**Introduction to *Humility: A History***

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*Humility in the History of Philosophy: A Prologue*

The concept of humility has venerable philosophical roots. Indeed, according to one variant on the philosophical origin story, western philosophy may be said to have been born of epistemic humility, as Socrates learns that his unparalleled wisdom, as pronounced by the oracle at Delphi, consists in his recognition of his own ignorance. On this account, at the core of wisdom is self-awareness (think of the Delphic maxim: ‘know thyself’), including an awareness of one’s own limitations. While Socrates’s interlocutors typically displayed an overweening and unreflective sense of certitude, Socrates sought to disrupt and dislodge false confidence, leaving his interlocutors—and Plato’s readers—in humbling a state of *aporia* or uncertainty.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Humility was not, however, always celebrated in Greco-Roman philosophy. Aristotle notably regards proper pride or greatness of soul (*megalopsychia*) as the crown of the virtues, treating one form of humility as a deficiency in one’s sense of self-worth. And the shameless Cynics and notorious proud Stoics of the Hellenistic schools are often understood as adopting a dim view of humility.

With the Christianization of Europe, humility came to be widely lauded as a virtue, and perhaps its greatest intellectual champion was Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 ACE). Augustine regarded pride as the supreme vice, as it erodes our reverence for God and inclines us towards vain and vicious pursuits. The antidote is, of course, humility.[[2]](#footnote-3) The Augustinian conception of humility as a proper recognition of our individual impotence and utter dependency on God was remarkably influential throughout the medieval period. It figured prominently in the monastic tradition—as exemplified by Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153) as well as female authors like Elisabeth of Schönau (c. 1129 – 1165) and Hildegard of Bingen (c. 1098 – 1179)[[3]](#footnote-4)—while also influencing the schools, with Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) hailing humility as an important virtue for cultivating deference and obedience to God and to the state.[[4]](#footnote-5) The impact of Augustinian humility extended into the modern period, perhaps especially in France where Jansenists like Blaise Pascal (1623 – 1662), Antoine Arnauld (1612 – 1694), Pierre Nicole (1625 – 1695), and the Catholic priest Nicolas Malebranche (1638 – 1715) criticized pride with Augustinian verve.[[5]](#footnote-6)

In the wake of the early modern wars of religion and the revival of Pyrrhonian Skepticism, a variant of epistemic humility reemerged that figured crucially into defenses of toleration. Perhaps the most prominent representative here is Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592), who appealed to humility in order to rein in religious zealotry, protesting that “it is putting a very high value on one’s conjectures, to have a man roasted alive because of them.”[[6]](#footnote-7) Appeals to epistemic humility can also be found in the tolerationist writings of Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536), Sebastian Castellio (1515 – 1563), and later Pierre Bayle (1647 – 1706) and John Locke (1632 – 1704).

Of course, humility also had its detractors in the modern period, especially among those who were critical of the repressive effects of Christian morality. Benedict Spinoza (1632 – 1677) expressly denies that humility is a virtue, viewing it as a sign of sadness and impotence.[[7]](#footnote-8) David Hume included humility amongst the “monkish virtues” that are “everywhere rejected by men of sense….because they serve to no manner of purpose,” an assessment that was shared by his friend and countryman, Adam Smith.[[8]](#footnote-9) And Friedrich Nietzsche is characteristically biting in his critique, treating humility as a form of self-negation promoted by slavish Christian moralists.[[9]](#footnote-10)

Despite these critiques, humility has retained its generally positive status in religio-ethical schemes, not only in the Abrahamic tradition,[[10]](#footnote-11) but also in a range of non-western philosophies. Reduced self-concern is a vital part of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist ethics.[[11]](#footnote-12) The virtue of humility has also been explored across literature and the fine arts.[[12]](#footnote-13)

And in contemporary philosophy—especially in virtue ethics and epistemology—humility’s star has been on the rise, as a check against chauvinism and self-aggrandizement.[[13]](#footnote-14) However, for members of groups who have historically been devalued and disempowered, there is reason to think that it is pride, not humility, that should be promoted.[[14]](#footnote-15)This would seem to render humility a situational virtue, at best.

From even this highly compressed sweep we see that the status and significance of humility has been contested throughout philosophical history, reflecting shifting cultural practices, religious outlooks, and value systems. This volume—which focused predominantly on western philosophy—aims to flesh out the history of this concept, the twists and reversals of status and the underlying reasons for these oscillations. The simple story above of “champions” and “critics,” while not entirely misleading, is also terribly incomplete. The picture that emerges from the chapters of this volume is vastly more complicated, and vastly more interesting, than this brief sketch would suggest.

*What is Humility?*

Given its disputed and serpentine history, one might reasonably ask whether this volume charts the course of a single, stable concept at all. Perhaps the subject of this volume is a cluster concept, united only by family resemblances. Part of the problem is linguistic. While there may be no great difficulty in identifying “humility” with the Latin *humilitas* or the French *humilité*, the situation is much less tidy when we look to, say, ancient Greek, ancient Chinese, German, Hebrew, or Arabic.[[15]](#footnote-16) And the problem of meaning in not merely one of translation. The very meaning of “humility” in English is somewhat indeterminate. There is no fixed set of synonyms or antonyms for humility. Some take humility and modesty to be interchangeable, but many do not. Some contrast humility with pride, others with arrogance, and still others with proper self-regard. Unless and until a consensus emerges concerning how best to understand the meaning of humility, there are bound to be divergent treatments that merely reflect different understandings of the term.

Perhaps when terms are sharply defined and the dust settles, we will find that the disputes are less substantial than they initially appear. Who, after all, would claim that humility as *resistance to arrogance* is a bad thing or that humility as *self-abasement* is a good thing? If linguistic intuitions about humility vary widely, it might be that both conceptual analysis and empirical enquiry can only make progress once it is stipulated what *sense* of humility is under investigation.

One way of trying to home in on, if not a single conception, at least a set of conceptions of humility, is to ask what *kind* of term it is. There is undoubtedly a descriptive component to humility: it has recognizable, empirically testable features.[[16]](#footnote-17) However, humility seems to involve an evaluative component as well. To call someone humble, in most contexts at least, is to express some degree of approval. In other words, humility is what Bernard Williams called a thick ethical term, one, like generosity or bravery, with both descriptive and evaluative components. Much of the contemporary literature on humility proceeds on the assumption that it is a thick ethical concept in just this way. This allows us to make at least a modicum of progress in understanding of humility, since the evaluative component can play a winnowing function: if the account of humility under analysis does not elicit any sense of approval, we must be off track. Still, this is a point of dispute.

But even if it is granted that there is an evaluative dimension to humility, or that humility is in some respect a virtue, there is plenty of room for debate concerning how to characterize it. Some see humility as an appropriate attitude towards oneself and others—that is, as an attitude that is intrinsically good or apt. We may call this the *strong virtue* account. Others think that humility is good only as a corrective to a pervasive vice, like arrogance or pride. On this view, humility might be characterized negatively as non-arrogance, or resistance to pride.[[17]](#footnote-18) We can further divide those who embrace such a negative characterization into those who regard it as a *proper* resistance to some excess and those who see it as an inapt attitude—a deficiency on the Aristotelian scheme—that is laudable in practice only because humans are generally so prone to err in the other direction (We may call this the *salutary deficiency*account). As long as linguistic intuitions vary, it is difficult to see how the meaning of the concept will be fixed, except by stipulation.

A somewhat different way to clarify our understanding of humility is to ask what *type* of thinghumility is. Where does it fit into the ontology of mind? While it is sometimes treated as an affect and sometimes as a belief or set of beliefs, the most prevalent view is that it is a trait or state of character. One can certainly feel humbled by a situation, or maintain a humble belief about one’s capacities, but humility itself seems to be broader than any particular affect or doxastic state. Rather, humility seems to be a multi-track disposition that is expressed cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, and bodily (i.e., in terms of physical comportment). Understanding humility as a trait or multi-track disposition also fits with its putative status as a virtue, since virtues are typically regarded as states of character or traits.

In recent decades, philosophers and social psychologists (so called “situationists”) have called into question the empirical reputability of states of character as traditionally understood, and in turn the empirical reputability of virtues and vices.[[18]](#footnote-19) The situationist challenge claims that while philosophical theories of virtue depend on a notion of character traits that is broad-based, consistent, and explanatory, such that, for example, one who is brave can be expected to behave in certain predictable, characteristically brave ways consistently and across a range of domains (bravery at war, bravery on a rollercoaster, bravery in a moral quandary, and so forth), in fact “bravery” does not correlate strongly across domains; circumstances are more explanatorily powerful than any putative character trait when it comes to human behavior.

One response to this challenge is to maintain that the situationists overstate their case, relying on a few prominent studies and using measures of character that are simply too crude. Another response is to concede that broad-based character traits, if not illusory, at least vanishingly rare, while defending a conception of virtue that is tied to narrower dispositions.[[19]](#footnote-20) And still another response is to defend a conception of character that is not distinct from, but built upon, situational or environmental features.[[20]](#footnote-21)

Rather than seeking to adjudicate things matter here, I will simply note that we should not think of humility as a binary trait (i.e., as something that one either does or does not possess, full stop), but rather as scalar, coming in degrees. Even if we lack good ways of measuring *degrees of humility*, I see no reason to think that the evidence from social psychology precludes such scalar traits, especially since a multi-track disposition like humility can be expressed to different degrees in different domains and in different respects: one might be very humble about her math skills when among strangers, while remaining quite proud them when with her admiring siblings; one feel humble about her athletic abilities when among her teammates, while feeling far less humble after being insulted by a rival. Given these complexities, whether we consider someone to be humble will depend on the degree to which she exhibits humility in the contexts (domains and respects) that we take to be most revealing of one’s character or most relevant to one’s interests.

*Core Manifestations*

While there are a great many ways in which one may be humble—and a range of them are discussed in the chapters of this volume—as I see it, there are three core manifestations or classes of humility: epistemic, moral, and existential. Let’s consider each of these.

Epistemic humility consists in something like not being unduly confident about one’s (first-order) judgments.[[21]](#footnote-22) Sometimes, though, epistemic humility is thought to involve a misjudgment or underestimation of one’s capacities.[[22]](#footnote-23) What should we say, for instance, of one who remains underconfident about her well-supported opinions unless they are expressed by others? Is she epistemically humble? According to the *strong virtue* account of epistemic humility, she is intellectually irresolute or diffident, rather than humble. According to the *salutary deficiency* account, she is perhaps *too* humble, but in a way that may be admirable in relation to her arrogant peers.

Moral humility is another core expression. While the epistemic humility is a matter of not being overly confident in one’s judgments, moral humility consists in something like not taking oneself to be more important than anyone else—a kind of anti-exceptionalism or anti-egoism. While some have assumed that this implies a self-debasement, those who regard humility as a virtue are more likely to subscribe to view widely (if perhaps erroneously) attributed to C.S. Lewis that humility consists not in thinking less of oneself, but in thinking of oneself less.[[23]](#footnote-24) If humility consists in reduced self-focus or a kind of “emptying out” of one’s sense of self, it might be a natural concomitant of directing one’s concern more toward others.[[24]](#footnote-25) Once again, though, we bump up against a version of the *strong virtue* or *salutary deficiency*question, as one might worry that humility could undermine self-respect or interfere with duties to oneself.[[25]](#footnote-26)

Epistemic and moral humility are distinct: it is conceivable for one to be modest in one’s judgments but ethically self-centered or to be relatively unconcerned about oneself while being overconfident in one’s judgments. Nevertheless, these two expressions of humility seem to be connected or non-accidentally related. One way of explaining this link is that they are both often undergirded by a more fundamental sense of humility concerning one’s relative insignificance. This manifestation has been called *existential humility*.[[26]](#footnote-27) This conception of one’s insignificance can be grounded in a religious outlook, as with one who conceives of herself as entirely dependent on God and God’s grace; but it can also take a secular form, as when one grasps one’s cosmic insignificance.[[27]](#footnote-28) On Susan Wolf’s account, to live a meaningful life, we must conduct ourselves in a way that “harmonizes” with our cosmic insignificance, rather than proceeding as though we are at the center of the universe.[[28]](#footnote-29) Here we see existential humility underwriting moral humility.

Still, difficult epistemic questions remain concerning what the appropriate perspective is from which to reflect on one’s existential status. Thomas Nagel points out that we have the capacity to survey our lives “with that detached amazement that comes from watching an ant struggle up a heap of sand,”[[29]](#footnote-30) but even he does not insist that this perspective is uniquely authoritative. Perhaps there is no single right perspective or frame from which to explore the question of human significance. While the adoption of a “zoomed out” perspective might enable us to better appreciate some of the absurdities of human life, most of us also feel horrified when, in the movie version *The* *Third Man*, Harry Lime (Orson Welles) looks down at the crowds from atop Vienna’s Riesenrad and asks: “would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving forever?” Nor is it obvious that the “cosmic” perspective entails assigning diminished significance to human affairs. Astronauts who have travelled to outer space describe the disturbing experience of seeing the earth recede into the distance, a phenomenon referred to as the overview effect.[[30]](#footnote-31) However, this experience can induce more, not less, concern about what happens on this fragile ‘pale blue dot.’

Another question here concerns what kinds of etiological constraints, if any, we place on existential humility. Must it arise from well-formed beliefs, or could it arise from a psychological disorder or from the incessant chastening or mortification from an authority figure (think of a congregant in Jonathan Edward’s church)? This depends, once again, on how one conceives of humility in relation to virtue. The strongest of *strong virtue* accounts will say that since humility is a virtue, it must be cultivated in the right way. Indeed, on this account, there will be a single conception of humility that is cultivated in the right way, and this virtue will arise together with the whole suite of other virtues, in accordance with the so-called unity of virtues thesis. Of course, few would endorse such a demanding conception of virtue. Instead, I think that we can allow that good states of character can arise somewhat independently of one another, that virtues are scalar, and that even internal to a single virtue, like humility, core manifestations might not cohere. The existentially humble person may still be morally or epistemically arrogant, conceiving of herself as small relative to God or the cosmos, but considerably wiser than, or superior to, other (insignificant) humans who treat the trifles of their lives as if they were profoundly important (one might think of the narrators in Thomas Bernhard’s novels). Indeed, she might even feel a sense of self-satisfaction in the recognition of her own cosmic insignificance, scoffing at the thoughtlessly inflated sense of self-importance that she espies in her peers.

*Paradoxes of Self-Ascription*

This last point might lead one to wonder whether in taking a kind of reflective pride in her putative existential humility, such a person ceases to be humble. This is one variant of the paradox of self-ascription of humility.[[31]](#footnote-32) A simple version of the paradox may be expressed thusly: if one thinks that humility is a virtue, one cannot reflect upon one’s humility without feeling pride, which thereby eroding one’s humility.[[32]](#footnote-33) A bald version of the paradox comes from Martin Luther, who asserted that “true humility…never knows that it is humble…for if it knew this, it would turn proud from contemplation of so fine a virtue.”[[33]](#footnote-34) In recent years, Julia Driver has theorized about a host of so-called “virtues of ignorance,” or forms of excellence that must necessarily remain unknown to their possessor. “Modesty,” which on her analysis could be swapped out for “humility,” is a paradigmatic example of such a virtue. In short, disparate thinkers from disparate eras have thus thought that there is something paradoxical about ascribing humility to oneself. At the very least, the assertion “I am so humble!” looks like a performative contradiction.

Still, it is not obvious that the paradox has as much bite as those who have posed it suggest. The problem is sometimes thought to arise because humility is an underestimation of the self, in which case to believe that one is humble would be *to think that one is worthier or more capable than one thinks one actually is* (compare: I think it is going to be a harder hike than I think), a fairly straightforward version of Moore’s paradox.

But even if we grant that humility is an underestimation of the self, it is not clear that this judgment is undone through reflective awareness of it. Consider that if knowing that one is humble is paradoxical, then knowing that one is proud would be equally paradoxical and for the same reasons: one could not think that one is *less* worthy or capable than one thinks one actually is. If that were right, one could overcome one’s pride simply by coming to *believe* that one is proud. Would that all vices could be overcome so easily!

One reason why this does not look right is that the paradoxical beliefs—the underestimation and the awareness of it—seem to be operating at different levels, and there is no problem with adopting a higher-level attitude that is about,and in some respect at variance with, one’s lower-level attitude. This is certainly true of desires, where one’s higher-order desire that one not desire p is perfectly compatible with desiring p. I see no reason why the same could not also be said of beliefs. One can perfectly well reflect on one’s first-order beliefs and deem them to be inapt, especially if we allow that the first-order beliefs are dispositional states, and so not neatly dislodged by a single reflective ‘aha!’ moment. Our cognitive lives are sufficiently complex, and we are sufficiently fragmented thinkers,[[34]](#footnote-35) that there is really no deep paradox here.

 Moreover, if humility is best understood, as I have suggested above, not simply as a cognitive state, but as a character trait or a multi-track disposition with affective, behavioral, and embodied manifestations in addition to its doxastic manifestations, it is even more apparent that one can discern one’s own humility by attending to one’s affective and behavioral dispositions (as well as the testimony of others). For instance, one might recognize of herself that she tends to deflect positive attention, to feel less proud of her accomplishments than others seem to think is warranted, to avoid self-promotion, and to comport herself in a slumping, inobtrusive manner.

Of course, if one is humble, and if one is inclined to think that humility is a virtue, one who is humble will be loath to self-ascribe humility, just as she will be loath to self-ascribe intelligence, generosity, beauty and admired traits, features, and abilities, in part because she will likely be reluctant to accept, or simply inattentive to, evidence that she possesses such traits. But even if the humble only reluctantly acknowledge their humility, there is nothing particularly paradoxical with their doing so. If *asserting* “I am so humble!” is paradoxical, it is not because one cannot be aware of one’s humility, it is because one who is humble is not likely to draw attention to this trait.

Notice further that if humility were a “virtue of ignorance,” encouragements to cultivate it at the individual level would seem self-defeating, since cultivating a trait requires that one can fairly accurately tracks one’s progress, which would—according to the “virtue of ignorance” view—preempt its possession. Fortunately, though,I do not think that there is a deep problem with tracking one’s humility. One can cultivate humility by working to identify and resist incitements to pride and excessive confidence. Still, exercising affective and doxastic restraint is quite cognitively demanding. In light of this, we might reasonably ask: why be humble?

*When and Why is Humility Good?*

On an Aristotelian account, virtues contribute to the flourishing of the possessor; so, on this scheme, if humility is a virtue, it would contribute to one’s welfare. But it certainly seems that humility can be detrimental to its possessor, as when one is too humble to demand a deserved raise or to tout one’s accomplishments in a grant application. This leaves us with a few ways of thinking about the relationship between humility, virtue, and flourishing: (1) we could cling to the *strong virtue* view and insist that if one is harmed by this character trait, it is not an instance of genuine humility; (2) we could take this as evidence that humility is not a virtue; or, (3) we could deny the Aristotelian assumption that virtues are intrinsically good for their possessors.

Among those who embrace the third option are Lisa Tessman, who maintains that in conditions of widespread injustice, we should admit the possibility of “burdened virtues,” or virtues that are “disjoined from their bearer’s own flourishing.”[[35]](#footnote-36) If humility is a burdened virtue, then the ‘*why be humble?’* question might not be answered by appealing to one’s own self-regard; it might require appealing to social justice or public goods. (The call to “check your privilege” can be seen as a call for humility rooted in social justice) But this raises a further question: *who* should cultivate humility?

 Here, one’s social position matters for at least two reasons. First, those who are in positions of privilege or power are more prone to excessive self-concern and overconfidence, and so more in need of humility as a corrective.[[36]](#footnote-37) Second, the cultivation of humility is more likely to inhibit the promotion of other virtues among those who occupy relatively marginalized positions. Take epistemic humility. While it might be the case that virtually everyone is prone to overconfidence, for those whose status as knowers is diminished and devalued, cultivating greater humility might erode another epistemic virtue: self-trust. One who lacks self-trust will likely struggle to cultivate her full cognitive capacities, perhaps deferring too much to others or retreating from intellectual challenges. When a group of people lack self-trust due to their diminished social status, this can reinforce stereotypes.

A concern with self-trust can be seen as underlying feminist analyses of gaslighting (or dismissing as paranoid, ungrounded, or delusional the testimony or situated knowledge of marginalized people), stereotype threat (where provoking a stigmatizing stereotype leads a member of the target group to underperform in some activity),[[37]](#footnote-38) and the ways these phenomena reinforce epistemic injustice.[[38]](#footnote-39) A similar case could be made in the moral domain, where considerations of justice seem to dictate that the marginalized and oppressed cultivate not humility, but proper self-regard or pride. It is not obvious, then, that humility should be sought by those whose epistemic and moral statuses have been systemically devalued, unless it is a humility that is compatible with proper pride.[[39]](#footnote-40)

*The Social Role of Humility*

In addition to considering the aptness and value of humility for its possessor, we may also ask about its social value. On the one hand, it would seem to facilitate prosocial behavior: by restraining extreme self-regard and overconfidence, humility would seem to conduce to respect for others, tolerance, and productive forms of disagreement. In this regard it would seem like a promising antidote to the polarized and often dogmatic politics of our times. However, one might worry that it could foster docility and pusillanimity and thereby inhibit resistance to injustice. Is it possible to be both humble *and* socially committed, both open-minded *and* full of moral conviction? The *strong virtue*view of humility will insist that this is possible, but others will think that there is an irresolvable tension, leaving us to consider which virtue-vice combination is preferable. Once again, it might be that what reason recommends is situational, depending not only on our social positioning, but also on the stakes.

In terms of high-stakes global issues, few if any rival climate change in terms of the scope and severity of impact. What role does humility play in relation to the climate crisis? Those who worry about humility engendering lack of conviction, might point to the climate crisis as exhibit A. For years, a kind of epistemic humility has been invoked, rather disingenuously, to justify inaction. And yet, it can hardly be doubted that, among highly industrialized nations, the lack of (ethical) humility—the shortsightedness and exaggerated sense of self-importance—has contributed mightily to the problem. By neglecting to take strong action against climate change, we push the problem onto future generations, enacting a generational chauvinism. Those of us in wealthy, highly industrialized countries continue to reap the benefits of heavy fossil fuel consumption, while shifting the burdens onto those in less industrialized countries who will incur the brunt of the impact. Justice and morality require that those nations that have profited most from the consumption of fossil fuels ought to commit to living less extravagantly or more humbly, at least in terms of carbon consumption, and take on more of the burdens of our past action—in short, we must stop taking treating ourselves as exceptional. Here in the U.S., that seems to run contrary to an inbred exceptionalism. This national pride, or sense of greatness—politically, economically, militarily—has long stood in the way of confronting our darker and more shameful national history, including the expropriation of native land and murder of indigenous peoples, the horrific history of chattel slavery, more recent imperialist exploits and covert, extra-legal military engagements abroad, and the ongoing legacies of these practices. Now, perhaps more than ever, America could really benefit from the cultivation of a national humility, a time to reckon with our history. Instead, even after Trump’s disastrous term in office, we remain in the grips of Trumpian “no apologies” politics. Perhaps this is a final flourishing of pride before the fall.

One of the great benefits of studying the history of philosophy is that it allows us to set aside some of our own shibboleths and biases to try to understand other ways of thinking, thereby expanding our own cognitive resources and perhaps even come to better appreciate the myopic, contingent nature of our own perspective. If the profuse array of perspectives on humility expressed in this volume leaves one unsure about what general lessons to draw, perhaps the humble thing to do is to resist grand declarations and acknowledge the messiness. What seemed rather straightforward, obvious, tractable has turned out to be complex and elusive. Perhaps studying the history of humility will induce a sense of humility by revealing the inadequacy of one’s preconceptions and the limits of what can be said, in general, about humility. Then again, maybe not. In Montaigne’s immortal words: *que sais-je?*

1. For a nuanced understanding of Socratic virtue, see Vasiliou (Ch. 1) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. For an account of the different forms of humility defended by Augustine, one that complicates the simple contrast with Stoicism, see Byers (Ch. 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. see Mancia (Ch. 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. see Pickavé (Ch. 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. see Stencil and Walsh (Ch. 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, Donald M. Frame (trans. and ed.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 790. For discussion of Montaigne, see Laursen (Ch. 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See Soyarslan (Ch.8). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. David Hume, *Enquiries,* ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch, 3rd Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 270. For a discussion of Hume and Smith, see Kopajtic (Ch. 9) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See Alfano (Ch. 10) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. See Morgan (Ch. 11); Khalil (reflection). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. See Zhao (Ch. 2) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See reflections by Dadlez and Muraoka. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. For an account of how humility relates to moral exemplarity, see Snow (Ch. 13) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. See Jeffers (Ch. 12) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. The linguistic complexities are discussed in particular chapters, such as Zhao (Ch. 2), Byers (Ch. 3), Alfano (Ch. 10), Morgan (Ch. 11), and Khalil (reflection). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. For discussion with references to the empirical literature, see Wright (reflection). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. E.g., Norvin Richards, “Is Humility a Virtue?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1988): 253–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. See Gilbert Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 99 (1999): 315–331; John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. See Maria Merritt, “Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3 (2000): 365–383. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. See Mark Alfano and Joshua August Skorburg, “The Embedded and Extended Character,” in Julian Kiverstein (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the Social Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2017): 465-478. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. See, for instance Allan Hazlett, “Higher-order Epistemic Attitudes and Intellectual Humility,” *Episteme* 8 (2012): 205- 23; and Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Intellectual Humility: Owning our Limitations” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 94(3) (2017): 509-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. See Henry Sidgwick, *The Method of* Ethics, 7th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1962), p. 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Cited approvingly in Nadelhoffer, et al. “The Varieties of Humility Worth Wanting,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 14 (2017):169-2000. I could not track down any reliable reference to C.S. Lewis. For more on this view, see Thomas Nadelhoffer and Jennifer Cole Wright, “The Twin Dimensions of the Virtue of Humility: Low Self-Focus and High Other-Focus,” in *Moral Psychology: Virtue and Character*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Christian B. Miller, vol. 5 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 309–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. See Zhao (Ch. 2) for a discussion of the image of emptying oneself in ancient Chinese philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Duties to oneself were a key part of modern natural law tradition. See, for instance, Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law*, ed. James Tully, trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Ch. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Nancy E. Snow, “Humility,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 1995): 206–7, In this volume, see Morgan (Ch. 11) and Snow (Ch. 13). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. For secular conceptions of humility in the early modern period, see Julie Cooper, *Secular Powers: Humility in Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Susan Wolf, “The Meanings of Lives,” in *The Variety of Values: Essays on Morality, Meaning, and Love* (Oxford, 2014), ch. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Nagel, “The Absurd,” The Journal of Philosophy Vol.68.20 (1971), 716-727, at p. 720. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Frank White, *The Overview Effect: Space Exploration and Human Evolution* (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. See Roy Sorensen, Blindspots (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Nicolas Bommarito, “Modesty and Humility.” In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, Winter 2018. Article published October 31, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Hume’s view of humility as “monkish virtue” faces a version of this paradox since a humble person cannot consistently and fully approve of their own humility, falling short of the “reflexive self-approval” characteristic of Humean practical reason (see Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991], esp. 215 – 216 and 293ff). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. *Martin Luther’s Works*, ed. and trans. by J. Pelikan. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), vol. 21, p. 315. Compare with saying from medieval Sufi thinker Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah: “he who affirms humility in himself is in truth proud, for humility does not arise except out of a sublime state” (quoted in Khalil’s reflection). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Andy Egan, “Seeing and Believing: Perception, Belief Formation, and the Divided Mind,” *Philosophical Studies* 140.1 (2008), 47–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. See Paul Piff, et al., “Higher Social Class Predicts Increased Unethical Behavior,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109 (2012), 4086-4091. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. See Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson, “Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performanceof African Americans,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69 (1995): 797–811; Jennifer Saul, “Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat and Women in Philosophy,” in Fiona Jenkins and Katrina Hutchinson (eds.), *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to**Change?* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013): 39–60. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. For an account of how this might be achieved, see Jeffers (Ch.12). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)