a moral virtue. Humility may fit Hume's general account of virtues as traits useful or agreeable to oneself or to others, but Hume himself rejects humility as a merely "monkish virtue," rather than a genuine moral virtue.[48] However, this may have been merely rhetorical, since humility was as valued in Hume's Puritan Protestant upbringing as in (Roman or Anglo-) Catholicism. In any case, his positive theory of moral virtue is both too broad and too narrow, insofar as it implausibly includes and focuses on various ways of having a personality agreeable to others in social encounters.[49]

Sidgwick seems at least temporarily to defer to what he deems the "general view" that "humility ... prescribes [our holding] a low opinion of our merits."[50] Anscombe observed that this seems to entail that humility requires people to underestimate themselves in important ways, no matter what the truth of the matter may be. No wonder Sidgwick finds it puzzling ("paradoxical") that, so conceived, humility is thought a moral virtue. Can the traditional view that humility is a moral virtue be vindicated? There are several distinct reasons to think so.

First, it is initially attractive to think what makes the sort of de-emphasis that we have described into a virtue is that such de-emphasis motivates (facilitates, makes room for) a project and acts of (moral and nonmoral) self-improvement. However, we need to be careful here, since even arrogance, conceit, and the like can and sometimes do motivate a project of excellence. (Of course, someone's de-emphasizing her good points may cause a debilitating despondency instead of motivating self-improvement. That is why there must be reasonable limits.)

Second, humility may prove more broadly beneficial to people. Christine Swanton writes, "On a consequentialist view, such as Driver's, a trait is a virtue if and only if its exercise tends to bring about a valuable state of affairs.[51] According to Driver, what makes modesty a virtue is that it 'stops problems [such as jealousy] from arising in social situations.' ... On Driver's view, the modest agent avoids spending time ranking herself and avoids seeking information to enable her to have a correct estimation of her worth."[52] Swanton herself holds that "what makes modesty a virtue is ... its being the expression of a valuable or flourishing state of affairs of the agent – namely, an agent who has self-love and does not need therefore to get a sense of self-worth from comparison with others." She claims that "its target is simply to avoid certain things," more specifically, "the modest agent avoids drawing attention to herself, talking about herself excessively, boasting, and so forth."[53] I think Swanton's view, while properly nonconsequentialist, is nevertheless too shallow. The humble avoid this self-centered speech and conduct *for a characteristic reason* (and not always as intentional and conscious self-restraint), rooted in de-emphasis on their good points, etc.

Third, some think humility has what is called intrinsic value. Snow holds that humility is "intrinsically valuable," in addition to being valuable "because of [its] desirable effects."[54] However, it is doubtful anything is intrinsically good (in the senses in which Moore and

[48] Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, sec. IX, pt. i, p. 111.
[49] See Taylor, 1985, chap 2 (esp., sec. 2) for a fuller discussion of Hume's position.
[50] Sidgwick, 1907, p. 334; cp. Anscombe, 1958. Wardle, 1963, defends Sidgwick. I discuss Sidgwick's more complicated view above.
[51] Swanton, 2001, p. 43, citing Driver 1996.
[52] Swanton, 2001, p. 43, citing Driver, 1999.
[53] Swanton, 2001, p. 44.
[54] Snow 1995, pp. 211–212.

Ross used that term) and, even if it is, following Linda Zagzebski's appealing suggestion that something is intrinsically good when its goodness derives from the goodness of nothing else, this still yields the result that no virtue is intrinsically good. For Aristotle was correct to say that a virtue must be good (or rather, as Aquinas saw, it is *called* 'good') in the sense that it makes its bearer good (a good instance of its kind).[55]

Fourth, Martha Nussbaum – discussing Iris Murdoch, who stresses this trait – indicates a distinctive reason for thinking humility a virtue. She finds Murdoch's view similar to that of Dante, for whom, according to Nussbaum, "[i]n pride ... one attends only to one's own standing; this leads to a failure to notice the needs of those one loves." In this way, Murdoch and Dante think pride is like envy, anger, sloth, and lust, which Nussbaum describes as "false loves [that] get between individuals and a love of persons, who are worthy objects of love."[56] Humility is pride's cure.

Fifth, perhaps the problem we moderns have with humility lies not in it but in us. We do well to remember that it was Christianity that brought humility to prominence as a moral virtue when we consider this remark of the religious ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. "'In our time,' Hauerwas says, 'Christian humility cannot help but appear as arrogance.'"[57] This is a useful reminder that, because our age has had such poor understanding of the genuine virtue of humility – mistaking it, as we have seen, for someone's being ignorant about herself or deceptive toward others – it may look to us like arrogance.

Sixth, I want to float a different proposal. Vanity, arrogance, pride, conceit, and so on, can only be deformations, defects in someone considered as steward of herself or as friend, 'neighbor', partner, etc. of another.[58] When we reflect on the vices of conceit, etc., we can recognize them as deformations in someone insofar as she occupies any of the relationships that are at the moral center of our lives. This suggests that, in addition to and more important than being a (causally) contributive virtue, humility is a *constitutive* moral virtue (both outwardly-directed and inwardly-directed): we naturally want, or we need, to exercise self-stewardship and we want, even need, others to be other-focused, and therefore want and need their self-regarding concern to be self-improvement with an eye toward a more benevolent response (and even service) to other persons. This is especially well captured in a moral theory centered on roles, the virtues basic to them, and the needs less of the agent than of the one in whose life she occupies the role. Elsewhere, I have urged such a view of our moral lives.[59] Still, it may be that other types of theory can also accommodate it.

Nevertheless, certain metaphysical and religious beliefs can (if true) provide *additional reasons* for seeing humility as a virtue – a virtue in more ways. Christians, as we saw, sometimes say humility involves truthfulness, so its being a virtue may depend in part on whether they are right that our good qualities and achievements are small in comparison with our failings, are due largely to God's grace, and are unstable and evanescent without His aid. Such beliefs can provide *epistemological* insight into when, how, and why humility is a moral virtue. Psychologically, such beliefs can also strengthen and (normatively) ground our *appreciation* of humility as a moral virtue.

[55] See Aristotle, N.E., Bk II, chap. 6, and Aquinas, who says that character traits "are called ... good ... not by some distinct goodness [of their own] ... but because by them something is good ... So also virtue is called good [only] because by it something [i.e., its bearer, which it makes virtuous] is good." (*S.T.*, I-II, q. 5, art. 4, *respondeo*)

[56] Nussbaum, 2001, p. 11.

[57] Oppenheimer, 2001, p. 42.

[58] This is quite independent of any transvaluation of values in which vanity is turned into virtue and humility into vice.

[59] See Garcia (1997).

So perhaps the moral virtue of humility makes best sense within a larger context like that found in much Christian thinking.[60] In Christianity, someone's own experience of her sinfulness is usually what convinces her of the gap between her achievement and her potential, facilitating humility.[61] Someone's humility may also be a kind of role–virtue within a Christian context, as it is part of what a creature is supposed, meant, and designed to be like relative to its creator. Recognition that *everyone* is similarly sinful can root humility in the general human condition rather than in what someone might otherwise, and wrongly, assume to be her peculiar, individual perversion. This recognition of shared failing (even viciousness) guards a person against potentially self-destructive or resentful feelings of inferiority to others and, still more dangerous, feelings of others' inferiority to herself. The Christian belief in human dignity, both inherent (in nature and Creation) and specially endowed (as by our fraternity with Christ), tempers and balances the believer's recognition of her and others' failings, thereby helping her reach the mean, that is, the virtue of humility. This kind of humility is compatible with recognizing humanity's residual dignity even in sin, as distinct from a vicious extreme of self-loathing or contempt for others. It also helps protect others from contemptuous and disrespectful treatment of others because of the recognition of their sinfulness.[62]

I suggest here that we conceive the moral virtue of 'humility' as the kind of internal de-emphasis on which I have focused: someone's being moderately unimpressed with herself, when it is duly tempered and is situated within such a psychological context. While the virtue of humility may be best explained and justified within a theological background, however, I have indicated that there are strong reasons to admire humility, to seek to gain and grow in it, that are independent of such religious commitments.

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[60] "I have always been exceedingly delighted with the words of Chrysostom, 'The foundation of our philosophy is humility;' and still more with those of Augustine ... "if you ask me with regard to the precepts of the Christian Religion [which is first], I will answer, first, second, and third, Humility." (Calvin, 1559, Bk 2, ch 2, sec. 11)

[61] "[P]ride ... (as I have so often said and must repeat again and again) has to be guarded against even in things which are rightly done, that is, in the very way of righteousness, lest a man, by regarding as his own what is really God's, lose what is God's and be reduced merely to what is His own." Augustine, *Treatise of Nature & Grace*, ch. 36 (alternate division: para 32).

[62] Christians have often thought the Christ to be the paradigm of humility, a moral virtue that was first emphasized in that tradition. Gregory of Nyssa writes, "What is more humble than the King of all creation entering into communion with our poor nature?" (Gregory, *Oration 1 in beatitudinibus*. See also Philippians 2: 3–6). Some see humility as so central to Christian life that the rest of it can be understood as but forms of humility. One of the most recently canonized saints within Roman Catholicism maintains, "Prayer is the humility of the man who acknowledges his profound wretchedness and the greatness of God. Faith is the humility of the mind which renounces its own judgment and surrenders to the verdict and authority of the Church. Chastity is the humility of flesh, which subjects itself to the spirit." And so on for obedience, and other religious practices and traits. At the end of the same spiritual manual, the new saint concludes, "I am more convinced every day that authentic humility is the supernatural basis for all virtues." (Escriva, 1987, secs. 259, 289)

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