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For my grandmother.

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Abstract:

I aim to construct an account of humility which explains and satisfies as many of our pre-theoretical intuitions about the trait as possible, whilst also being internally consistent and otherwise compelling. Starting from a man-on-the-street understanding of what humility involves, I build a secular account of humility which seems coherent and attractive. I then contrast this with a 'radically' Christian understanding of humility drawn from the work of Kent Dunnington, who constructs his account from writings from the early desert monastics and St Augustine, and ultimately on Jesus's willingness to "[humble] himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Having established its distinctiveness, I explain why Christian humility is thought to clash so fundamentally with classical accounts of the virtues, such as those put forward by Aristotle, leading to the oft-cited rift between ‘classical’ and ‘Christian’ virtue ethics. Finally, I investigate whether there are any reasons to consider Dunnington's a more compelling account of humility than its secular counterpart. I compare the two accounts on various grounds including their internal consistency, the viability of their schemes for attaining humility, and their reasons for appraising humility as morally valuable.

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What is Humility?

Humus, the Latin root of humility, means ‘of the earth’, or ‘soil’.

Section 1: Introduction:

My aim in this piece is to present an account of humility which satisfies as many of my pre-theoretical intuitions about the virtue as possible, whilst also being internally consistent and otherwise compelling. I start with what I take to be the bare bones of a viable account of humility, which is highly vulnerable to falsely positive ascriptions of humility, and I end up with what I think is a fleshed-out, well-reasoned account of humility which is significantly less vulnerable, if it is vulnerable at all, to falsely positive ascriptions of humility. Here is a breakdown of my sections. In **Section 2**, I outline my four strongest pre-theoretical intuitions about humility which I think any decent account of it should satisfy and explain. I also explicate the meta-philosophical approach that I am taking to this task: to pit various intuitions against one another, so as to end up with an internally consistent account of humility which protects my strongest pre-theoretical intuitions about the trait, perhaps at the cost of jettisoning weaker ones. In **Section 3**, I begin with what I take to be a bare-bones, man-on-the-street understanding of humility; that it is an associated set of behaviours. I introduce the notion of a ‘disposition’ to causally unite these disparate behaviours, and I show that what I call the ‘Simple Behavioural Account’ of humility is nonetheless impotent to differentiate false humility from true humility. In **Section 4**, I argue that a cognitive element is vital to our account of humility to render false humility conceptually possible, and

to conceptually unify the disparate behaviours associated with humility which were mentioned in the Simple Behavioural Account. **Sections 4.1, 4.2**, and **4.3** are then dedicated to ascertaining the precise nature of the cognitive element of humility which I'll have established is necessary. I traverse through the options that it involves a low self-estimate (**4.1**), an accurate self-estimate (**4.2**), and an accurate self-estimate with the qualification that humble people are cognitively disposed to abstain from inferring illicit entitlement claims from their (potentially high) accurate self-estimates (**4.3**). This is grounded in the metaphysical assumption that every person is of equal and significant moral worth. Some elements from the Qualified Accuracy Account are the first elements up until this point in the essay which make it into my final account of humility. In **Section 5**, I move on to argue that right-motivation is essential for true humility to subsist, and therefore that an affective element will be a necessary feature of the account. I present Roberts and Wood's Low Concern Account (**5.1**) as a viable affective account of humility straight from the literature. The Low Concern Account holds that humility consists in an unusually low concern for one's comparative social status, and consequently a disposition to have one's attention drawn to (noble) stimuli external to oneself. I then modify the Low Concern Account in three important ways; namely, with help from Dennis Whitcomb et al., I tweak it to accommodate their intuition that humble people care about and are appropriately attentive to their flaws. I also highlight a minor, but significant inconsistency in the Low Concern Account and I graft onto it some valuable elements from the aforementioned Qualified Accuracy Account which I'd be sorry to lose. In (**5.2**), then, I finally present the Modified Low Concern Account of humility (MLCA). In **Section 6**, I point out that the MLCA, whilst seemingly invulnerable to falsely positive ascriptions of humility, is unfortunately lacking in both causal and conceptual unity. I explore three possible solutions to this problem: to conceive of humility as a foundational virtue, to conceive of humility as a psychological state instead of a virtue, and to

incorporate some aspects of Christian thought about humility to our account. In **Section 7**, I finally present my own account of humility. In **Section 8**, I conclude that my own account of humility operates more fundamentally than the MLCA, which allows it both to causally and to conceptually unite the elements of the MLCA. Moreover, my account satisfies all of my own pre-theoretical intuitions outlined in Section 2.

Section 2: An Outline of my Approach:

A seemingly good place to start is to list various intuitions that most of us would like an account of humility to capture and to explain. The capturing of a given intuition should not be seen as a 'necessary condition' for an account of humility's being complete, but rather as a reason to consider one account of humility more compelling than another. In other words, an account will be more persuasive than another if it captures and explains (i.e. it 'accounts for') comparatively more of our pre-theoretical intuitions about humility. I am sympathetic to David Lewis's view of the philosophical method. He says in his 1973 essay, "Possible Worlds", almost as an aside, that philosophy, or at least constructing metaphysical accounts, is all about weighing our intuitions against one another. Some of our pre-theoretical intuitions are stronger than others, in that they seem to inform more of our beliefs than others (Lewis, 1973: 186). The job of a philosopher is to knit together internally consistent 'pictures of reality' or 'theories' which satisfy and explicate as many of our starting intuitions as possible. A 'theory' can be understood as a model, system of ideas, or 'background story' which, if

assumed, sheds light on why we have the intuitions we do. We can explicate each intuition by showing how it is contextualised within the theory or follows naturally from it. For example, the notion that we were created in the image of a good god is a theory which explains the widespread intuition that all humans have intrinsic and significant moral value. Intuitions are united with one another when they can be explicated by the same theory. Said otherwise, a good theory will explain why we have particular intuitions and not others and, moreover, why we have particular sets of intuitions and not other sets of them. It will link the set of intuitions that we do have together by showing that they share a reference point. For example, the notion that we were created by a good god grounds numerous strong intuitions: not only that humans have intrinsic and significant moral value, but that we are capable of morally good actions or at least of holding morally good sentiments, that life seems to be transcendentally meaningful, that there is something peculiar about the thought that human persons will wholly cease to exist after biological death, etc. This theory may not be true, but it is made compelling because it offers a unifying explanation for multiple strong intuitions. Of course, alternative theories can also be posited to satisfy and explicate these intuitions.

Often, for the sake of keeping our theories internally consistent, we jettison (or reform) intuitions if they no longer fit with our theories. But we should be far readier to jettison our weaker pre-theoretical intuitions than our stronger ones. If a proposed theory undermines a significant number of strong intuitions, e.g. that humans have intrinsic and significant moral worth, or that we are capable of doing good things or at least holding morally good sentiments, then we have reason to jettison the theory as opposed to the intuitions. Thus the philosopher's job is to construct theories which satisfy and protect our strongest intuitions. Maintaining the internal consistency of these theories and their maximal correspondence with our intuitions will sometimes come at the price of reforming or jettisoning some of our weaker intuitions and, less often, some of our stronger ones too. E.g. it may seem that the

most internally consistent theory we can muster, which also satisfies the majority of our strongest intuitions, is incompatible with there being some kind of life after death or with life being transcendentally meaningful. In this case we'd have to jettison or reform these intuitions. Our theories and intuitions are engaged in a sort of interplay or dance, where they sharpen and alter each other as iron sharpens iron, such that (ideally) we end up with theories which are internally consistent whilst satisfying as many of our pre-theoretical intuitions as possible, especially our strongest ones.

All this is to say that my aim below is to lay out what I take to be strong pre-theoretical intuitions about humility. An account of humility is promising if it can satisfy and explicate these intuitions. Various promising accounts of humility will then have to be vetted for internal consistency and other theoretical virtues.

Without further ado, here are my pre-theoretical intuitions:

1) There is such a thing as 'false humility' – sometimes when people behave in typically 'humble' ways, we get the sense that they are in fact acting from conceit. Vainly, they want everyone to *think* they're humble as opposed to actually being humble.
2) There is something odd about self-assertions of humility such as "I am humble". This is noteworthy because self-assertions of other virtues do not seem as directly self-defeating. If somebody says, "I am generous", we may be led to believe that he is not very *humble*, but we needn't be as quick to conclude that he is not generous.[1]

[1] To be clear, there *is* something self-undermining about saying, "I am generous", but I don't think it is *directly* self-undermining, whereas I think that saying, "I am humble" is directly self-undermining. Here's what I mean: humility has something to do with not drawing attention to one's own strengths. Therefore self-ascriptions of humility, which call attention to one's strengths, directly contradict a core feature of humility. By contrast, self-ascriptions of generosity do not contradict core features of generosity *per se*. Self-ascriptions of generosity come across as *proud*, but not necessarily as ungenerous. Perhaps this owes the 'unity of the virtues', i.e. the classical notion that someone can only possess a given virtue if they possess every virtue simultaneously. On this conception, someone could only be generous if they are also humble, and vice versa. Therefore, to the extent that our agent's saying, "I am generous" suggests that he is *proud*, we can *ipso facto* conclude that he is neither humble nor generous. In this way his claim to generosity is only *indirectly* self-undermining, whilst his claim to humility is *directly* self-undermining. Interestingly, self-ascriptions of humility do not similarly come

3) Humility is a virtue. Indeed, people are only motivated to be falsely humble because humility is widely considered an appealing quality to have. There is something good about humility which makes its possessors admirable, and which makes it a quality worth pursuing or imitating.
4) For something to be morally praiseworthy, e.g. a virtue, it must result from the relevant agent's own efforts. The fact that, as per (4), some people are humbler than others and that, as per (2), humility is praiseworthy, combined with the intuition that moral praiseworthiness supervenes on agentive effort implies that there is something we can do to make ourselves humbler.

Again, it may be the case that the most compelling account of humility we can think of satisfies some but not all of these intuitions. It might win out over alternative accounts for adjacent reasons, such as its being more internally consistent. It must also be stated that, at least for now, I have not attached weightings to the abovementioned intuitions. If competing accounts satisfied and explicated equal numbers of intuitions, but different sets of them, such that each account 'weighed' the same, then provided that they were both internally consistent we'd have no way of telling (as of yet) which account of humility was superior. It may be the case that we never need to attach weightings to these intuitions because one account satisfies significantly more of them than another. Now that I have outlined some basic intuitions with which I think a compelling account of humility will accord, I can move on to surveying the available accounts of humility in the literature to see if any of them are suitably compelling.

across as ungenerous. This suggests that, whilst interconnected, humility is more foundational than generosity. More on this later. My current point is only that the seemingly self-undermining nature of saying, "I am generous" owes to the interconnectedness of the virtues, but self-ascriptions of humility are distinctly jarring because they seem directly self-undermining in some way.

Section 3: Behavioural Accounts of Humility:

I'll start with what I take to be the most common, knee-jerk understanding of humility today – that a humble person is somebody who does not brag. With some thought, a modern, proficient English language speaker will add some more behaviours to this list. A humble person, he will say, is someone who does not brag, does not talk over others or dominate the conversation at dinner parties, does not behave as though she is entitled to more time and resources than others (e.g. by making a fuss if she's turned away at a packed restaurant without having booked a table), and does not speak too much about herself. Notice that all of these involve *abstaining* from certain behaviours, which makes this rendition of humility vulnerable to the *reductio ad absurdum* that people who are in comas or who are otherwise unable to act are *ipso facto* wonderfully humble. So let's strengthen this seedling account of humility by stipulating that someone needs to be able to boast, and behave as though they are entitled to more than others, etc., and yet choose not to, to qualify as humble. They must be able to act *qua* conscious agent. Perhaps humble people not only abstain from what I'll call 'proud behaviour', but also engage actively in what I'll call 'humble behaviour'. A paradigm example of humble behaviour is indicating interest in other people's lives and stories, perhaps by listening well ('actively listening') and asking thoughtful questions. Other examples might include *gladly* cooperating with social systems and following basic rules of etiquette, such as paying one's taxes gladly and happily trying concertedly to be punctual respectively[2]. It seems that abstaining from proud behaviour is a necessary condition of humility, but whether engaging in humble behaviour is a necessary condition is a moot point which I'll address later on. Before proceeding, let me take a moment to define the terms 'proud behaviour' and

[2] I am assuming for the sake of simplicity that the social systems in question are just and equitable, such that any reasonable person would agree with their socio-ethical value.

'humble behaviour' formally and clearly. I will use these terms throughout my thesis and so it is worth emphasising them:

'Proud behaviour' is behaviour that exemplifies proud people, such as boasting, talking over others, and behaving as though one is entitled to more than one's fair share of time and resources.

'Humble behaviour' is behaviour which a humble person *qua* humble person might engage in *over and above* abstaining from proud behaviour. This is likely to include listening well to others, asking thoughtful questions of them, and cooperating with (just) social systems like picking up one's litter and paying one's tax.

In sum, I take it that most people today would use the word 'humble' to describe someone who abstains from proud behaviour, and who may or may not engage in humble behaviour. People would even more readily use the word to describe someone who did this despite having a lot to be proud *of*. E.g. if a high-profile celebrity abstained from and engaged in these behaviours respectively at an event where one was in attendance, I take it that most modern, Western people would relay to interested inquirers afterwards that that celebrity was admirably humble.

If this is how a humble person behaves, then what is humility? It surely can't be a set of behaviours such that if somebody abstains from them all or enacts them all at least once then they'd qualify as humble. At the very least, a humble person should ordinarily or *habitually* abstain from proud behaviour, and perhaps also habitually engage in humble behaviour. Moreover, humility surely can't be a set of disparate behaviours which have nothing to unite them conceptually. There should be a common thread which runs through 'not talking too much about oneself' and 'not exhibiting entitled behaviour' for us to dub them both displays of *humility*, as opposed to dubbing them displays of any other virtues, or combinations

thereof. If we want to maintain the intuition that humility is a unified concept, in the sense that we are saying something extra and distinct *about* a behaviour when we label it 'humble', then these disparate behaviours need to have some relation to each other. Perhaps the relation is probabilistic, such that if someone habitually exhibits one behaviour, e.g. active listening, they are more likely to exhibit another, e.g. refraining from boasting. But even this is not enough. It is widely believed that virtues are mutually reinforcing, in the sense that a person who is kind and generous has a higher likelihood of being patient too than someone who is neither kind nor generous. Classical virtue theory goes so far as to assert the 'unity of the virtues' thesis, which holds that somebody can be said to possess a given virtue iff she possesses *all other* virtues simultaneously. We needn't go this far for my purposes. At the very least, it's reasonable to assert that somebody's possessing one virtue increases the likelihood of their possessing another, which means that the virtues are probabilistically related. Yet they are not thereby united into one concept. There seems to remain something distinct about each virtue.

So how can we distinguish virtues from one another, despite their being probabilistically related, whilst uniting disparate behaviours under the banner of one virtue *based on* their being probabilistically related? The concept of a 'disposition' might help, where a virtue is a type of disposition. Other types would include vices and value-neutral traits like 'chattiness'. A disposition is a tendency toward a certain set of behaviours, but not toward others. Virtues would be dispositions towards morally good sets of behaviours. The behaviours themselves are united probabilistically only because they have a common source – their respective dispositions. The dispositions themselves are also probabilistically related, in the sense that the more likely one is to possess a given disposition (virtue), the more likely one is to possess a related disposition (virtue), which engenders another set of behaviours. The main point to get here is that the concept of a disposition allows us to group sets of behaviours under the

banner of individual virtues, whilst still maintaining the conceptual distinctions between those virtues. Perhaps virtues are also united probabilistically because they have a common, even more fundamental, source, but that is a topic for another essay. The concept of a 'disposition' allows us to group disparate behaviours together as 'patient' or 'kind' without 'patience' and 'kindness' blurring into one. With the above in mind, we can transpose our description of the humble person into a working definition of 'humility', the abstract noun, which is the characteristic possessed by humble people. Thus, what I will call the 'Simple Behavioural Account' of humility goes as follows:

Section 3.1:

The **Simple Behavioural Account (SBA)** defines 'humility' as ***the disposition to abstain from proud behaviours and perhaps actively to behave in humble ways as well, which includes but is not limited to refraining from talking too much about oneself, and listening well to others respectively.***

The SBA is a useful point of departure for our discussion because it supports our bare minimum intuitions about humility whilst also being obviously incomplete. By omission, it illuminates what needs to be added to our account to strengthen it. Let me start with some low-hanging fruit: the fact that the SBA cannot distinguish humility from 'false humility' (a phenomenon with which we are all familiar), and the fact that the SBA still doesn't identify the conceptual thread which runs through the disparate behaviours it describes. The concept of a 'disposition' provides a possible explanation for the root *cause* of a given set of behaviours, i.e. that they are engendered by the agent's possessing a particular virtue, but it does not explain what makes 'abstaining from boasting' and 'listening well' both instances of *humility* in particular, as opposed to of other virtues like patience or kindness (especially

considering that many of the behaviours we associate with humility, like listening well, are what we'd expect from patient and kind people too!). It does not yet seem as though we are saying something extra *about* a behaviour when we call it 'humble', other than tying it together with other behaviours. In what follows, I'll first tackle the matter of false humility and then I'll address the problem that the behaviours associated with humility are causally but not conceptually united by the notion of a 'disposition'. I'll suggest that a step towards solving both problems is to add a cognitive dimension to our account of humility, such that the humble agent is not only disposed to a certain set of behaviours, but also holds particular beliefs about herself.

The following is an argument that the SBA cannot account for false humility. It may seem long-winded, but I want to tease out precisely why the SBA cannot account for it so that it will become clear how adding a cognitive dimension, in particular, will help. We can construe the SBA in two different ways; as a 'context insensitive' behavioural account or as a 'context sensitive' behavioural account. The former considers every instance of an agent's behaviour, regardless of its context, as a relevant data point for inferring whether an agent possesses a given disposition, whereas the latter considers the agent's behaviour only in certain contexts as relevant for inferring given dispositions. For example, a context insensitive construal of the SBA (henceforth the 'CI-SBA') would count *any* instance of refraining from talking excessively about oneself, active listening, or refraining from behaving as though one deserves special treatment as an example of humble behaviour. Let's imagine that Oprah Winfrey, a very high-profile celebrity, spends the vast majority of her time in luxurious contexts with other high-profile celebrities. Oprah may refrain from talking about herself only for fear that somebody else has more impressive stories to tell, and she may ask thoughtful questions of others and listen carefully to their answers only because she is interested in them *qua* celebrities and not *qua* human beings. She may refrain from

behaving as though she deserves extra special treatment because, in these luxurious contexts, she is already getting it. The CI-SBA is forced to classify all of Oprah's abovementioned behaviour as 'non-proud' or 'humble'[3], despite its seeming that her context should affect our interpretation of her behaviour. We needn't jump to the conclusion that her behaviour instantiated false humility. On the information provided, Oprah might be acting from a mixture of fear and starstruck-ness rather than consciously feigning humility. But in another scenario where Oprah *is* feigning humility, the CI-SBA would still be unable to differentiate her falsely humble behaviour from genuine humble behaviour. The point is that the CI-SBA is vulnerable to 'false positives' in terms of classifying people's behaviour as humble. False positives can arise because much behaviour that is, e.g., shy, starstruck or obsequious resembles humble behaviour, and because feigned humble behaviour resembles humble behaviour. And if it falsely classifies behaviours as humble, it will ascribe the disposition of 'humility' to the wrong people.

The only conceivable way that the CI-SBA could conclude that Oprah is 'proud' is if a sufficient proportion of her behaviour is proud. Likewise, it can only dub her 'humble' if a sufficient proportion of her behaviour accords with what we'd expect from someone with a humble disposition. But what qualifies as 'sufficient'? Let's imagine that 95% of Oprah's behaviour is that of a humble person – i.e. it includes the abstinence from proud behaviour and perhaps the enacting of humble behaviour. Given the CI-SBA, I think it's more than reasonable to ascribe a trait to someone if 95% of their behaviour reflects what we'd expect from them if they possessed that trait.[4] Requiring that 100% of their behaviour accords with a

[3] Note that these are distinct categories. 'Non-proud' behaviour is the abstinence from 'proud behaviour' as earlier defined, whereas humble behaviour is the active engagement in 'humble behaviour' as earlier defined.
[4] People with a bent towards classical virtue theory might find this very controversial. They will hold that a given virtue, or virtue *simpliciter*, can only be ascribed to somebody if they act in accordance with it 100% of the time. 'Situationists' object to these puritanically high standards of classical virtue theory by pointing out, using empirical findings from socio-psychological experiments, that *no one* has been found to act in line with a given trait in 100% of the circumstances demanding of that trait. An Aristotelian could respond to the

given virtue before inferring that they possess this virtue is surely too stringent. In sum, most of us would be happy for the CI-SBA to dub Oprah 'humble' if 95% of her behaviour reflected humility. But if Oprah behaved humbly only when in luxurious contexts around high-status friends, and reserved her 5% of proud behaviour for her interactions with social inferiors, like waitstaff and shop-tellers, then we'd grow suspicious of her being humble despite the CI-SBA's saying so. Compare this with the case of Gayle King, Oprah's best friend, 95% of whose behaviour also accords with humility. However, the 5% of Gayle's behaviour which is proud plays out randomly across social demographics. Sometimes she talks over her mother, sometimes she talks over fellow high-profile celebrities, and sometimes she talks over social inferiors like waitstaff and shop tellers. The fact that 95% of both Oprah and her friend's behaviour accords with humility means that the CI-SBA deems them both equally humble. Yet it seems especially suspicious that Oprah's so-called humility only plays out when she is amongst social equals, and that she reserves her proud behaviour for social inferiors. The CI-SBA has no resources to account for this suspicion, because it is blind to the fact that we understand behaviour differently according to its context.

It would be too hasty to reject the SBA altogether because of its inability to account for context. Perhaps we can merely upgrade it to the context sensitive SBA (henceforth, the CS-SBA), which decrees that people's behaviour in certain contexts is far more telling than their

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situationist objection by pointing out that such empirical findings merely prove what Aristotelians have been saying all along; that truly virtuous people are extraordinarily rare (Doris, 1998). They will say that we should not lower the standards of virtue to accommodate the 'riff raff' of our society into the category of 'virtuous people'. Similarly, we should not lower the standards of what it means to possess a given trait so as to ascribe that trait to people more easily. There is good sense in this. But I am more interested in the way most people *colloquially* ascribe traits to others, which I take not to involve such high standards. Colloquially, acting in line with a trait 95% of the time would deem someone possessive of that trait in the eyes of most people. If arguing from a colloquial lens is unacceptable, then I have a stronger point to make: even Aristotle admitted of degrees of virtue (Doris, 1998). Somebody's behaving in line with a given virtue 95% of the time still makes them more virtuous than someone whose track-record is 90% positive. Albeit, neither of them is truly virtuous. This is all I need to make my ensuing point; that the context which underwrites the 5% or 10% of someone's bad behaviour matters more than what proportion of their behaviour is 'good', when it comes to ascribing virtues to them. We will judge someone differently depending on if the 5% of their bad behaviour played out in particularly 'telling' contexts or in a spread of random contexts.

behaviour in others when it comes to ascribing any given disposition to them. Notice that the CS-SBA has not diverged from defining humility purely behaviourally; it simply adds the qualification that it's only agents' behaviour *in particular contexts* which is relevant to ascertaining their dispositions. A compelling example of a context which is apt for discerning whether someone's behaviour is humble is when they are around their social inferiors. The CS-SBA would do well to hold, along with Sirius Black from the *Harry Potter* series, that "If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals" (Rowling, 2000:525). If we take 'interactions with social inferiors' as the context in which it's clearest if somebody's behaviour is humble or proud, then we can make sense of the intuition that Oprah's proud behaviour around waitstaff and shop-tellers, even if it only constituted 5% of her total behaviour, *matters more* in our appraisal of how humble she is than the 95% of her behaviour which was humble. Where the CI-SBA can only dub Oprah 'proud' if a significant proportion of her total behaviour is proud, the CS-SBA can only dub Oprah 'proud' if she behaves proudly in the contexts that count, e.g. when she is around social inferiors. The CS-SBA is therefore more discerning than the CI-SBA because it can identify people as proud even if the vast majority of their behaviour is humble. It thereby engenders fewer 'false positive' ascriptions of humility than the CI-SBA.

Alas, even though the CS-SBA is superior to the CI-SBA, neither can account for false humility. If Oprah feigns humility, even around her social inferiors, then both versions of the SBA will classify her as humble. Insofar as humility is defined solely in terms of behaviour, we don't have the resources to explain the phenomenon of false humility because there is no conceptual space for a disparity between someone's actions and their true character. The concept of 'falseness' relies for its existence on there being a disparity between two things, one of which is the truth. To make this point clearer, let's compare humility to politeness, which I take genuinely to be a purely behavioural attribute. Even by the CI-SBA's lights, if

Oprah occasionally behaved proudly among her celebrity friends, e.g. by demanding special treatment or boasting about her successes, then we'd likely doubt the sincerity of her previous displays of humility. Oprah's proud behaviour casts a dark shadow on the rest of her behaviour, seemingly giving us a glimpse into the true state of her character regarding humility. If somebody behaved politely most of his life, and only exhibited rudeness on a few occasions, we'd not start doubting the legitimacy of his previous displays of politeness. There is no such thing as acting polite without being polite, because politeness just is a way of acting. The disanalogy between how we interpret someone's polite behaviour in light of their impolite behaviour and how we interpret somebody's 'humble' behaviour in light of their proud behaviour suggests that humility, unlike politeness, is not purely behavioural. In sum, any definition of humility which is purely behavioural will fail to satisfy and explain my first pre-theoretical intuition about humility: that there is such thing as false humility.

The above problem can be solved by attaching a cognitive element to the SBA. Imagine the following scenario: Gayle King, Oprah's best friend, observes her behaving humbly around everyone, including her social inferiors, for a significant majority of her adult life, and therefore forms the belief that she is humble. One day whilst sitting in Oprah's living room, Gayle stumbles upon Oprah's private journal. The latest entry reads, "I think I am cut from a higher cloth than most people. If the masses are ordinary cotton, I am Egyptian Giza Cotton of voluminous thread-count. I only feel comfortable in the upper echelons of society, where I belong, but even there I fear I've never met an equal". The preceding pages are filled with similar entries. Oprah muses that her "unexceptional friends… must feel so grateful to know [her]" and that she "sometimes feels burdened by the unmatched poignancy of being Oprah Winfrey".[5] It would be very difficult for Gayle to maintain the belief that Oprah is humble, despite all her wonderfully humble behaviour. In fact, Gayle would likely lay more store by

[5] To be clear, these and the next few 'quotations' are entirely fictional.

Oprah's private self-evaluation than by her behaviour, because people's private thoughts are more likely to be honest than the image they display to others. Because Oprah's behaviour is more likely to instantiate false humility than her private journal entries are to instantiate dishonesty, Gayle would doubt the sincerity of Oprah's behaviour. Imagine the converse scenario: this time, Gayle reads in Oprah's diary that "[She believes] that all people are equally significant. Those who've accrued less wealth or fame than [her] are nonetheless imbued with full human dignity, which is the only true source of significance. It is a privilege to be able to call any fellow human [her] neighbour". The preceding pages are filled with similar sentiments. This time, Gayle is likely to be assured of the sincerity of Oprah's humble behaviour. Gayle's reactions in both of these scenarios, while intuitive, only make sense if the nature of agents' honest self-evaluations is considered more integral to their being humble than their behaviour, i.e. if the cognitive element is considered more fundamental in our account of humility than the behavioural element. This is clear because, in both scenarios outlined above, Gayle judges (as we would) the sincerity of Oprah's behaviour in light of her self-appraisals, rather than vice versa. Allowing self-evaluations to occupy a core spot in our conception of humility means that false humility can be explicated in terms of a disparity between a person's private self-appraisals, and their behaviour, where their private self-appraisals are considered a 'truer' reflection of their character than their behaviour. This is just the sort of disparity conceptually required by the notion of false humility. Adding a cognitive element to our (thus far) purely behavioural account of humility strengthens it by allowing it to satisfy my strong pre-theoretical intuition that there is such a thing as false humility.

Moreover, adding a cognitive element to our account explains why the CS-SBA deems some contexts more relevant than others in ascertaining if somebody is humble (which the CS-SBA itself lacks the resources to explain). The reason why it seems to 'count' more if somebody

acts humbly around their social inferiors is because it suggests that they *think* they're no more important than others, even those of significantly lower social status than themselves. If a high-status person behaves humbly around social equals, then their behaviour could result from the belief that they are no more important than anyone, including their companions, or from the belief that they are no more important than their companions, where collectively they and their companions are tremendously more important than everybody else. It's therefore more telling to observe someone's behaviour around social inferiors because it weeds out the latter option. Someone's behaving as though they think they're no more important than those of the lowest possible social status implies that they don't think they're more important than anyone.[6] The CS-SBA cannot explain as satisfyingly why some contexts are more relevant than others for judging someone's humility. At most, it can stipulate that humility *just is* a virtue to do with treating one's social inferiors as equals, regardless of whether one believes that they are. Again, though, the CS-SBA lacks the resources to explain *why* treating social inferiors, in particular, as equals is constitutive of humility, as opposed to treating anybody else this way. Adding a cognitive element helps because it suggests that treating social inferiors as equals reflects the agent's *belief* that they are equals, and that this is a virtuous belief. Yes, it is possible to treat social inferiors as equals *without* believing that they are equals. This phenomenon is called false humility, which is only explicable by adding a cognitive dimension to our behavioural account.

Lastly, note that the addition of a cognitive element in our account of humility grants us a plausible way to understand the intuitive conceptual connection between the otherwise disparate behaviours that we associate with humility. The SBA alone provides no such

[6] There is always the option that someone's behaviour around their social inferiors constitutes false humility but, again, this is only conceptually possible because of the disparity between a person's actions and their beliefs which is introduced by the cognitive requirements of humility. Their beliefs, on this conception, are taken as representative of the 'true' status of their humility.

conceptual link, but on a cognitive account we could say that humble behaviour, i.e. both positively humble and non-proud behaviour, is united by its being the natural expression of the belief that one is no more valuable than other people. Someone's asking thoughtful questions of others and listening well to their answers, not behaving as though she deserves special treatment and refraining from talking excessively about herself are all things that we'd expect from someone who genuinely believed that she was no more important than others. Humble behaviour is conceptually united by the non-self-aggrandising nature of the beliefs that engender it. The behaviour itself mirrors these non-self-aggrandising beliefs by being non-self-aggrandising in nature – behaviours like not talking over others and asking thoughtful questions have a common outcome of everybody in a given social circle being granted equal opportunity to participate therein. They amount to 'sharing the spotlight' in social situations, which is an intuitive practical outworking of non-self-aggrandising beliefs.

In sum, the two flaws with the SBA that constituted 'low hanging fruit'; that it can't account for the reality of false humility and that it can't explain how disparate humble behaviours (which includes both positively humble behaviours and non-prideful behaviours) are conceptually related; can be solved by rejecting the SBA in favour of an account which prioritises the cognitive aspects of humility, but which still sports a behavioural element. An additional flaw, with the CS-SBA in particular, is that it lacks the resources to explain why some contexts are more telling than others when judging people's level of humility. This too can be accounted for by the notion that some contexts betray agents' *beliefs* about their value in relation to others more clearly than other contexts do. The next question is: what exactly should a person believe about their value in relation to others to qualify as humble?

Section 4: Cognitive Accounts of Humility:

I've established above that any tenable account of humility will have a cognitive dimension which is more primary than its behavioural dimension. The content of the cognitive dimension has something to do with an agent's self-appraisals, especially in relation to her appraisals of others, but the precise nature of humble people's self-appraisals requires investigation. There are at least three options regarding the content of humility's cognitive dimension: that it consists in undervaluing oneself, valuing oneself accurately, or overestimating oneself. The latter is obviously incompatible with humility, but I'll test out the first two options further. Julia Driver is the most prominent advocate for the first option, which I'll explore below.

Driver argues in her 1989 article, 'The Virtues of Ignorance', that, to be humble, a person "must be ignorant with regard to her own self-worth. She must think herself less deserving, or less worthy, than she actually is" (1989:377). The main point of her article is to demonstrate that some virtues rely for their existence on ignorance, and are *ipso facto* practised unknowingly.[7] She uses humility as a case-in-point. Such virtues constitute counterexamples to the position held by classical virtue theorists that virtue is necessarily practised knowingly. This mainstream view is exemplified in Aristotle's insistence that virtue is always conducted via practical reason, which can only be done self-consciously (Driver, 1989:373). Driver

[7] One might object that a person *can* be aware of what they're ignorant of. E.g. I know that I am ignorant of the history of Ghana. More topically, Roger Federer can have a decent understanding of how good he is at tennis without knowing his precise world rankings, whilst simultaneously being aware that he doesn't know his precise world rankings. He can thus be aware that he is ignorant of his tennis capabilities in a precise sense. This is true. But Driver's account requires a specific kind of ignorance: *underestimating* one's self-worth or capabilities. And it is logically impossible to consciously underestimate something. This amounts to saying, "I sincerely believe that I am x units tall/funny/smart, and I also sincerely believe that I underestimate my tallness/funniness/smartness, such that my true tallness/funniness/smartness-score is above x units." If someone holds the second belief, then they cannot sincerely believe the first, and vice versa. Driver notes that the above sentence is reminiscent of Moore's Paradox, i.e. it is similarly odd to someone's stating, "It is raining outside, but I do not believe it" (Driver, 376). Thus ignorance of - in the sense of *undervaluing* - one's own worth entails being unaware that one is doing so. If, as Driver claims, practicing the virtue of humility just is undervaluing one's own worth, then this would be a virtue that is *ipso facto* practised unknowingly.

acknowledges that humility is often defined more broadly, to include cases wherein agents *are* aware of their own worth but understate it when in company. She emphasises that all she needs to make her point is that humility *can* be ascribed to those who are genuinely ignorant of, in the sense that they undervalue, their own worth. Such people practise the virtue of humility unknowingly, thereby embodying counterexamples to the mainstream view in virtue ethics. Nonetheless, even though Driver points out that her primary argument will hold even if humility is defined more broadly, she clearly advocates its narrower definition (REF). Her primary argument doesn't interest me so much as her account of humility in its own right, which I'll soon expound.

It's important first to acknowledge that, technically, Driver develops an account of 'modesty' in her paper as opposed to of 'humility'. She notes that the word 'modest' has at least two senses; "a chaste and unassertive countenance" (which manifests, partly, in dressing non-revealingly), which has historically been considered a womanly virtue, and "self-deprecation, or an underestimation of one's self-worth" (1989:374). Driver is most interested in the second sense of the word. I will join with many before me in taking Driver to be using the word 'modesty', in the second sense, interchangeably with the word 'humility'. This is not without a basis. In the year that she wrote her paper, the OED defined 'humility' as the quality of having "a low estimate of oneself" (OED, quoted in Richards, 1988:253). Thus, common usage of 'humility' at the time shared a sense with Driver's second use of the word 'modest'. Even if Driver didn't think of the words interchangeably, many other people do. This makes her account of modesty a good place to start in our quest for a cognitive account of humility, even if this is not what she intended it for. Whilst I'll treat Driver as the spokesperson for this account, I'll outline it in more general terms below to recognise the fact that many people besides Driver equate humility with underestimating oneself. Indeed, the essence of the OED's definition of the word has remained unchanged since 1988. The OED currently

defines humility as, “The quality of being humble or having a lowly opinion of oneself; meekness, lowliness, humbleness: the opposite of *pride* or *haughtiness”* (“humility”, OED:2021). The ‘Low Estimate Account’, i.e. the generalised version of Driver’s account, is detailed as follows:

Section 4.1:

The **Low Estimate Account (LEA)** defines ‘humility’ as ***the disposition to undervalue oneself, which includes undervaluing oneself globally as well as, or because of, undervaluing one’s capacities like one’s talents, moral character, positive impact on others and social or professional status. Humility could also be the disposition to undervalue all of one’s positive attributes whilst maintaining an accurate global self-worth. These dispositions engender abstinence from ‘proud’ behaviour such as talking excessively about oneself, boasting, and behaving as though one is entitled to special treatment, and sometimes they engender positively ‘humble’ behaviour, like indicating interest in others’ lives and stories.***

There are two important points of clarification to make before proceeding. The first is that, (at least in Driver’s version of the LEA, which means this is not necessarily a feature of all LEAs), humility still requires appraising oneself as *somewhat* valuable. Driver says that somebody who has done something good, but believes that he has done something wicked, is not humble but completely self-deprecating (1989:376). She draws a line in the sand between humility and self-deprecation based on the degree to which one’s self-worth falls below one’s true worth. Driver’s choice of where to draw this line, to my mind, is doomed to be rather arbitrary and subjective. Nonetheless, I’ll let this point slide as I think there are bigger fish to

fry concerning the LEA – namely critiques which can apply to all versions of the LEA and not just Driver's.

The second point of clarification is to specify precisely what the LEA's humble person is underestimating. There are several options here. She could be underestimating her global self-worth *simpliciter*, her global self-worth in virtue of underestimating some or all of her positive attributes, some of her positive attributes, or all of her positive attributes. Driver seems to define humility in her paper as the disposition to underestimate the second option, i.e. one's global self-worth in virtue of underestimating some or all of one's positive attributes (1989:378). In any case, since the LEA is only a generalised version of Driver's account of humility, I feel at liberty to decide what its humble person is undervaluing. My strategy is to make the LEA as accommodating as possible, such that my critique of it amounts to critiquing numerous (slightly) different accounts of humility. Therefore, the only option I'm going to dismiss outright is the third; that the LEA's humility is constituted by a disposition to underestimate some, *but not all,* of one's positive attributes. I'm jettisoning this option to avoid the case wherein somebody underestimates some (or even most) of her positive attributes, whilst overestimating or accurately estimating others. Such a person might therefore refrain from proud behaviour with regard to, say, her musical acumen and culinary talent, whilst banging on about how good looking she is and behaving as though her attractiveness entitles her to special treatment. It's not obvious whether to dub this person 'proud' or 'humble' *tout court*. Nonetheless, it seems natural enough to call her 'humble with respect to her culinary flair', and 'proud with respect to her looks'. These more limited ascriptions of humility and pride are common enough in every-day conversation and are philosophically interesting. I also think that any account of humility discussed in this thesis, and the critiques thereof, could be understood as analyses of these more limited ascriptions of

humility and pride. The only reason I am jettisoning this option, then, is because keeping it on the table will muddy my remaining discussion of humility. Whenever I refer to someone's being humble or proud in the remainder of this essay, I want my reader to rest assured that I mean that they are a humble or proud *person*, and not only in humble or proud with respect to some attribute. Concerning the LEA, then, a humble person is somebody who underestimates her *global* self-worth, for any reason including in virtue of underestimating some or all of her positive attributes. Alternatively, the LEA's humble person is someone who tends to underestimate (all of) her positive attributes, without necessarily underestimating her global self-worth, such that she can still be dubbed a humble *person* in light of this disposition. I am fairly confident that Driver had the first person in mind when explicating humility, and so the language I use in my ensuing discussion of humility will accord nicely with this option. But my ensuing discussion applies equally well to the second option, i.e. to the LEA's defining humility as a disposition to undervalue all one's positive attributes without undervaluing oneself globally.

Clarifications aside, what do we think of the LEA? Let's not skip past its appeal. Like all cognitive accounts, it unites the disparate behaviours we associate with humility both causally and conceptually. It does this by equating humility with a disposition (hence, the causal unity) to hold certain beliefs about oneself (hence, the conceptual unity). The conceptual thread running through abstinence from proud behaviours and engagement in humble ones is their non-self-aggrandising nature, which reflects the non-self-aggrandising beliefs which engender them. The LEA also captures the intuition that it is admirable for a truly excellent or worthy person not to possess the airs of excellence, despite seemingly being entitled to them (Richards, 1990:257). To be unaware of one's own entitlements, and therefore not to demand them, arguably has a sort of unassuming beauty to it. Also, unlike

purely behavioural accounts, the LEA has the resources to account for false humility and can therefore satisfy and explicate the first of my pre-theoretical intuitions. It can do this by pointing to a disparity between one's proud self-evaluation and one's humble behaviour, under the assumption that one's self-evaluation reflects the truth about one's level of humility. Thus a person can be deemed proud despite his humble behaviour. The LEA shares all of these positive features with all cognitive accounts.

Very notably, and more particularly to the LEA (this is not the case with the as-yet-unexplored Accuracy Account of humility, for instance), the LEA makes sense of why self-assertions of humility are jarring, thus satisfying and explicating my second pre-theoretical intuition. I agree with Driver that any decent account of humility should be able to explicate this phenomenon (1989:375). According to the LEA, which assumes that humility is a virtue as well as claiming that humble people are ignorant of their virtues, or are disposed to underestimate them, it would *seem* self-defeating for a humble person to believe of himself that he is humble. "Like Moore's 'It is raining, but I do not believe it,' ['I am humble'] can be true, but [its utterer] cannot believe it to be true or utter the sentence sensibly. [Someone] can be [humble], but [she] cannot know it" (Driver, 1989:376). My interpretation of Driver's qualm is that, by her lights, stating 'I am humble' is equivalent to the statement, 'I know that one of my virtues is that I am ignorant of, or underestimate, my virtues'. I take it that her dubbing the former statement 'self-defeating' translates to her calling the latter statement contradictory. But if I've interpreted her correctly, then I must disagree with Driver that the latter statement is straightforwardly contradictory. If its implicit propositions were fleshed out, it might mean, 'I know that one of my virtues is that I am ignorant of, or underestimate, my virtues, *except for this one*.' Said otherwise; 'I tend to underestimate my virtues, and I think that that's a morally good trait'. This seems like a perfectly reasonable statement to me.

I've argued in Footnote 7 that it's impossible consciously to underestimate one's capabilities in a particular area, and I stand by this. A statement which demonstrates this impossibility is, 'I know that I underestimate how funny I am'. This is self-defeating because it entails the contradiction that its speaker simultaneously believes that she is x units funny ('p'), and that this is an underestimation, i.e. that she is not really x units funny, but x + n units funny ('-p'). She believes 'p and -p', which is a contradiction. For the very same reason, the statement, 'I know that I underestimate my tendency to underestimate my virtues' entails a contradiction. Thus the statement, 'I underestimate how humble I am', which equates to the previous statement, entails a contradiction and is therefore self-defeating. But, crucially, this is different from stating, 'I am humble', which could mean, 'I tend to underestimate my virtues, and I think that's a morally good trait'. It seems perfectly consistent to have an accurate awareness of one's own tendency generally to underestimate one's worth or abilities, without knowing which particular abilities one is underestimating at a given time, and whilst simultaneously having an accurate sense of *some* virtues. Someone can become aware of her tendency to underestimate her capabilities through repeated experiences of achieving more highly than expected, and also by being appraised of this tendency by trusted friends. The same person can conceive of 'humility' as a tendency to underestimate one's capabilities and, so long as she is unaware of the capabilities she is underestimating at a given time, can consistently state, 'I am humble'. In sum, I think that 'I underestimate my humility' is self-defeating by the LEA's lights, but that, 'I am humble' is not necessarily self-defeating. The LEA can nonetheless still explain the oddness of the latter in slightly more limited contexts. If the utterer of 'I am humble' means that she underestimates her *global* self-worth, and not just that she tends to underestimate her capabilities without knowing which ones she's underestimating at a given time, then, 'I am humble' is self-defeating for the same reason that 'I underestimate how funny I am' is. It entails believing that one's global self-worth is x units

(‘p’) whilst also believing that one’s global self-worth is x + n units (‘-p’). The belief, ‘p and -p’ is contradictory. The takeaway here is that, whilst the LEA can satisfy and explain both my first and second pre-theoretical intuitions about humility, other accounts of humility can do the same without sporting the LEA’s flaws, which I’ll discuss next.

One of the LEA’s most apparent flaws is that it suffers the unpalatable consequence that either the inculcation of humility requires self-deception, or humility cannot be inculcated at all and can only be possessed by fluke. If somebody already has an accurate understanding of her own capabilities or self-worth, perhaps based on evidence of her strengths and weaknesses such as, respectively, the successes and failures she’s clocked, then how is she to learn to underestimate her worth? Her only two options are to will herself to forget about her successes, and therefore her worth, or to will herself to believe that they are less impressive than she’d previously thought, i.e. to wilfully underestimate them. The first option amounts to believing that she literally did *not* achieve the things she previously believed she did, or to becoming agnostic about whether she achieved them, i.e. it requires inculcating a belief that contradicts her current belief in her successes. This constitutes self-deception. Note that, given the LEA, the second option, i.e. wilfully underestimating her successes, does not consist in ‘keeping her achievements in perspective’. If our heroine was, say, Marie Curie, then wilfully underestimating her achievements would amount to inculcating a belief like ‘I contributed only in a token way to my and my husband’s work on radioactivity, which earned us the Nobel Prize in 1903. He and Henri Becquerel did all of the difficult thinking and experimentation, and I played a merely supportive role’. Whereas ‘keeping her achievements in perspective’ would amount to reframing her actual contributions in light of the bigger picture. It could look like her thinking ‘I contributed significantly to my, my husband’s and Becquerel’s work on radioactivity which won us the 1903 Nobel Prize for Physics. My share

in this prize was well-earned. But one must remember that we didn't develop every bit of the science we used ourselves. We stood on the shoulders of giants – building on crucial insights and discoveries from many before us to make our own breakthrough in radioactivity. In a non-trivial sense, this prize owes to many hundreds of people's work, and not just ours'. Note that the first option involves forcing herself to believe a falsehood, that she did not contribute as much as she did to the project, and that the second option merely contextualises the truth about her own contribution to science within the bigger picture. Inculcating the first belief therefore involves self-deception but inculcating the second does not. Most importantly, only the first belief qualifies as *underestimating* her contributions to science. The second does not involve underestimation but a sober-minded accuracy about her contributions to science. In sum, only by inculcating beliefs that one did not achieve what one thought one had achieved, or becoming agnostic about one's past achievements, or by consciously underestimating one's achievements, all of which involve inculcating beliefs which one currently takes to be false, which constitutes self-deception, can one become humble by the LEA's lights.

But it is unacceptably counterintuitive to prescribe that people ought to believe falsehoods to be humble, let alone to inculcate them, which requires self-deception. Even Driver rejects this mode of inculcating humility because she thinks that self-deception is intrinsically bad (1989:382), but I would like to chime in that it is also impossible. Doxastic voluntarism, a school of thought which holds that we can believe a given proposition at will, is not well supported by philosophers at all. Bernard Williams (1973:148) demonstrates its incoherence rather elegantly. His argument goes as follows:

1) If we could believe propositions at will, we'd have to be aware of our ability to believe propositions at will.

2) Believing a given proposition at will requires being able to believe it irrespective of its truth, and, given (1), being aware that one can acquire beliefs irrespective of their truth.
3) A belief is rightly understood as "something purported to represent reality" (Williams, 1973:148).
4) It follows from (1)-(3) that, at moment right before choosing to believe a given proposition, one could not coherently understand that proposition as a belief, i.e. as something purported to be true.
5) Moreover, if we could remember which of our 'beliefs' we acquired at will, we could not coherently think of them as our beliefs, i.e. as propositions we take to be true, because we'd remember that we acquired them irrespective of their truth.
6) Therefore, in order to regard the 'beliefs' we acquired at will as genuine beliefs, we'd have to forget that we acquired them at will.
7) But if we didn't know which of our beliefs we'd acquired at will, we'd have reason to doubt the veracity of all our beliefs, including the belief that we can acquire beliefs at will.
8) Taken together, (1) and (7) entail a contradiction: that if doxastic voluntarism were coherent, we'd have to believe both that we could believe at will, and that we should doubt this belief.
9) Doxastic voluntarism is therefore incoherent.

It seems especially implausible, given Williams's argument, to be able to will ourselves to believe something which we currently take to be *false*, let alone propositions about which we are currently agnostic. And yet, given the LEA, inculcating humility requires adopting beliefs

which one currently takes to be false. So, as well as self-deception's other downsides, Williams's argument demonstrates that it's impossible.

How are people with accurate knowledge of their self-worth or skills to become humble, if they cannot learn to underestimate themselves or their skills? Driver bites the bullet and says that it's impossible to inculcate humility. Only those who are naturally disposed to virtues of ignorance possess them. Anybody who tries to possess them necessarily fails (1989:383). This is a very unpalatable conclusion. It would be pessimistic, though coherent, to claim that humility is something that we cannot cultivate. But it is incoherent to claim in addition that those who already possess it, by complete fluke, should also be praised for having it. Aristotelean notions that virtues are praiseworthy and that, for something to be *morally* praiseworthy it must be voluntary, are widely held, and for good reason.[8] Either we should jettison the seemingly core intuition that something is only morally praiseworthy if it's the result of an agent's effort, such that Driver's humility is morally praiseworthy despite being accidental, or we must conclude that Driver's humility is not in fact morally praiseworthy. I

[8] Not everyone shares the intuition that something needs to be voluntary, i.e. to result from an agent's conscious effort, to be worthy of moral praise. Some will argue that being naturally intelligent or kind warrants praise despite being out of the agent's control; their intelligence could be genetic, and their kindness could be a product of their upbringing. Perhaps, by sheer imitation and adoption of family norms, they developed a set of habits in their treatment of others which amount to kindness, but quite unconsciously and unintentionally. Such a person's kindness is morally praiseworthy despite being involuntary. My rebuttal is that natural intelligence, and many other praiseworthy traits, are not *virtues*. It is only for *morally* praiseworthy traits that I reserve the intuition that an agent must have done something off their own bat to qualify for *moral* praise. Kindness is a virtue, or at least it is morally praiseworthy, and so it seems that I should hold that *some* traits, despite being involuntary, are deserving of moral praise. My response is, essentially, to refute that such instances of genuine kindness exist. I suspect that there comes a point when any environmentally instilled trait cannot be sustained but for the agent's choice and willpower to sustain it. There is also likely to be a modicum of choice involved in allowing oneself to develop traits which mirror those observed in one's environment in the first place, i.e. before the choice to sustain them emerges one must first assent to being imbued with them. Not all children of kind parents, or who were raised surrounded by kindness, are in fact kind after all, which implies that some did not assent to being imbued with kind habits. I therefore reject the idea that any genuine virtue can subsist without the agent's choice in the matter. The extent to which somebody deserves moral praise equals the extent to which their own agency was involved in the cultivation of a given virtue. In the case where somebody has involuntarily internalised habits and dispositions, which have moral value, from their environment, then moral praise is owed *not* to them but to the person responsible for cultivating this environment. E.g. if somebody develops kind habits (which I don't think is enough to constitute genuine kindness in any case) because of having been brought up by genuinely kind parents, then moral praise is due to his parents but not to him.

contend that we choose the latter, and seek a new definition of humility which preserves my third pre-theoretical intuition that it *is* a morally praiseworthy trait.

Whilst it may be the case that, given the LEA, those who already possess accurate knowledge about their self-worth and skills cannot become humble, perhaps it is still possible for people who are *already* ignorant of their worth and capabilities, and therefore who are already humble, to choose to remain ignorant of them, and thereby to remain humble. The *choice* component here would preserve the intuitive marriage between voluntariness and moral praiseworthiness, such that Driver's humility could, in these limited circumstances, still be considered morally praiseworthy. This is great news for the LEA. But unfortunately, when tested for leaks, some cracks are exposed in the idea that somebody can maintain their pre-existing humility. Driver says that a humble person should have a "dogmatic disposition" towards underestimating herself (Driver, 1989:378). She sketches a scenario in which a highly capable person, who is performing well at her job, is nonetheless unaware of the value she adds to her company. The LEA would, *prima facie*, describe this person as humble because she meets its criteria if undervaluation. But if someone sits her down and *tells* her about the value of her contributions, say at her midterm report, and she goes back to work with an inflated view of her self-worth in virtue of her high performance, then Driver holds that she clearly was never *disposed* to underestimate herself to begin with. She was merely naïve to the quality of her work. Driver contends that "most of us" would not call this person humble, because the way that she responded to being apprised of her capabilities (by developing an inflated view of herself) reveals that she was previously disposed towards conceit (1989:378). By contrast, a truly humble person simply cannot be persuaded of her worth, even by new information, owing to her 'dogmatic' disposition to undervalue herself and/or her skills. I find this objectionable. For argument's sake, we can accept that the worker who emerges from her positive midterm report with an *inflated* view of her skills possessed a

disposition towards conceit. But what about the case where she simply emerges with an accurate view of her skills? I don't think that 'most of us' would accuse her of pride in this case. We'd applaud her receptivity to truth and look elsewhere for evidence of her humility or pride.

When it comes down to it, Driver has strange expectations of her humble person. How exactly would her 'dogmatic' disposition to undervalue herself play out during her midterm report? I can think of at least three options: she could refuse to listen to the facts being presented to her about her good work, she could fail to understand the facts being presented to her, or she could reject the veracity of the facts being presented to her, *simply because* they paint her in a good light. An account of humility which requires agents to do any of these three things seems respectively to condemn people for what they cannot always control, to make humility depend on accidental mental deficiencies, or to require its exemplars to be suspiciously averse to truth. The latter is morally jarring but perhaps also incoherent. The first option, i.e. refusing to listen when being apprised of one's skill, breaks down when we imagine someone's being *involuntarily* apprised of her skills. The idea of someone blocking her ears at the first hint of being complimented, whilst strange, at least maintains a modicum of intuitiveness about what it means to be humble. The agent might want to avoid an inflated ego at all costs, and might see an accurate sense of her worth as the first step on a slippery slope to an inflated sense of her worth. Though extreme, it makes sense for this person to block her ears when being complimented as a preventative measure. But if someone were able to ambush her with a (true) compliment, thus apprising her of her real worth before her hands were able to reach her ears, and she understood the compliment, then the LEA is forced to deem her proud from that moment on. This makes no sense. Just as somebody cannot be morally praised for something outside of her control, she cannot be condemned for something outside her control. All that this person has done to 'merit' a change in her *ethical* status is to

hear and understand a fact about herself, which also seems to blur the lines between fact and value, i.e., in this context, between what is the case, and how we should respond to what is the case. Another way for someone to maintain her pre-existing humility, by the LEA's lights, is for her not to understand the facts presented to her about her own worth, perhaps owing to some mental deficiency. And yet the thought of a human excellence, like a virtue, relying for its existence on a human defect, like a mental deficiency, is jarring (Richards, 1988:253). If we accept the tenet of classical virtue theory that virtue is the apex of all human excellences, then the LEA is committed to an image of the 'ideal human' as one who is virtuous only because she is mentally defective. Mental excellence and moral excellence cannot coexist in the LEA's ideal person. Not only is this unintuitive in itself, but it rests on the notion which I disputed earlier; that something can be morally praiseworthy despite being involuntary. Virtue that is engendered by mental deficiencies, which are accidental, is not morally praiseworthy. Besides, I don't think that this is what Driver had in mind. I think she imagined her ideally humble person enacting the third option; simply to disbelieve facts about her own prowess. Again, this is bizarre, and potentially incoherent. If someone were presented with indubitable evidence of her skill, e.g. if she solved a notoriously difficult mathematical problem, and was congratulated for it, it would be completely unreasonable for her to deny the level of skill for which she was being congratulated. Perhaps a humble person could refute vague compliments like "You are an exceptionally gifted mathematician" but to deny precise, straightforwardly true compliments like "You clearly possess the skill to solve this notoriously difficult mathematical problem. This makes you outstanding as a mathematician," would betray an irrational aversion to truth. A human excellence as important as a virtue surely cannot depend for its existence on a human defect like a stubborn resistance to truth. This seems especially dodgy, and even unvirtuous, when considering that classical accounts of the virtues take truth and the knowledge thereof to be intrinsic goods. It

is unacceptably counterintuitive to imagine that the ideal human can possess virtue only insofar as she habitually eschews truth. Such eschewal is irrational at best and normatively suspicious at worst. Furthermore, this option may even be incoherent because, to eschew the truth, she needs to recognise it as such. If somebody complimented her skills in a way that undervalued them, yet still cast them in a positive light, then Driver's humble person would be welcome to accept this compliment. But this would require her being able to discern true compliments from understated ones, which in turn would require her to have an accurate sense of her own skillset by which to measure the veracity of compliments. She cannot simultaneously underestimate and hold accurate beliefs about her skills, which makes Driver's humble person a walking contradiction. Of course, Driver might have in mind that her humble person prudentially eschews *all* positive comments for fear of their being true, but this would amount to a debilitating self-deprecation and not humility, even by Driver's own lights, which I clarified earlier on.

In sum, the LEA is an untenable account of humility because, if we try to figure out how to inculcate its version of humility, we are led to the unacceptable conclusion that its inculcation requires self-deception, which is impossible. Any instance of the LEA's humility is natural and therefore accidental, which means we'd have to forgo the intuition that humility is morally praiseworthy. It seems, *prima facie*, that at least somebody who is *already* humble, in that they already underestimate their skills, could voluntarily maintain their humility by avoiding contact with evidence of their skills, and thus be morally praised for their effort in so doing. But when we test out this option in the hypothetical scenario wherein a humble person is *involuntarily* apprised of her worth, the LEA is forced into the bizarre conclusion that she is *ipso facto* no longer humble. She cannot maintain her humility by not understanding the facts about her value, because the mental deficiency required for this is accidental, making her resulting self-underestimation morally non-praiseworthy. Finally, she

cannot maintain her humility by eschewing truth because truth is intrinsically good. An aversion to it is incompatible with the human excellencies we associate with virtues like humility. If Driver had in mind that a humble person should be able to discriminate between understated compliments and true ones, and only to accept the understated ones, then Driver's 'humble person' must have an accurate understanding of her skills and worth, which she cannot by Driver's own definition. If Driver had in mind that, prudentially, a humble person should eschew all compliments, then she is mistaking humility for self-deprecation, even by her own lights.

Most of the problems with the LEA owe to its insistence that humility is incompatible with knowing the truth about one's capabilities. But why does it major on this point? Driver says that underestimating one's self and skills engenders meek behaviour, i.e. behaviour which does not incite jealousy, envy, tension between people and other socially "troublesome" emotions (1989:384). It seems, then, that if we find an account of humility which engenders this kind of behaviour whilst also allowing its agents to know the truth about their worth and capabilities, then we'll preserve what is valuable about the LEA, even in Driver's eyes, whilst ridding ourselves of its more 'troublesome' features. Let's consider Owen Flanagan's 'Non-Overestimation Account' of humility as an alternative cognitive account to Driver's. Flanagan reckons that a humble person is somebody who "[has] a perfectly accurate sense of her accomplishments and worth but who does not overestimate them" (1989:424). I.e., she neither underestimates nor overestimates her abilities and worth. Flanagan believes his account to be better than Driver's because, *inter alia*, it supports the idea that a humble person can have a functioning self-esteem without being accused of arrogance. He thinks that Driver's account goes too far in requiring that humble people consistently undermine their own worth, which can only be detrimental to their self-esteems (1989:425). Norvin Richards (1988) puts forward a similar account of humility, i.e. one which centres around having

accurate beliefs about one's own worth. I'll merge and generalise their views into what I'll call the 'Accuracy Account' of humility, laid out as follows:

Section 4.2:

The **Accuracy Account (AA)** defines 'humility' as ***the disposition to value oneself accurately, perhaps in light of valuing one's talents, character, positive impact on others and societal or professional status soberly and accurately, and keeping them in perspective. Humility could also be the disposition to value all of one's positive attributes accurately, independently of whether or not one maintains an accurate global self-worth. These dispositions engender behaviour which is merited by one's genuine value and accomplishments. It naturally represses behaviour which reflects an inflated self-evaluation.***

Our first reaction to the AA might be to question the moral value of holding accurate beliefs about oneself. So what if someone is aware of their self-worth and/or capabilities? True belief is an epistemic good which is worth striving for, such that the holding many false beliefs seems incompatible with human excellence, but it is unclear why true belief is *morally* valuable *per se*. How could it be the good-making feature of humility? Even if it is, it is unclear why true beliefs are especially characteristic of *humility* and not some other virtue, like honesty. Perhaps we are changing the meaning of 'humility' so much that it would be more prudent to create and name another virtue which is to do with non-overestimation (Dunnington, 2019:15). Flanagan answers this question by referencing empirical, psychological research conducted by Shelley Taylor and Jonathan Brown which proves that the vast majority of people *overestimate* themselves. It would therefore be quite remarkable for somebody to resist the daily barrage of temptations to overvalue themselves and instead to

appraise their skills and/or themselves soberly, and to maintain perspective about their achievements. Since most of us overvalue ourselves, we unknowingly behave in an overly entitled and self-serving manner. The Accuracy Account relies on the notion that appraising ourselves accurately will result in the *decrease* of most of our self-esteems and therefore a decrease in overly entitled behaviour, and therein lies the moral value of this version of humility (Flanagan, 1989:427). A small chink in this defence, I think, is that not everyone overestimates themselves. Some people greatly underestimate their own worth and skills, such that learning to appraise themselves accurately would result in an *increase* in their self-entitled behaviour. If Flanagan ultimately pins the value of his account on decreasing self-entitled behaviour then surely, from his point of view, he should regret that those who currently undervalue themselves' behaviour will be *more* self-entitled as a result of adopting his humility? In the (apparently unlikely) scenario where more people currently underestimate themselves than overestimate themselves, or where the minority of people who underestimate themselves do so by a gargantuan margin, widespread adoption of Flanagan's humility would lead to a net *increase* in self-entitled behaviour. Flanagan might respond by saying that it is appropriate for such people to behave as though they are entitled to what they are in fact entitled to. This is healthy and good, especially as compared to their preceding self-undermining behaviour. The moral value of his humility, then, is that it decreases behaviour to which people aren't entitled, and increases behaviour to which they are. I think that this is fair enough as a defence of the behaviour in question, but not as a defence of his account of humility. Flanagan must explain what makes the (justified) increase in self-entitled behaviour constitute *humility* in particular, as opposed to some other positive trait like dignity or self-respect.

If we accept that humility amounts to behaving in a way which is congruent with one's accurate self-appraisal, the AA still has some creases to iron out. Daniel Statman challenges

the AA with the case of a truly exceptional person. For the sake of maintaining the clarity of this argument, this person is not just exceptional with reference to a given trait. She is exceptional *qua* human specimen because she is at least above-average in all respects whilst also having some exceptional qualities. Whatever weaknesses she has do not pull down her overall 'value' to make her anything less than exceptional. Her impressiveness *qua* human specimen places her in the 95th percentile of the world's people, both dead and alive. What would it mean for her to keep her worth or capabilities 'in perspective'? It might mean constantly reminding herself of the 5% of people who are superior to her. But this seems almost pathological. Why does 'keeping one's value in perspective' amount to focusing on one's minor flaws as opposed to one's plethora of positive traits? (Statman, 1992:427). 'Perspective' is seemingly better understood as the act of keeping the whole truth, both the good and the bad, in mind, i.e. that she is both inferior than 5% of people and superior to 95% of them. 'Perspective' should, in her case, involve acknowledging to herself that she is *extraordinarily* gifted, from both a present-minded and historical perspective. In turn, Statman contends that this highly impressive woman, by Flanagan's lights, has every right to *behave* as though she is better than 95% of people. Because she is. Such behaviour might include talking over others, dismissing their views briskly to save time with no regard for their feelings, calling her intellectual inferiors 'idiots' and other such names (after all, this might be true of them in relation to her), displaying little patience for people who are slower to execute tasks than she is, and so on. All such behaviour flows from an accurate understanding of her capabilities in relation to others, and so it is justified, but it still seems arrogant (Statman, 1992:427). Thus we can adopt the AA only at the cost that some of its so-called 'humble' people behave in ways that are unkind and abrasive and which diminish others. Such behaviour is consistent with the AA, but it is not consistent with a more pre-theoretically intuitive understanding of what it means to be humble, i.e. that it is a trait which

involves behaving in a way that does not diminish others. Moreover, many humble people (in this pre-theoretically intuitive sense), who are also exceptionally talented, seem to exist. At the very least they are logically possible (Richards, 1988:253). Could we perhaps add something to our account to accommodate the intuition that humility is consistent with holding accurate beliefs about one's value, and thereby not underestimating oneself, without this type of self-appraisal leading to behaviour that diminishes others?

Statman suggests that we define the humble person as someone who follows a *moral imperative* to avoid making her peers feel inferior, not only because this is intrinsically wrong, but also because it issues in jealousy, hatred, self-loathing and despair, which are not conducive to social flourishing (1992:434). Specifically, he thinks that humility is the disposition to "resist temptations" to develop a view of oneself which is inflated enough for one to believe that one is exempt from this imperative (1992:434). To be clear, Statman holds that *any* self-appraisal which leads its agent to believe he is exempt from this moral imperative is *ipso facto* inflated. As he put it, "the fact that one is epistemically justified in believing one is of high merit does not imply that one is morally justified in going around and showing off in front of other people thereby making them feel degraded" (Statman, 1992:434). Essentially, Statman draws a line between the status of people's impressiveness *qua* human being, and people's moral worth *qua* human being. I take it that Statman believes that degrading someone or making them feel inferior by, for instance, boasting about one's achievements in front of them, constitutes undermining their moral worth. He takes it as given that we are all equally and significantly morally worthy and are to be treated as such, which includes being treated as ends in ourselves. Maintaining this belief constitutes the cognitive aspect of his account. Importantly, Statman does not prescribe the specific content of this belief, but says only that humble agents should think, however vaguely or subconsciously, that they have a moral duty towards others because of their shared, equally

valuable, humanity. Believing something along these lines ensures that humble people's good behaviour towards others is non-accidental. Instead it is a product of believing that they *ought* to treat others in a certain way (Statman, 1992:435). It is only when people allow their high (but justified, according to the AA) self-appraisals to cross into the moral sphere, potentially leading them to think they are exempt from following the imperative, that they are guilty of pride (Statman, 1992:434).

The core intuitions which Statman holds dear are that we should appraise ourselves accurately and that every person is of equal and significant moral worth and should be treated as such, which includes not degrading others or making them feel inferior. I'll call Statman's account the 'Qualified Accuracy Account' (QAA) of humility. It is unclear whether the QAA should be classified as a behavioural, cognitive, or affective account of humility. Statman himself says that the behaviour it promotes ultimately flows from the *belief* that everyone is of equal moral worth and ought to be treated as ends in themselves, suggesting that it is more fundamentally a cognitive account than a behavioural one (1992:434). However, he also says that modesty is ultimately a "disposition to *stick*, so to speak, to this belief and to behave accordingly, in spite of a very powerful temptation to believe and to behave contrarily" (emphasis my own) (1992:434). Indeed, it seems as though the ultimate locus of his humility is in one's ability *to resist the temptation* to develop warped views of one's own and others' moral worth, from which socially destructive behaviour will naturally flow. I take the resisting of temptations to belong to the affective part of a person (if we accept a broadly Aristotelean tripartition), and not to the cognitive part. Accordingly, I think that Statman's QAA is fundamentally an affective account of humility. To preserve Statman's own conviction that it's fundamentally cognitive, though, we need only make a small change. Instead of pinpointing the locus of humility as an affective strength to resist certain temptations, we can pinpoint it as a *cognitive* strength not to make illicit inferences about

one's entitlements based on one's merits. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood take this route. They explicate humility by reference to some of its opposites, including, *inter alia*, vanity and arrogance. They define arrogance as "a disposition to 'infer' some illicit entitlement claim from a supposition of one's superiority, and to think, act, and feel on the basis of that claim", and they define humility, partly, as the disposition to refrain from such inferences (Roberts & Wood, 2003:265). Importantly, an 'arrogant' inference can be made subconsciously, and it needs to be illicit. It would not count as arrogant if a remarkably skilled doctor inferred from his expertise that he was entitled to use of the best equipment in the hospital, because this is a valid inference. It *would* count as arrogance, however, if the same doctor inferred from his medical expertise that he was entitled to disrespect other people, because this inference is (always) invalid (Roberts & Wood, 2003:265). Roberts, Wood, and Statman all share the conviction that thinking oneself superior to others *per se* does not make one proud. Even inferring from one's plethora of merits that one is superior *qua* human specimen does not make one proud. After all, perhaps one's being greatly more talented and virtuous than others *does* make one superior *qua* human specimen. Acting in (justified) accordance with this superiority does not make one proud either. These three thinkers believe only that inferring from one's alleged superiority, either *qua* human specimen or in reference to a given skill, that one may mistreat others or that one somehow qualifies for (unjustified) special treatment, constitutes arrogance or pride.[9] This means that, if somebody infers illicit entitlement claims from some particular skill, then she can be proud without thinking herself superior *qua* human specimen. Also, somebody can think she's superior *qua* human specimen without being proud, provided she makes no illicit inferences regarding her entitlements (Roberts & Wood, 2003:533). Something absent from Roberts and

[9] I am using 'arrogance' and 'pride' interchangeably because Roberts and Wood speak of arrogance as a possible antonym to 'humility'. Pride is also such an antonym, and is more general than 'arrogance', such that whenever something is arrogant it will also be proud.

Wood's account, which Statman helpfully explicates, is the grounding claim for why people ought not to be mistreated, or for what makes such arrogant inferences 'illicit' in the first place. This is what Statman's account can offer: that we are all of equal and significant moral worth, and therefore that, no matter how superior one is by various metrics or *qua* human species, one can never surpass another in terms of *moral* worth and thus ought not to behave as though one does. All three thinkers draw a strong distinction between people's overall appraisal *qua* human species, which might surpass or subceed another's, and one's *moral* worth qua human species, which can never surpass or subceed another's, but only Statman articulates this distinction clearly (1992:434).

So, then, let's finally combine the insights from Statman, Roberts and Wood to create what I'll call the Qualified Accuracy Account, or QAA. Combining their insights allows us to preserve Statman's conviction that his account is fundamentally cognitive, and it provides Roberts and Wood with a metaphysical ground for why their inference-based arrogance is morally wrong.

The amalgamated account goes as follows:

Section 4.3:

The **Qualified Accuracy Account (QAA)** defines 'humility' as ***the cognitive disposition to abstain from making illicit entitlement claims based on one's perceived (or actual) superiority qua human specimen, or based on the impressiveness of one's individual traits, and consequently to think and behave in a way which accords with one's true entitlements. The behaviour this engenders will be reflect the humble agent's conviction that all human beings are of equal and significant moral worth, i.e. their behaviour will, inter alia, not degrade or diminish others, and it will not be proud.***

By introducing the notion of 'moral worth', the QAA shines the light of hindsight on both the LEA and the AA, illuminating the fact that both accounts had only the notion of people's value *qua* human specimen at their disposal. The LEA and the AA involved undervaluing oneself *globally* or accurately valuing oneself *globally* respectively, but neither account clarified whether these global self-evaluations constituted evaluations *qua* human specimen or global evaluations of their subjects' moral worth. The QAA is a breath of fresh air in this regard because it delineates the two. To be clear, I think that people can legitimately be thought to be unequal *qua* human specimen. If we are to hold any ideals at all regarding how the human being ought to live and function, it is highly likely that some people approximate this ideal more closely than others, and therefore count as superior *qua* human specimen. It would be difficult to maintain a theory of virtue which disallows us to dub historical humanitarians and peace-makers *better people* than famous war criminals and mass murderers, provided that such humanitarians and peacemakers didn't have colossal hidden flaws which outweighed their virtuous aspects. The QAA's notion of the equality of our fundamental moral worth allows us to sensibly rank people, at least in principle, according to their excellencies whilst maintaining the intuition that we are all, in some profound sense, equal. The QAA's introduction of the notion of moral worth therefore brings both our preceding and ensuing discussion of humility into sharper focus, whilst providing a moral ground for humility's being a virtue.

Before moving on, it is also worth pointing out that the account of humility which is currently on the table, i.e. Statman's QAA, *assumes* that all people are in fact morally equal and to be treated as ends in themselves, which I take to be a metaphysical assumption, i.e. an assumption about what kind of world we live in and what is objectively valuable in it. If ours was a world in which human beings were fundamentally insignificant, or of unequal moral worth, then there would be no ultimate basis for humility as we've so far expounded it. Of

course, there might be other moral imperatives for how to treat people in such a world, but without people being of equal and significant moral worth, there would no longer be a basis of the virtue of 'humility' as so far understood. This is noteworthy because it is the first time since beginning our quest for an account of humility that anything has been assumed about the fundamental nature of reality. So far, all I've done is pit intuitions about what one might qualify as 'humble' against one another to see which ones win out, so as to weave together an internally consistent theory of humility which satisfies and explains most of my pre-theoretical intuitions. But this is the first time that our working account of humility requires being consistent with facts *external* to it, i.e. about the true nature of the world and what's valuable in it, for its sensibility.

What do we make of the QAA? A point in its favour is that it solves the problem that is raised by the AA; it curbs the possibility that someone with a justifiably high view of herself behaves in ways which diminish others, i.e. that she behaves proudly. The QAA's manoeuvre is to switch the behaviour-engendering belief from something about one's own self-appraisal, to the belief that everybody is equally morally valuable and ought to be treated in a way that does not undermine their worth. The behaviour demanded by this belief is non-proud in nature. This switch ensures that principled (non-accidental) abstinence from proud behaviour is consistent with extremely high, justified, self-appraisals. It also ensures that the behaviour we associate with humility is *conceptually* united by the non-self-aggrandising nature of the belief which engendered it. So we are back on track after being derailed by the AA; the two necessary features of humility as so far defined have been restored: that it requires abstinence from proud behaviour and a cognitive element which engenders such behaviour, where the cognitive element both causally and conceptually unites the behaviour it provokes.

That said, I think the following illustration will illuminate some of the QAA's deficiencies, including that it is wanting of an affective component. The illustration goes as follows:

The Prince, the Pauper, the Plane, and the Parachute

A prince and a pauper are on a plane. The plane's pilot is suddenly paralysed with pain as he experiences a bout of pounding heart palpitations. He plunks down on the floor, whispers his prayers, and passes. Because no one can continue to operate the aircraft, it spins and begins to plummet to the ground. The pair of passengers' only hope is to escape the plane via parachute. But a single parachute is present and printed in bold on its plastic packaging are the words, "PARACHUTE MADE FOR 1 PAX. OVERLOAD AT OWN RISK".

The prince thinks to himself, "I am royalty. I am eminently more able and educated than my companion, who is clearly of little consequence. I play a critical role in my father's kingdom. Indeed, the chinks in my character matter little to me in light of my myriad merits. But however clear these facts may be, and no matter the joy their contemplation brings me, I must remind myself that I'm no more entitled to life than he. He may be *but* a bedraggled beggar, but he's a human being and thus an end in himself. For the sake of humility, I am beholden to treat him as such, no matter how little I'd like to. Thus it remains opaque who, from morality's perspective, should possess this parachute".

The pauper thinks to himself "I am an idle indigent. I know nothing and can do nothing noteworthy. Woe is me. Would that my worthlessness not be so wearisome to my weak and haggard frame. My companion is a prince, and one who contributes crucially to the kingdom. I fear what he must think of me. Even so, my moral worth equates to his; each of us is an end in himself. It's nowhere near clear whose life is more dear, and I dare say I'm happy I don't make the rules, for never has there breathed a man of poorer judgement than me."

…

Fin.

I am assuming that both the prince and the pauper's behaviour towards each other reflects their independent adherence to their shared belief that everyone has equal moral worth, i.e. that both of them, *inter alia*, abstain from proud behaviour and any other behaviour that diminishes the other. Indeed, though he fears as much, the pauper is unaware that the prince thinks of him as "*but* a bedraggled beggar" because the prince behaves perfectly non-proudly, out of an obligation to stick to the moral imperative. I am not going to be helpful in solving the problem of who gets the parachute. I'm only interested in the fact that both the prince and the paupers' thoughts and actions qualify them as humble by the QAA's standards: both don't allow their (accurate, for the sake of argument) self-appraisals to sway them from believing that and behaving as though all people are morally equal, which includes their mutual abstinence from proud behaviour, and their mutual belief that each is as worthy of life as the other.

So, both the prince and the pauper are deemed humble by the QAA, but are they humble? I am not convinced. I have three objections to the QAA; two to do with the prince and one to do with both the prince and the pauper. Covering all three of them will take quite some time, and it will involve passing through one more account of humility – the Low Concern Account - before arriving at my final secular account of humility – the Modified Low Concern Account. Structurally speaking, this will be a fairly complicated journey, so I will let you know what to expect upfront: My first problem with the prince's being called humble is that his motives are off; he acts out of obligation to a moral imperative as opposed to from right-concern for those around him. Because motivation originates in the affective part of a person, I will therefore argue that we should add an affective component to our account of humility as one of its necessary features, together with its behavioural and cognitive components. If the correct motivation for humility is right-concern for the surrounding world, then my next task is to figure out what constitutes this 'right-concern', so as to establish the nature of a

humble person's affective part. My second problem with the QAA, which concerns both the prince and the pauper, is that each character seems too obsessed with his (perceived) social status as compared to the other's to qualify him as humble in any intuitive sense. To address this problem, whilst simultaneously fleshing out what constitutes 'right-concern' in humble people, I will introduce Roberts and Wood's Low Concern Account of humility, which states that humble people have a low concern for their comparative status. My third overall problem with the QAA, and my second one to do solely with the prince's being called humble, is that "the chinks in [his] character matter little to [him]", whereas we'd expect humble people to regret their flaws and to try to fix them as much as is appropriate and possible. This intuition is accounted for neither by the QAA nor by Roberts and Wood's Low Concern Account (LCA). This will be my first reason to modify the LCA. My second reason to modify it is that, unlike the QAA, I don't think the LCA necessarily issues in non-proud behaviour, let alone positively humble behaviour. I therefore need to graft a valuable element from the QAA onto the LCA, one which we'd be sorry to forfeit, and that is the belief that all people possess equal moral worth and should be treated as such. The third modification I will make to the LCA is to fix what I will argue is a minor inconsistency therein. Thus, finally, I will introduce the Modified Low Concern Account (MLCA) of humility, which satisfies the intuition that humble people care about their flaws, as well as ensuring that humble people do not act proudly. The MLCA improves on the LCA in three important ways, and ultimately answers to all three problems I'll have raised with the QAA. The MLCA, rather than the LCA, is therefore the appropriate successor for the QAA.

So, let's get to it. My first problem with the prince's being deemed 'humble' is well captured by Bernard Williams's famous quip that, "it is a notorious truth that a modest person does not act *under the title of* modesty" (emphasis my own) (Williams, 1993:10). Indeed, the second of my pre-theoretical intuitions was that an adequate account of humility should be able to

explain why it is odd to describe oneself as humble. It is similarly odd for someone to do something for the sake of being humble. The person who doesn't boast about his achievements because it simply *doesn't occur to him to do so* seems to approximate humility far more closely than the person who consciously decides not to boast about his achievements because 'it is the humble thing to do'. Why is this? There are two separate issues here. The first makes humility analogous to every other virtue, and the second draws a disanalogy between humility and the rest of them. The first issue is that it is widely held by classical virtue theorists that truly virtuous people just care about the right things, believe the right things, and do the right things, making them virtuous, as opposed to being the way they are in a grand effort to be a virtuous person. A truly just person does things because they are just, and not because he would merely like to be a 'just sort of person'. The latter seems too egocentric to be truly virtuous. Similarly, there is something morally suspicious about a person who acts out of obligation to a set of principles, as opposed to acting from a place of right-concern for the world around him. Acting out of obligation to a set of principles is not necessarily egocentric, but it seems rather clinical, and arguably betrays a lack of genuine *care* for the human object of one's actions. Indeed, in a sense, the object of such a person's actions are the abstract principles themselves, and not the people to whom the actions are directed, which is morally dubious because it betrays a malfunctioning attitude towards real, flesh and blood people. In this regard, the prince's acting "for the sake of humility" is suspicious, but no more so than it would be for him to act for the sake of any other virtue, such as justice or kindness. The first issue is ultimately a question of motive, with classical virtue theorists believing that the correct motive for virtuous action is right-concern for the world around oneself. Appropriate affective responses to the surrounding world inspire well-deliberated action in virtuous agents. The clear salience of right motivation to true virtue is sufficient reason to add an affective component as a necessary feature of a tenable count of

humility. If it's not clear why motivation belongs to the affective part of a person, and not to, say, its own 'motivational part', this is because what motivates one is a direct product of what one *desires,* and what one desires is a function of what one *values*. If somebody values wealth, for instance, then the desire they feel towards potential, future wealth will spur them to engage in wealth-accruing activities. Desire and valuing belong squarely to the affective part, and therefore so does the motivation they inspire.

The second issue, which makes humility disanalogous to the other virtues, is that there is something uniquely suspicious about doing something whilst *conscious* that it is the humble thing to do. There is nothing morally strange about someone's acting justly whilst being conscious of the fact that they are so doing. In fact, their consciously applying principles of justice to ensure that their behaviour accords with the right-concern they feel for the world around them assures us that their behaviour is not accidental, but instead the result of sound practical reasoning about justice. But it *is* morally strange for somebody to act humbly whilst conscious of the fact that they are so doing, even if their ultimate motive rests in a right-concern for the world around them, and not in a desire merely to 'be a humble person'. Musing, "I am thinking and behaving very humbly right now" whilst behaving 'humbly' is far more morally off-putting than musing, "I am deliberating and behaving very justly right now" whilst so doing. The first is strange for the same reason that thinking, "I am humble" is strange - it just doesn't seem like something a humble person would think - but the latter assures us of how deeply deliberative the just agent's actions are. Even if self-attributions of humility turn out to be consistent with being truly humble, our winning account of humility should ideally explain why such self-attributions nonetheless *seem* odd. The QAA lacks the resources to offer such an explanation. By its lights, if somebody appraises themselves accurately, whilst ensuring that they do not infer from a high self-appraisal that they are entitled to diminish other people, or that they qualify for any other illicit entitlements, and

behave accordingly, then they are humble. Since the QAA is ultimately cognitive, thanks to Roberts and Wood's contribution that the locus of humility is the cognitive disposition to abstain from making certain types of *inferences*, it seems that there is even reason to think the opposite: that somebody's being conscious of their behaving humbly should morally *impress* us. Far from being morally off-putting, it might show us that the person is taking great care to ensure that their high self-evaluation isn't influencing their reasoning about their entitlements. Instead of hoping that they will subconsciously draw the right inferences from their high self-evaluation, they are paying meticulous attention to their habits of reasoning and ensuring that only legitimate, humble chains of reasoning are acted upon. Such self-consciousness renders their habits of reasoning non-accidental and admirably purposeful. The fact that being conscious of one's behaving humbly *is* morally off-putting, then, suggests that there is something unusual about humility as compared to the other virtues. Self-ascriptions of humility come across as self-admiring in a way that seems to grind against the essence of humility in an especially ironic way. Self-ascriptions of, say, justice or kindness might also come across as self-admiring, but they (arguably) don't come across as un-just or un-kind in the same way that self-ascriptions of humility come across as un-humble. Why is this? Humility seems antithetical to the kind of self-admiration implied by dubbing oneself 'humble'. Self-admiration, in turn, betrays a malfunctioning affective part. The self-admirer values herself too much, and other goods too little. Adjacently, self-admiration betrays a kind of preoccupation with the self which it is hard to square with humility. I've shown in this and the above paragraph that it is necessary to add an affective component to our account of humility, and that self-ascriptions of humility come across strangely partly because they betray the agent's malfunctioning affective part. My next task is to ascertain what a right-functioning affective part in a humble person looks like. What do humble people value and, consequently, what preoccupies them?

One way to answer this question is to figure out what humble people do *not* value. This brings me to my second problem with the prince's being called 'humble' by the QAA. This problem applies to the pauper too, but less intuitively, so I will address it only as it applies to the prince for now and show how it implicates the pauper equally a bit later. For a so-called humble person, the prince is awfully interested in comparing himself to his companion based on indicators of status, like his profession and level of education. The prince's first thought when presented with the problem of the parachute is that he is "royalty", and that his companion is "*but* a bedraggled beggar", and he even admits that contemplating this disparity brings him great "joy". Even though the prince decides to treat the pauper as his *moral* equal in the end, the fact that he does so only after weighing up his relative status by other metrics tells us that comparative status is rather important to the prince. It is well within the acceptable boundaries of the QAA to be preoccupied with such comparisons, so long as it doesn't sway one's adherence to the moral imperative. But the fact that the prince is so concerned with his relative social status is hard to square with humility, which we often associate with a lack of interest in such comparisons. Please note that I am not concerned here with the prince's interest in traditional status indicators *per se*, but only with the value he bestows on how many of them he possesses in *comparison* to others. Another example will make this clearer: Imagine somebody who owns a Ferrari, and who gleans great joy from this fact. I'm not thinking about a motor enthusiast who enjoys the Ferrari for its own sake, marvelling at the artistry of its design and enjoying the textured screech of its engine, but somebody whose primary enjoyment of his Ferrari is the kudos it earns him by its being the fanciest car in the neighbourhood. Even if this never affected his treatment of others, we'd be hesitant to call such a man 'humble'. As C.S. Lewis (1952:109-10) aptly put it, "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest". The QAA has no

resources to explain why the "joy" the prince feels at his social status's being higher than the pauper's calls his humility into question. But such mis-directed valuing can be explained by having a malfunctioning affective part.

What draws one's attention, or preoccupies one, is a simple function of what values highly. I.e., both are products of the orientation of one's affective part. What one values also directly shapes the emotional responses one has to the world around one. Feeling distraught at the loss of one's pet but not at the loss of one's checked-in luggage, for example, indicates that one values one's pet more highly than (some of) one's possessions. Moreover, preoccupation with one's pet, in the form of thinking about it a lot when one is at work, fussing over its health, and buying it accessories etc., stems from placing a high value on the pet. Placing a high value on one's comparative social status, then, will manifest in preoccupation with it, as well as in a range of emotional responses to its increasing or decreasing. Because placing a high value on one's comparative social status is a ubiquitous human phenomenon, it's easy to describe its common manifestations in quite some detail. What follows are some classic examples of how comparative-status-valuers are likely to think, feel and act: Such people are likely to view their peers as their competitors in a grand rally for (perceived) social status, or as instruments by which to gain or lose such status, rather than as people to love and connect with as equals. They will keenly observe new acquaintances for signs of excellence and weakness, to figure out the extent to which their own comparative status is under threat, and their attitudes towards themselves and towards their acquaintances will shift according to what they discover. They will likely fear, envy, resent, or be strangely infatuated with their perceived social superiors, whilst feeling smugness, pity, or even warmth towards their perceived social inferiors, because such people do not threaten their relative social standing. Comparative-status-valuers will frequently recite evidence of their own social status to themselves and they will feel relieved whenever they conclude that it's a bit higher than

others'. When they perceive it to be uncomfortably lower than others', they might justify their own flaws to themselves, thereby nullifying them, or explain away their peers' successes, thereby increasing their own perceived status relative to their peers'. Lastly, such people will take special interest in those they perceive to be of similar social status to themselves because, of all their peers, these are the people with whom they can realistically compete to gain or lose social standing. If, for example, Jeff Bezos placed a high value on his comparative social status regarding his wealth, then he would be far more preoccupied with the small, volatile differences between his own bank balance and, say, Bill Gates's, than with the enormous and stable gap between his bank balance and that of the man who sweeps his neighbourhood's streets. Similarly, if the man who sweeps Jeff Bezos's neighbourhood's streets placed a high value on his comparative social status regarding his wealth, he'd more likely be preoccupied with comparing his wealth to that of other blue-collar workers in his area than with Jeff Bezos's. He'd be more likely to feel awe, infatuation, or jealousy towards Jeff Bezos, than to feel these things whilst also being preoccupied with the negligible ebbs and flows of the gap between their respective bank balances, whereas he'd be preoccupied with comparing his wealth to his blue-collar peers' whilst also feeling things like smugness or jealousy towards them. This is because those one perceives as proximal to oneself in the pecking order, with reference either to (perceived) global social status, or with reference to social status by a given metric, pose the greatest and most immediate threat to one's treasured position in that pecking order.

With these social phenomena in mind, Robert C. Roberts and Jay Wood define 'vanity' as "an excessive concern to be well regarded by other people, and thus a hypersensitivity to the view others take of oneself. Its emotional marks are anxiety about how one appears, joy at making a good appearance, embarrassment or shame at making a bad appearance, resentment of those who criticize or withhold the prescribed admiration, etc. Since part of making a good

appearance may be to give the appearance of not caring what sort of appearance one makes, the vain person may cover up these emotions, for others or himself or both" (Roberts & Wood, 2003:259). In turn, they stipulate that a core mark of humble people is that, though they are aware of their comparative social statuses, they are not preoccupied with them. For Roberts and Wood, then, humility would no longer be a virtue of 'ignorance' in the sense of being unable accurately to recount one's comparative merits, and therefore one's comparative status by a given metric, but rather a virtue of 'ignoring', in the sense of choosing to pay little or no attention to them despite having accurate knowledge of them. Roberts and Wood's primary aim is to develop an account of intellectual humility, but the way they go about defining intellectual humility is by deriving it from their own more general account of humility. I am interested in their more general account. They construct their more general account via a negative method, i.e. they define humility by reference to its many opposites, including grandiosity, pretentiousness, and snobbishness, with a particular focus on vanity and arrogance (2003:258). Because they focus on explicating only two of its opposites thoroughly, Roberts and Wood do not suppose their general account of humility to be complete. Instead, they intend for it to offer helpful insights about the nature of humility that can be built upon by explicating more of its opposites, like snobbishness. I am interested in the way they defined humility as antithetical to vanity in particular, because it accords with two of the arguments I've made above: that an affective component is a necessary condition for any decent account of humility, and that humble people do not place much value on their comparative social statuses, and consequently are not preoccupied with them.

Their account of humility is outlined below. Note that, unlike heretofore mentioned accounts, this is not a generalised version of their account, but a faithful representation thereof.

Section 5: Affective Accounts of Humility:

Roberts and Wood's account of humility, the Low Concern Account, goes as follows:

Section 5.1:

The **Low Concern Account (LCA)** defines 'humility' as ***a disposition to be "unusual[ly] unconcern[ed] to be well regarded by others, [and consequently to have] a kind of emotional insensitivity to the issues of status". This is coupled with an outward-looking attentiveness or concern for some noble external good*** **(Roberts & Wood, 2003:261).**

Roberts and Wood stress that just being unconcerned about one's status is insufficient for the virtue of humility to subsist. If it were sufficient, then people in comas or people who've experienced lobotomies to their frontal lobes, rendering them unconcerned about many things, including their social statuses, would count as humble. To avoid this *reductio ad absurdum*, Roberts and Wood stipulate that true humility is evidenced by an outward-looking attentiveness or concern for some external good. Adding this extra requirement, by their reasoning, transforms the disposition they have in mind from being merely non-vicious (because it is non-vain) to being positively virtuous (Roberts and Wood, 2003:277).

There are a few points about the Low Concern Account which require clarification. I'll go about clarifying them by presenting some objections to the LCA from the literature, and responding to them how I imagine Roberts and Wood would. This back-and-forth should bring into sharper focus what Roberts and Wood mean, and what they do not mean, by their account. The first objection is one lobbed by Dennis Whitcomb et al. in 2017. They contend

that being unconcerned about one's status or entitlements, and being emotionally detached therefrom, is not a necessary condition for being humble. To illustrate their point, they sketch a scenario involving a woman (seemingly some kind of academic) who is very interested in epistemic goods, and very motivated to attain them. Hence, she meets Roberts and Wood's requirement of having an outward-looking attentiveness to some (noble) external good. Nonetheless, she works in a male-dominated environment wherein women are often side-lined when it comes to apportioning status and entitlements. As well as undermining her dignity as a person and value as a worker (she is better at what she does than some of her colleagues), this has practical repercussions for her pay-check, and consequently for her ability to support her family. For example, she is frequently overlooked for promotions and other opportunities involving extra remuneration for no other reason than that she is a woman. Such a person, contends Whitcomb et al., can be very preoccupied with her comparative status and emotionally sensitive to it, fuelled by her conviction of the injustice of it all, without being vain, indicating that a low concern for status is not a necessary condition for humility (Whitcomb et al., 2017:516).

Roberts and Wood would respond to this objection merely by re-emphasising what they've already explained in their paper: that, "Humble people aren't distinguished from [proud] people by being unconcerned about their entitlements. Rather, they lack a specific kind of motivation for this concern, namely 'ego exalting potency'" (2003:257). I'll explicate what I think they mean by 'ego exalting potency' a bit later on. For now, it's sufficient to say that it's not their position that any preoccupation whatsoever with one's social status counts as vanity, and therefore as pride. Indeed, to the extent that entitlements and status serve as means to some valuable end, then provided that the subject is interested in them only *qua* means, she does not qualify as vain (Roberts & Wood, 2003:257). So, because Whitcomb et al.'s woman in the workplace is interested in her comparative status only insofar as it signals

the injustice of the system she's in, and as a means to her being remunerated enough to support her family, she does not count as vain. Whilst we're here it's worth adding, along a similar vein, that if this woman realised after the fact that she had committed a social *faux pas* at the workplace which lost her some social status (let's say she consistently, but innocently, forgets her boss's name), she wouldn't necessarily qualify as vain for feeling embarrassed about this, provided that the level of embarrassment she feels is commensurate with the seriousness of the *faux pas*. Yes, her embarrassment would betray a level of concern for her social status, in the form of wanting to make a good impression on others, which is not clearly to do with her social status being a means to some valuable end. But, on closer inspection, it is. She cares about the impression she makes on others only insofar as it constitutes her meeting minimum standards of propriety. Vanity, by contrast, involves a concern to "glitter" or "outdo others" via possessing more status-indicators than them, or by making a better impression on others than them (Roberts & Wood, 2003:259). The working woman's embarrassment at forgetting her boss's name isn't motivated by the desire to outdo others, but only by the desire to be basically polite. In sum, not all concerns about comparative status-indicators or about making a good appearance, both of which reduce to being concerned about comparative status, count as vain. Only when someone is motivated to achieve something *merely* for the social status it confers, rather than trying to maintain basic social propriety, or when someone is motivated to achieve *more* social status than others for its own sake, rather as means to some valuable end, does their attitude count as vain. This has something to do with exalting their own egos, but I'll get to that later on. From the outset, then, Whitcomb et al.'s epistemically-motivated woman in the workplace never counted as vain by the LCA's lights.

A second objection to the LCA, also by Whitcomb et al., is that even if displaying little concern for one's status is a necessary condition for humility, it is not a sufficient condition.

This time, they ask us to reflect on the life of Professor P. Professor P. is an outstandingly talented philosopher, and he knows it. But his deep love for epistemic goods far surpasses his affection for comparative status or entitlements. They "aren't even on his radar" (Whitcomb et. al., 2017:515). He is not concerned with impressing others, he doesn't disrespect or otherwise diminish his colleagues, and he doesn't think he's entitled to special treatment. The catch is that when Professor P.'s intellectual mistakes are exposed, he justifies them or covers them up, or he reaches for elaborate sophistical devices to explain them away. He seldom owns up to his mistakes, even when they are blatant. Whitcomb et al. contend that Professor P. lacks intellectual humility, and *ipso facto* perfect humility, even though he has a low concern for comparative status and entitlements and thus satisfies the conditions of the LCA (Whitcomb, 2017:516). Roberts and Wood do not address precisely this concern in their paper, but I think they could easily defend their account from Whitcomb et al. simply by clarifying what they mean by 'status'. I take it that when Roberts and Wood refer to 'status' or being 'well regarded by others', they are referring to something which can be measured by a myriad of metrics, and not just by traditional status-indicators like job titles and bank balances. If they do not mean something quite so broad by 'status' as what I take them to mean, then I think that it would serve them well to broaden their conception thereof. A broader definition will aid their responding to Whitcomb et al.'s objection and will provide their account with extra insight about the nature of human vanity, and consequently about humility.

I take it that Whitcomb et al. think that Professor P. isn't concerned about status and entitlements because he does not pay much attention to, for example, his job title, pay-check, or the number of papers he's published in comparison to others. But if we include under 'status' something like 'the extent to which he's intellectually respected by others', then the way that he reacts to his intellectual errors' being pointed out indicates that he cares very

much about his status indeed. The way that Whitcomb et al. describe Professor P. indicates that he wouldn't feel as shocked and embarrassed upon discovering his intellectual blunders if others did not also notice them. When alone, his love for epistemic goods would motivate him simply to figure out how he'd erred so that he could tackle the intellectual problems at hand more fruitfully. But, in public, he covers them up. This indicates that his need to preserve the image (he thinks) others have of him as an intellectual giant is more important to him than the pursuit of epistemic goods *per se*. If this were not so, he'd receive their feedback gratefully to aid his tackling epistemic challenges. My point is that I think that the word 'status', as Roberts and Wood use it, functions as a catch-all for anything from which an agent can glean personal significance, which will depend on what they subjectively understand as valuable. Roberts and Wood could equally well have used a catch-all term like 'kudos' – any word which expresses the notion of (perceived) success in the eyes of others. My use of 'status' and 'kudos' is therefore interchangeable in the above and ensuing paragraphs. When I'm referring to the object of vain people's preoccupation, though, I will use phrases like 'social status', 'comparative' status, 'relative status' and 'social standing'. This is to emphasise that, according to the LCA, it is not status *per se* that vain people value, but only their status as it compares to others'. Another important point to emphasise is that it's conceptually possible for vain people to rank themselves and their peers according to their (perceived) *global* status *simpliciter*, their (perceived) status with reference to a given trait, or their (perceived) global status in virtue of their perceived status with reference to a given trait. Thankfully, this need not complicate things. The LCA could be interpreted in any of these ways because all of them involve being preoccupied with one's status in relation to one's peers' statuses. Preoccupation with comparative status evidences vanity, whether it be with one's relative global status or with one's relative status with reference to a given metric. Preoccupation with either of these things is ultimately caused by placing a high value on

one's comparative status, which is characteristic of vanity. A right-functioning affective part will place far less, or zero, value on one's relative status for its own sake.

Having responded to these initial objections and thereby provided extra clarity to Roberts and Wood's account, it's worth noting that the range of things from which human beings can glean a sense of self-importance, and which can therefore be used as markers of status, is seemingly unlimited. Status-markers are both subjective and context-sensitive. In academic environments, vanity is likely to subsist in being preoccupied with how many papers one's published relative to one's peers, whereas vanity in a night club is more likely to subsist in being preoccupied with one's good looks or the magnetism of one's dance moves as compared to others'. It's certainly possible to be vain about good and noble things, like the extent and reach of one's philanthropic projects, the amount of patience one has with one's children, or even one's own (self-perceived) humility. Rather insightfully, Roberts and Wood commented on this theme that, "people who are vain about their moral reputation treat their ethical character in an 'aesthetic' rather than an ethical light", implying that such people are often, but not necessarily, more interested in appearing virtuous than in being virtuous (2003:261). Curiously enough, people can even be vain about normatively bad things. One need only watch the Monty Python skit, "The Four Yorkshiremen" to be reminded of this. The skit portrays four men who are each trying to outdo the other with stories about how difficult their childhoods were. Their social exchange is made intelligible by realising that each man is buying into the notion that whoever had the most difficult childhood earns the most kudos, and each of them wants to earn more kudos than the other, which is precisely what preoccupies vain people. In most real-life scenarios, the metrics by which people compete for kudos aren't as synchronised. Whilst some things are commonly seen as status-indicators, like job titles and bank balances, each person also has a bespoke set of metrics by which they measure their own significance as compared to others'. This means that, in the

very same social exchange, one agent could be preoccupied with measuring his status relative to others based on how attractive everyone's respective spouses are, and therefore count as vain, whilst another agent is simultaneously preoccupied with measuring his status relative to others based on how kind and funny everyone is, and therefore count as equally vain. Vanity, as here defined, consists in placing a high value on one's relative status, resulting in preoccupation with it and an emotional sensitivity to its ebbs and flows. Indicators of status, in turn, are extremely context sensitive and are dependent on each subject's personal beliefs regarding what makes humans significant.

The above has interesting repercussions for its converse scenario. By this definition of vanity, somebody can count as equally vain, and therefore as proud, if they are preoccupied with comparing their perceived status to others', *even if they never conclude that their status is higher than others',* by any metric. I am finally talking about the pauper. Indeed, his self-preoccupation evidences his vanity, because it betrays placing too high a value on 'the self'. If one values 'the self' too highly, then one will be preoccupied with it, and one will be highly emotionally sensitive to how significant it feels. Vain people feel significant when they perceive their social status to be higher than others', and insignificant when they do not. Feeling joy about one's perceived superior social status, or grief at one's perceived inferior social status, are therefore equally consistent with vanity. Again, not just any concern with comparative status counts as vanity – the concern must be for status for its own sake, and not as means to some valuable end. Despair at having a low status because it exposes the injustice of the system that engendered it, then, is not vanity. But the person who stares in the mirror despairing at her pimply skin is equally as vain as the person who stares in the mirror marvelling at her smooth and supple skin, provided that her interest in having attractive skin is merely for the social status it imbues. The pauper's self-pity and self-loathing betray his self-preoccupation, which in turn indicates his placing too high a value on 'the self'. In sum,

whilst most accounts of humility contrast it with some kind of disposition to self-aggrandise, the LCA is laudable for insightfully diagnosing some forms of self-effacement as vanity, and therefore as pride, on the basis that it equally involves self-preoccupation. As Roberts and Wood put it, "Self-effacement… involves self-preoccupation, a self that needs to be effaced because it obtrudes or intrudes. The self-effacing person says 'I am no good', 'I am unworthy', 'How stupid I am!', thus showing preoccupation with himself." (2003:262-263).

A third objection to Roberts and Wood's LCA, which was also raised by Whitcomb et al., and which applies most obviously to the prince, is that it clashes with their strong intuition that humble people are sufficiently self-preoccupied to notice and to 'own' their flaws. In the story much earlier, the prince said that, "the chinks in [his] character matter little to [him] in light of [his] myriad merits" and that contemplating his merits brings him much "joy". This level of callousness about his weaknesses and preoccupation with his merits was perfectly consistent with the Qualified Accuracy Account of humility, which had nothing to say about how people apportion our attention so long as they appraise themselves accurately, believe that everyone is of equal moral worth and ensure that they treat them as such. The Low Concern Account, however, understands preoccupation with one's relative merits as evidence of a malfunctioning affective part - one which values 'the self' too highly. But, to the LCA's discredit, it is perfectly consistent with the prince's paying insufficient attention to his own flaws. In fact, the LCA *supports* the prince's being unpreoccupied with his flaws, in virtue of its applauding preoccupation with (noble) things other than the self. The QAA, the LCA's predecessor, did a bit better than the LCA in this regard: in virtue of having an accurate awareness of their positive traits and strengths, the QAA's humble people automatically had an accurate *awareness* of their negative traits and limitations. Indeed, to put it rather crudely, knowing that one scores 6/10 for kindness is the same as knowing that one scores 4/10 for unkindness. Our strengths and weaknesses are all measured at opposite ends of the same

continuums (Whitcomb et al., 2017:533). Knowing what one's strengths are, e.g. one's intellect and artistic ability, implies knowing what they are *not*, e.g. one's physical fitness. Thus people who are humble by the QAA's lights are self-aware of their character flaws and limitations. But, as Nancy Snow points out, "no necessary connection exists between becoming aware of our defects and being humbled. We might be made aware of our deficiencies yet not care, regard them as trivial, persistently ignore them, or even deny that the traits in question are defects" (1995:207). One can be aware that one scores 4/10 for unkindness but think that this is a mark of their being 'interestingly complicated' or 'refreshingly honest', rather than it being something regrettable. A disposition to explain away or justify one's personal failings is not a quality we expect from humble people. Snow says that, "To be humbled… is to be appropriately pained by, or to feel sorrow or dejection because of, the awareness of personal deficiencies" (Snow, 1995:207). Thus neither the QAA nor the LCA accounts adequately for the intuition that humble people are aware of and appropriately pained by their flaws. The QAA entails, at least, being sufficiently aware of one's personal defects, but it didn't prescribe caring about them to any degree. The LCA entails neither being aware of one's defects nor caring about them and working to fix them as appropriate.

If we accept that humility characteristically involves being aware of and caring appropriately about one's defects, then the next question to ask is; what is the appropriate way to care about one's defects? Given that what one *cares* about is a function of the orientation of one's affective part, fleshing out what it means to 'care appropriately' about our defects will provide much-needed insight into what a well-functioning affective part in a humble person looks like. Drawing from the LCA's resources, it is already clear that if someone were preoccupied with fixing their flaws *merely* to increase their relative social standing, as opposed to caring about their flaws for their intrinsic normative badness and/or trying to fix

them to alleviate the negative effects they have on other people, then they would rightly be classified as vain, and not as humble, for the way in which they care about their flaws. Therefore, not all motivations for attentiveness to one's flaws count as humble. Even Nancy Snow, who pioneered what could be called 'limitations-owning' accounts of humility, which centre on caring appropriately about one's defects, says in her 1995 paper that, "a deep-seated sense of personal inadequacy and insecurity that causes you to magnify even trivial errors… is compatible with neurotic self-absorption or obsession with yourself, especially with failings" (Snow, 1995:207). Therefore, neither caring about one's flaws to improve one's social status nor caring about them to the point of self-obsession qualifies as 'caring appropriately' about one's flaws.

So, what *does* count as 'caring appropriately' about one's flaws? Whitcomb et al.'s major contribution to the philosophical literature on humility is their further development of Nancy Snow's 'limitations-owning' account.[10] They build on Snow's work by explicating the attitude she prescribed we take to our limitations. The thrust of their paper, as was the case with Roberts and Wood, is to develop a tenable account of *intellectual* humility, but they derive this from their own account of humility *simpliciter*, which is what I'm interested in. In their words, "humility is about having the right stance towards one's limitations. What is the right stance toward them? To be properly attentive to them and to *own* them" (emphasis in the original) (Whitcomb et al., 2017:516). They further define 'proper attentiveness' towards one's limitations as a golden mean between paradigmatic arrogance – which involves being blissfully unaware of one's limitations – and paradigmatic servility – which involves being obsessed with one's limitations (2017:517). Their mean disposition subsists in one's

[10] Importantly, Nancy Snow does not call her own account a 'limitations-owning' account. In fact, the term was coined by Whitcomb et al. 22 years after Snow's paper – but the fact that Whitcomb et al.'s ideas were a continuation of Snow's justifies my referring to hers as, essentially, the first 'limitations-owning' account of humility.

limitations coming to mind iff the circumstances call for it (Whitcomb et al., 2017:516). Regarding what it means to 'own' one's limitations, Whitcomb et al. say, "Despite its lack of ivory tower chic, ['owning'] succinctly captures the rich, multi-track dispositional profile we have in mind". They mean it much in the way that attendees of AA meetings are encouraged to 'own' their addictions (Whitcomb et al., 2017:519), i.e., in a way which encompasses behavioural, cognitive, motivational, and affective responses to the knowledge of one's limitations. What follows is a brief sketch of each dimension of the response they have in mind. Behaviourally speaking, 'owning' one's limitations translates to being disposed to, e.g., admit one's faults to others when appropriate, avoid pretence, defer to others or ask for help when one's expertise are lacking, and train oneself to improve in areas of weakness (Whitcomb et al., 2017:517-8). Cognitively, 'owning' translates to a disposition to believe and accept that one has the limitations one has, and to believe that the negative outcomes of those limitations do in fact result from those limitations (Whitcomb, 2017:517). Motivationally, 'owning' translates to caring about one's limitations and working to fix them for their own sake, as opposed to caring about and fixing them for the sake of upholding one's good reputation. Lastly, affectively speaking, owning means feeling dismay or regret at one's deficiencies, and feeling grateful for experiences or people who help to expose them, as opposed to feeling hostile towards them (Whitcomb, 2017:518). In sum, a core problem with the LCA (and also with the QAA) is that it does not accommodate the intuition that humble people pay appropriate attention to and 'own' their limitations, where 'owning' has behavioural, cognitive, motivational, and affective elements.

Technically, the LCA is at least compatible with a disposition to tend appropriately to one's flaws. Roberts and Wood say only that humble people are "unusually unconcerned" about their social statuses, and therefore that they are 'unusually' unpreoccupied with themselves. This is rather vague. But seeing as the LCA sanctions some level of self-preoccupation, then

surely part of it could unobjectionably consist in being appropriately attentive to one's flaws? Without causing any friction between the two accounts, then, we can incorporate Whitcomb et al.'s insights into the LCA. Alternatively, as Whitcomb et al. will have us do, we can dispense with the LCA entirely and replace it with their 'limitations-owning' account of humility. They believe that their account has all of the LCA's merits without sporting any of its defects. Firstly, much like Roberts and Wood, they think that proper attentiveness to our intellectual (and general) limitations is a mean between two extremes – between ignoring and obsessing about our limitations. At the mean, the humble person will be aware of her limitations "just when the situation calls for it". Therefore, from the beginning, excessive self-focus is ruled out (Whitcomb, 2017:527). To be clear, their 'mean' level of self-attentiveness doesn't reduce to spending an appropriate amount of *time* contemplating one's flaws. Instead, it's about possessing a "certain sort of dispositional profile, one that remains unconscious except when triggered in the appropriate circumstances" (Whitcomb et al., 2017:528). I.e., it amounts to a disposition to recognise and to address one's flaws when it is the salient thing to do. Importantly, Whitcomb et al. hold the mirror image of their stance towards 'limitations owning' towards 'strengths owning'. I.e., they think that part of what it means to 'own' one's strengths, which they commend, is to pay attention to them iff the context demands it. This should appease anyone who was worried that, whilst Whitcomb et al.'s humble people don't focus excessively on their weaknesses, they are at liberty to focus excessively on their strengths, which amounts to excessive self-focus at the end of the day. What's even more reassuring, regarding this worry, is that Whitcomb et al. think that the owning of one's limitations and the owning of one's strengths amounts to the same thing in rationally consistent people. This is because, as before, 'owning' that one scores 6/10 for kindness entails 'owning' that one scores 4/10 for unkindness. Thus, by virtue of their paying appropriate attention to their limitations, if they are rationally consistent, Whitcomb et al.'s

humble people pay appropriate attention towards their strengths (2017:534). Such unconsciousness about one's strengths or weaknesses but-for-when-the-situation-demands-it, moreover, owes to their (intellectually) humble people's being motivated by their love for epistemic goods, which necessarily pulls their attention away from themselves (Whitcomb et al., 2017:528). This is a further point of overlap between their 'limitations-owning' account of humility and the LCA. So far there is no reason to think that the two accounts are incompatible. The defects with the LCA which they highlight are that low concern for status is neither necessary nor sufficient for humility, as evidenced by the stories of the woman in the workplace and Professor P. I believe I refuted these objections earlier and so I don't count them, as Whitcomb et al. do, as reasons to prefer their account over the LCA. To my mind, the accounts are equally compelling. They both stipulate that humble people genuinely love (noble) external goods, which draws their attention away from themselves, and they each provide further, valuable insight into how the affective part of a humble person functions. Specifically, the LCA offers that humble people don't value their comparative statuses for their own sake, and the limitations-owning account satisfies the intuition that humble people care about and respond appropriately to their flaws, in the form of 'owning' them. Moreover, Whitcomb et al. demonstrate that 'owning' one's flaws, if one is rationally consistent, entails 'owning' one's strengths, which means having an accurate awareness of them and paying attention to them iff the context demands it. I propose that, because it came first, we keep the LCA but modify it to incorporate the insights from Whitcomb et al. which I've listed above. This modification will be the first of three to the LCA which, taken all together, will form the Modified Low Concern Account (MLCA). As it stands, then, the (semi-modified) LCA would dub someone 'humble' if they were preoccupied with some external good, had a low concern for their comparative status, and 'owned' their flaws (and *ipso facto* their strengths).

Owning their flaws and strengths, by Whitcomb et al.'s definition, means having accurate knowledge of them and responding appropriately to them in affective and behavioural ways.

The second modification to the LCA is to graft some insights from the QAA about humble people's *behaviour* onto it. As it stands, I don't think that meeting the LCA's requirements entails abstaining from proud behaviour. I don't see a link between having one's attention drawn to some (noble) external good and being inspired to behave in ways which do not diminish others. Why would, for example, an intense love of and resultant preoccupation with beautiful music, which is an aesthetic good, lead a person to treat her companions in the way humble people characteristically treat others? Roberts and Wood might respond to this question by appealing to the unity of the virtues. They say in their paper that, "a general feature of humility [is] that it is internally connected, in the personality of the virtuous person, with other virtues. For example, lack of self-righteousness is a virtue only in someone who has moral concerns, among them the concern for his own righteousness" (Roberts & Wood, 2003:278). They could reason that just as one doesn't count as non-self-righteous if one doesn't care to possess the virtues which one admits not to having, one doesn't count as humble if one's, say, non-boastfulness owes to one's being totally absent-minded during all opportunities to boast, because one's mind is so preoccupied with other goods. In other words, they might agree that someone's being preoccupied with music, to the exclusion of all else, is incompatible with their being properly humble. Such limited preoccupation reveals that this person does not respond rightly to the world around them. They ignore many external goods to which humble people would naturally be attentive. Since right-response to the surrounding world is central to all virtue, and since all virtues (including humility) are inextricably linked to one another, such a person cannot be virtuous, and therefore cannot be humble. I accept that, because Roberts and Wood hold to the unity of the virtues, they have it within their resources to object to the abovementioned music-obsessed person's being called

humble. However, I don't think that their LCA, taken alone, entails that their humble people will value, and therefore respond rightly to, *all* external goods in the way that virtuous people do. Their LCA states only that humble people are unusually un-self-preoccupied, and that what draws their attention needs to be noble.[11] Thus, even though Roberts and Wood reject what follows from this – that someone who is obsessed with music to the exclusion of paying attention to all other goods is humble – their account nonetheless entails that such a man is humble.

Is the (semi-modified) LCA any better? A little. The (semi-modified) LCA already meets one of the QAA's requirements; that, in virtue of 'owning' their limitations (and *ipso facto* their strengths) humble people have accurate knowledge of their worth and capabilities. Owning one's limitations, in turn, involves behaving appropriately in response to one's weaknesses, which might include things like asking for help, deferring to others or asking for forgiveness

[11] Whilst it's intuitive that humble people are not overly self-focused, it's less obvious that the external stimuli which draw their attention must be "noble", as stipulated by the LCA. Why is this? Let's imagine somebody who is markedly unconcerned about matters of status, and whose attention is consumed by running an underground drug syndicate. His interest in consortium-management is not self-aggrandising in nature – he sincerely wants to deliver high quality contraband as efficiently as possible to those who want it, and at a fair price too. His thrill is in the 'business' of business, and not in the high social status that his wealth and notoriety bring him within the drug-dealing community. Such a man might be hostile to the law, and callous to the negative effects of the drugs he sells on his customers, but surely his lack of concern for status makes him humble, by Roberts and Wood's lights? I think they would respond by appealing to the unity of the virtues. In virtue of this man's disregard for honesty (his career is innately deceitful), other people's health, and justice, he cannot be said to possess the beginnings of right-concern for the world around him. Since right-concern for the surrounding world is the core motivation for humility, as it is for all virtues, such a man cannot qualify as humble even if his behaviour resembles humility. Interestingly, the same goes for someone who's attention is drawn to (what they subjectively perceive as) value-neutral stimuli, at the expense of his paying any attention to noble external stimuli. Instead of spurning value, such a person is apathetic towards it. Again, this is incompatible with humility because it precludes right-concern for the surrounding world, which is the core of humility. Thus, because of their adherence to the unity of the virtues, Roberts and Wood's LCA will not dub un-self-preoccupied people humble if what draws their focus is ignoble or normatively neutral. Here, 'normatively neutral' refers broadly to anything which cannot be called a 'good' for its epistemic, aesthetic, ethical, or practical value. I am thinking of people whose full attention is gripped by (even what they perceive to be) meaningless stimuli, like, for instance, somebody whose only preoccupying thought is the colour red – somebody who isn't pondering its aesthetic value, but who is just holding an image of the colour fixed in their mind, at the expense of responding to any external (noble) goods in the world.

when the context demands it. This type of behaviour seems qualitatively non-proud. But other proud behaviour, like undermining others' worth to look better by comparison, which needn't require holding false beliefs about one's own worth and capabilities, slips under the radar of the (semi-modified) LCA. This means that both the (semi-modified) LCA and the LCA are inadequate accounts of humility. Both are vulnerable to ascribing humility to the wrong people, i.e. people who behave in ways which are characteristically proud, but which do not involve inaccurate self-appraisals or failure to 'own' limitations. To fix this problem, we could add an element from the QAA to the (semi-modified) LCA, thus transforming it into the Modified Low Concern Account (MLCA). The QAA stated that humble people do not infer illicit entitlement claims from their (accurate, and potentially high) self-evaluations. Instead, their behaviour towards others is ultimately shaped by their strong belief that everyone is of equal and significant moral worth and ought to be treated as such. If we add these cognitive requirements to the (semi-modified) LCA, there will be a significant reduction in its falsely ascribing the quality of humility to people.

The third modification to be made to the LCA regards a simple, but crucial, point of consistency. Roberts and Wood say that humble people are 'unusually unconcerned' about their relative social statuses, but what does this amount to? How unconcerned are they? They believe that it is healthy and good to be somewhat concerned about one's comparative status, on the basis that, "Just about everyone, including people we would not in the least call vain, will feel embarrassed or ashamed upon perceiving that others are shocked at their behaviour, and will regret the loss of status if that occurs, and enjoy the status conferred by others' approval" (Roberts & Wood, 2003:260). Vain people, they think, are just more concerned about their relative social statuses than most people. They are "hurt by smaller failings and elated about successful appearances that the humbler person hardly pauses to note… Robustly healthy and virtuous people are a little bothered by others' not taking them

seriously, slighting them in society, thinking they are not worth much; but the vain person is very bothered by such things… the vain person… feels nervous and unfulfilled unless he is getting [an] extraordinary sort of attention" (Roberts & Wood, 2003:260). I am not convinced by the idea that vanity and humility are separated only by the degree to which one values social status for its own sake, especially if the only reason for delineating them this way is that 'just about everyone' has some level of concern for their social status for its own sake. Ethical arguments which appeal to what 'most people already do' as their moral bar are not compelling. The point of ethics is to discover what *ought* to be, which is quite independent from what is the case. Also, Roberts and Wood's claim that a bit of concern for one's social status (for its own sake) is 'healthy' contradicts their earlier comments regarding the woman in the workplace. By their lights, the reason she did *not* count as vain for feeling embarrassed about forgetting her boss's name was because she wanted to meet basic standards of propriety, as opposed to valuing social status for its own sake. If Roberts and Wood are to be consistent with this view, then either they should categorise *all* desire for social status (for its own sake) as vanity, or they should change their understanding of a 'healthy' desire for social status to one which includes only desiring status as a means to some valuable end. This amounts to the same thing. In sum, whilst its more stringent, it's more ethically compelling and consistent for Roberts and Wood to keep the moral bar for non-vanity high. Instead of distinguishing vanity from humility based on the degree to which one is concerned about one's relative status, they should stick to distinguishing them based on the nature of the concern one has for one's relative status. Valuing one's comparative status for its own sake counts as vain, and valuing it as means to some valuable end, or to the extent that it signals the presence of some other intrinsic good, like a just social system, doesn't count as vain.

After making these three modifications, our newest account of humility goes as follows:

Section 5.2:

The **Modified Low Concern Account (MLCA)** defines 'humility' as ***a disposition to be unconcerned about and therefore emotionally insensitive to one's relative status, i.e. relative status for its own sake. This is coupled with an outward-looking attentiveness or concern for some noble external good*** **(Roberts & Wood, 2003:261).** ***It also involves a disposition to 'own' one's limitations, which includes being aware of them and responding to them as and when the context demands*** **(Whitcomb et al., 2017:518).** ***Additionally, it involves the cognitive disposition to abstain from making illicit entitlement claims based on one's perceived (or actual) superiority qua human specimen, or based on the impressiveness of one's individual traits, and consequently to think and behave in a way which accords with one's true entitlements. The behaviour this engenders will reflect the humble agent's conviction that all human beings are of equal and significant moral worth, i.e. their behaviour will, inter alia, not diminish others, and it will therefore not be proud*** **(Statman, 1992:434).**

The MLCA is quite a mouthful. But it is the least vulnerable to falsely positive ascriptions of humility out of all the accounts we've explored so far, and it avoids the internal inconsistency of the LCA which I outlined above. There might yet be proud people who slip undetected past its search light... I don't claim that the MLCA is a complete account of humility. But I believe that it is better than others in the literature because it combines the best insights from available accounts together to form an internally consistent (in that its components are mutually compatible) mega-account. This mega-account synchronises with many strong and widespread intuitions about what humility involves, e.g. that it involves abstaining from proud behaviour, treating people with dignity, having a sober-minded view of oneself, and not being inappropriately self-focused.

Section 6: Causally and Conceptually Unifying the Modified Low Concern Account:

My primary problem with the MLCA mirrors one of the earliest problems I addressed in this thesis. Even before constructing the Simple Behavioural Account of humility, I listed some behaviours characteristic of humble people like, *inter alia*, refraining from boasting, listening actively, and not talking over others at dinner parties. The problem was that these behaviours were neither causally nor conceptually connected. I noted that they were probabilistically related to one another, but that so are virtues as per the 'unity of the virtues' thesis. How could we group these behaviours together based on their being probabilistically related, but distinguish the virtues from one another despite their also being probabilistically related? To solve this problem, I introduced the notion of a 'disposition'. Positing that these behaviours came as a 'set', and that this set was engendered by a distinct disposition called a 'virtue', I offered a tenable explanation for why the behaviours were probabilistically related; they shared a common cause. I then said that each virtue equates to a distinct disposition, which in turn engenders its own set of behaviours we associate with that virtue. Creating this tiered approach allowed us to keep each virtue distinct from the others whilst simultaneously unifying disparate behaviours under the banner of each virtue. I also mused that all virtues, though distinct, might share a common cause which would explain *their* probabilistic inter-relation. But I said that this was a topic for another essay. With this in mind, my qualm with the MLCA is that it purports to define 'humility', but it does so by conglomerating three distinct dispositions. These dispositions are compatible, but they are not mutually entailing. Someone who's disposed to abstain from inferring illicit entitlement claims from her high self-evaluation could logically be preoccupied with her comparative status or unpreoccupied

with it, and *vice versa*. Whether she is preoccupied with her comparative social status, in turn, has no logical bearing on whether she owns her flaws, and *vice versa*. Lastly, whether she owns her flaws has no logical bearing on whether she abstains from inferring illicit entitlement claims from her (accurate) self-evaluation. If we conceive of virtues as dispositions, then there are three distinct, non mutually entailing virtues outlined in the MLCA, as opposed to just one. Thus, if humility constitutes a single, distinct virtue, then the MLCA cannot be the definition of humility.

I would like to hold onto my pre-theoretical intuition that humility *is* a virtue. So, the first solution I'll explore to this problem is that we re-conceive humility as a kind of foundational virtue for all other virtues, including those virtues (dispositions) outlined in the MLCA. Humility's being a foundational virtue makes sense of the asymmetry of our intuitions regarding self-ascriptions of various virtues. Let me demonstrate: self-ascriptions of, say, generosity are not especially ironic or self-defeating, and yet they still leave a bad taste in our mouths. They suggest that, whilst their subjects aren't straightforwardly un-generous, they *are* straightforwardly proud. If we accept the unity of the virtues, then their straightforward pride confirms that they aren't truly generous. This explains why their self-ascriptions of generosity seem suspicious, without being straightforwardly ironic or self-defeating. This doesn't work the other way around, though. Self-ascriptions of humility *are* especially ironic and perhaps self-defeating, but they do not seem, say, un-generous. To the extent that they cast aspersions on their subjects' possessing other virtues, they cast aspersions on their subjects' possessing *all* other virtues, without any of them coming to mind more apparently. Someone's being proud makes one morally suspicious of all that they do. Thus self-ascriptions of humility do not emit the stench of, say, un-generosity in particular, but they give us logical reason to doubt their subjects' generosity. Asymmetrically, though, self-ascriptions of generosity (and all other virtues bar humility) both emit the stench of pride in

particular (without emitting the stench of any other vices) *and* give us logical reason to doubt their subjects' humility. A very plausible explanation for the asymmetry between these intuitions is that humility is more foundational than generosity, and indeed more foundational than all other virtues. Humility's being a foundational virtue is far from a novel suggestion. George Schlesinger, for example, contends that humility is "the tendency to adopt the objective perspective" (1993:9), which involves "[viewing] objectively the relative merit of a vast variety of aptitudes and achievements, as well as the order of importance among many wants and longings... [a humble person] is one whose thoughts are not constantly focusing on his ego" (1993:12). He also says that "Righteous moral behaviour is grounded in an outlook that is close enough to the objective perspective, and, therefore, ranks sentiments, accomplishments, needs and aspirations in accordance with their actual, inherent order of importance" (1993:12). In other words, he identifies humility with a tendency to perceive the world in a way which is necessary for all further righteous behaviour; through an objective lens. Humility just is responding rightly, both cognitively and affectively, to the surrounding world, and is this the core of all true virtue. Jennifer Cole Wright also contends that humility is the foundational virtue, in the sense that humility is logically prior to all other virtues and so other virtues cannot subsist without it. But she goes one step further and says that possessing humility acts as a *catalyst* for attaining all other virtues, i.e. possessing humility not only makes their attainment logically possible, but it speeds the process along. This is because, similarly to Schlesinger, she thinks that "humility *orients us toward reality*" (emphasis hers) (Wright, 2019:152). She holds that each of us, phenomenologically, experiences our own needs and desires to be the most pressing and important ones in the universe. Humility, then, is a disposition towards "a state of awareness free of the epistemic and ethical biases generated by our natural [self-]centredness" (Wright, 2019:152). It allows us to "cognitively and affectively experience and appreciate the actual significance – the

'weight,' as it were – of the many different features of [a] situation" (Wright, 2019:150). Wright's thought is that humility enables one's focus to shift from one's natural self-centredness to the salient features of any situation, such that one can respond rightly to it both cognitively and affectively. The subtle difference between Shlesinger's and Wright's view, if there is one, is that Schlesinger identifies humility with a disposition towards the objective perspective needed to respond rightly to the surrounding world, and thus to being virtuous, whereas Wright identifies humility with *the ability to attain* that objective perspective, as opposed to remaining in our natural, ethically and epistemically distorting, self-centredness. I am not convinced that there is a significant difference between their two views. To me, Schlesinger's view is to Wright's view as 'I am disposed to open my eyes' is to 'I am able to attain open-eye-ness'. It is not clear that Wright's describing the closedness of the eyes prior to their opening (i.e., our natural self-centredness), and the process of their opening (i.e., our attention being re-focussed where it's due), indicates that her humble people know *how* to initiate the opening of their eyes any better than Schlesinger's do. All she's done is described the process more vividly as though from a third-party observer's point of view, without illuminating the mechanism by which the eye-openers themselves choose to open them. Wright's view therefore collapses into Schlesinger's; that humility just is the objective perspective of value, which is foundational to all virtues.

Given that this is Schlesinger's and Wright's shared thesis, I have a further qualm with it. Identifying humility with 'the perspective by which one responds rightly to the world' is tautological. They might as well say that humility is 'to rightly see so that one can see rightly'. By their lights, humility just equates to right-response to the surrounding world. From the neo-Aristotelean viewpoint (toward which this thesis is strongly bent), right-response to the surrounding world is at the core of all virtue, which explains the aforementioned asymmetry between our intuitions regarding self-ascriptions of virtues. So

long as we identify humility with the core feature of all virtue, *of course* all other virtues will logically depend on it. But if we are so to do, then we must forfeit the intuition that humility is itself a virtue. Instead of being a virtue with which other virtues are (perhaps inextricably) linked, it is demoted to being a component of virtue, without itself being a virtue. I reject this conclusion because my third pre-theoretical intuition, that humility is a fully-fledged virtue, is too strong to forfeit.

Instead of defining humility as a foundational virtue, perhaps we could define it as a psychological state which naturally engenders the three dispositions mentioned in the MLCA. I.e., on this conception, humility would still be foundational, but it would no longer be a virtue. I'll explicate this option by starting with a question: psychologically speaking, what *causes* people to behave, think and affectively respond, proudly? This is a good time to refer to that strange phrase that Roberts and Wood used – they said that vain people are preoccupied with comparing their status-indicators because of their "ego exalting potency" (2003:257). By this I take them to mean that placing too high a value on 'the self', which engenders self-preoccupation (including preoccupation with one's comparative status), results from having a very sensitive ego. A sensitive ego constantly demands reassurance that 'the self' (itself) is sufficiently significant to feel secure. One way of providing a sensitive ego with such assurance is by constantly feeding it 'proof' that it possesses more merits than other people. It gleans significance from its perceived superiority to other people. Whenever one's ego is assured that it possesses a high status relative to others, it gets inflated, which makes it/ its subject feel joy. Whenever evidence of its significance, in the form of evidence of its superiority, is wanting, then it/ its subject will feel despair. Hence, the emotional sensitivity vain people feel towards the subtle shifts in their perceived relative status. I'll emphasise again that, on this conception of vanity, both joy and grief at one's perceived relative social status are equally compatible with vanity. On this conception, proud thoughts

and behaviour can be understood as rooted in a yearning for personal significance, whether or not that yearning is met. As Roberts and Wood put it, "In the vain person's view, the approval of certain others confers value on himself… the attention that vanity truly seeks is affirmative of the subject's value as a person… the vain individual may see even strongly disapproving attention as having an approving aspect, in particular as showing at least that the subject is important enough to pay this attention to" (Roberts & Wood, 2003:259). They say elsewhere that the reason why proud people react defensively to criticism is because they are responding "not primarily as intellectuals, but as selves" whose fundamental significance feels threatened (2003:276). Nancy Snow agrees that both over-owning and under-owning one's limitations can be traced back to a deficient and an inflated self-worth, respectively (1995:207). I suspect that one of the reasons why an unstable self-worth is so widely understood as the root of pride is because this seemingly absolves proud people of all moral guilt. Understanding pride this way entails understanding its antithesis, humility, by similar lights. Instead of humility being a virtue, it would be something like a sense of psycho-emotional security, or a 'healthy self-esteem' which naturally gives way to non-self-aggrandising and non-self-defensive thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Such non-proud behaviour stems from the humble person's not feeling they need to earn personal significance by 'glittering' or outdoing others. The humble person is already convinced of her significance, and is therefore free from the need to compete with others, and can just contentedly and unobtrusively go about her life. My problem with this is that we cannot sensibly judge people morally for the state of their self-esteems, or the extent to which they feel fundamentally significant, because their component psychological states are largely involuntary. Doing so would violate my fourth pre-theoretical intuition; that only voluntary acts, or states of mind, can be morally praised. So, to the extent that somebody can 'choose' to feel secure, and is therefore to blame for feeling insecure, which would constitute humility

and pride respectively, then humility and pride remain morally praiseworthy and blameworthy respectively. But this leads to the unacceptable logical conclusion that people who were, say, emotionally abused and who therefore struggle with chronically low self-esteems and chronic doubt about their own personal significance are *ipso facto* proud, and therefore morally blameworthy. It also leads to the equally unacceptable (though less distressing) conclusion that people who are secure in others' love for them, through no feat of their own, are thereby humble and morally praiseworthy. Either we must give up the intuition that humility and pride are morally praiseworthy and blameworthy respectively, and accept that they are involuntary, and therefore value-neutral, psychological states, or we must reject the notion that they are (involuntary) psychological states and thereby preserve my third pre-theoretical intuition that they have moral valency. I choose the latter.

Even though I reject the idea that humility and pride are wholly constituted by involuntary psychological states, I can see the appeal in identifying humility with a psycho-emotionally secure state. Doing so would help to provide both causal and conceptual unity to the MLCA. Each component of the MLCA can very plausibly be causally explained by humility's ultimately being a secure psycho-emotional sense of one's own self-worth. I'll explain how. Regarding the 'disposition to be unconcerned about and therefore emotionally insensitive to one's relative status (for its own sake)'; if somebody were essentially convinced of and secure in their own personal worth, their ego would no longer look to comparisons of social status for 'proof' that it is superior to others in order to count itself significant. It would already count itself significant. Regarding the 'outward-looking attentiveness or concern for some noble external good'; if somebody were secure in their personal significance, their ego would no longer call attention to itself, constantly needing to be reassured of its worth. It would already be sure of its worth. This person would therefore have the freedom of mind to notice and appreciate valuable things outside of herself, not least the significance of other

people, with whom she'd now be able to connect as equals rather than compete for social kudos. Regarding the 'disposition to 'own' one's limitations, which includes being aware of them and responding to them as and when the context demands'; if somebody were secure in her personal significance, and therefore insensitive to her comparative status, then she would not be afraid of admitting her faults to others, or to herself. There would be no 'image' she had to keep up to preserve the significance she gleans from her good social standing. She wouldn't glean her significance from her comparative social standing at all, because she wouldn't need to. Such a person would feel psycho-emotionally safe enough to gain sober knowledge of her flaws and to deal with them as is appropriate, because her sense of personal worth would not be threatened by the knowledge that she's imperfect, has negatively impacted others, and needs to change in important ways. Regarding 'the cognitive disposition to abstain from making illicit entitlement claims'; if somebody were secure in her personal significance, she'd feel no need to 'prove' her significance to others or to herself by grasping at privileges to which she isn't entitled. To the extent that such grasping is a disguised effort to increase one's comparative social status, she wouldn't be interested in it, because she would no longer be interested in her comparative status. Finally, regarding the fact that 'the behaviour this engenders will reflect the humble agent's conviction that all human beings are of equal and significant moral worth, i.e. their behaviour will, inter alia, not diminish others, and it will therefore not be proud'; if someone were secure in her personal significance, she'd more readily recognise the significance of others because she'd no longer see others as threats to her social standing. She'd therefore be free to value others for their own sake, which entails not diminishing them, which entails abstaining from proud behaviour. As is clear, identifying humility with a psycho-emotional state provides causal unity between all the dispositions we associate with humility as per the MLCA. Moreover, identifying humility this

way *conceptually* unites them: the dispositions we associate with humility are all to do with an agent's not having to impress others or herself to feel personally significant.

Section 7: My Dunnington-Inspired Account of Humility:

How, then, can we maintain the benefits of identifying humility with a psycho-emotional state whilst also preserving the intuition that humility is morally praiseworthy and therefore has some voluntary aspect to it? I propose that we draw from Kent Dunnington's account of Radical Christian Humility (RCH) to answer this question. To be clear, whilst his is the only account of Christian humility I'll be drawing from here, I don't mean to imply that it's the best, or most mainstream account thereof. In fact, as the name suggests, it is distinctly 'radical'. Many thinkers define Christian humility in a way that's reminiscent of Schlesinger's and Wright's conception of humility as a foundational virtue; a way of seeing and valuing everything correctly. Christian thinkers cut from this cloth simply explicate 'valuing everything correctly' to include valuing God extremely highly, as His glory demands, and valuing everything else comparatively dimly (but fittingly, on their account). Most Christian accounts, then, are compatible with Schlesinger and Wright's, in that they amount to having an accurate view of the world and responding to it rightly, which includes responding rightly to our own innate value by safeguarding it and upholding it as appropriate. Kent Dunnington, though, bases his account on Jesus's willingness to "[humble] himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8), i.e. on a self-sacrificial view of humility, rather than on a self-preserving one. I take it that Dunnington doesn't mean that Jesus didn't value himself appropriately or have significant moral worth as a person, leading him to forfeit his life. In turn, neither does Dunnington think we should value ourselves inappropriately, or that we lack significant moral worth to begin

with. Instead, I think that he means that humility is about 'dying to ourselves' *even though* we have significant moral worth.

The first element from the RCH that I'm drawing into my own is that it is God's love for us which imbues us with unconditional significance (Dunnington, 2019:83). Awareness and acceptance of God's love for one, then, engenders the kind of psycho-emotional state which is able both to causally and to conceptually unify the disparate dispositions outlined in the MLCA. This time, the causal unity is from humility's having something to do with one's secure knowledge of God's acceptance of and love of oneself. The conceptual unity, as before, is that the dispositions we associate with humility are all to do with an agent's not having to impress others or herself to feel personally significant, because of the significance she already feels.

The second thing I want to draw from the RCH into my own account allows me to preserve my fourth pre-theoretical intuition; that there is something voluntary and therefore morally praiseworthy about humility. Notice that the word 'humble' is used as a verb in the verse from Philippians quoted above. The fact that, as shown by Jesus, the exemplar of Christian humility, it's conceptually possible to 'humble yourself' means that there is a voluntary aspect of humility to be found in Dunnington's RCH. What is it? Dunnington thinks that to 'humble oneself' means, essentially, to put to death one's 'ego ideal'. One's ego ideal, in turn, is "the class of reflexive beliefs and desires that provide a sense of distinctive personal importance" (Dunnington, 2019:79). 'Dying to oneself', I take it, is to forfeit one's ego ideal, not out of motivation to 'be more humble', but for the sake of loving the valuable things that surround oneself. I'll sketch an example of what I take Dunnington to mean by 'dying to oneself' or forfeiting one's ego ideal. Imagine that Sally's friend, Jane, has a terribly stressful family life, and so she acts out at school in rude and inappropriate ways. Sally knows that Jane acts the way she does just to cover up her vulnerability, and not out of malicious intent.

But the other children nonetheless resent Jane for her ill manners and take up any opportunity to make her life difficult. One day, Jane is having a particularly difficult time and, out of sheer stress and emotional turmoil, she throws up on the classroom floor during break time. Thankfully, Sally is the only person who saw it happen, but Jane was nonetheless terribly embarrassed. Seeing as Sally and Jane were the only two people in the classroom at break time, the other children will know that the embarrassing smell and mess in the classroom owes to one of them. When they come back, though, Sally makes a quick decision to claim that the mess was her own to protect Jane from further distressing bullying, Sally thereby becomes the victim of a few days' worth of social ostracism and teasing from the other children, but she does not regret the loss of status one bit, as she is just so glad that Jane has been feeling a bit better lately.

In light of this story, my (Dunnington-Inspired) account of humility[12] goes as follows:

I define 'humility' as the ***disposition to be willing to give up what would otherwise be one's source of personal significance, because of love for some other good. This self-sacrifice is rendered appropriate, and not a sign of pathological self-loathing, because the agent knows that her true and unchanging significance is found in the unconditional love and acceptance of God.***

Section 8: Conclusion:

In virtue of its involving an unlimited source of psycho-emotional security and significance, in the form of God's unconditional, loving acceptance of one, my Dunnington-Inspired account of humility provides both causal and conceptual unity to the MLCA just in the same way that was achieved by equating humility to a psychological state *simpliciter*. This means that, if someone were sincerely to embody the type of humility described in my account, she would necessarily possess all of the dispositions outlined in the MLCA, with all of its ensuing behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes, and would therefore unobjectionably count as humble by widespread intuition. Crucially, unlike was the case with the MLCA, her 'humility' could furthermore be identified as a single dispositional trait, i.e. a willingness (or, if you like, a disposition towards willingness) to give up one's sources of personal significance, e.g. one's social kudos, for the love of some external good. Finally, my Dunnington-Inspired account of humility satisfies and explains all four of my pre-theoretical intuitions. In virtue of its essentially engendering the MLCA, I've already shown that it satisfies the first three intuitions. In virtue of its having a voluntary component, it also satisfies the fourth, which qualifies it as a legitimately morally praiseworthy trait, i.e. a virtue.

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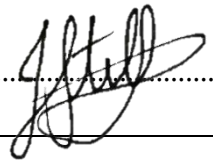
Declaration of Originality of Authorship of a thesis submitted for examination in the BPhil in Philosophy in the academic year 2020-2021

I, ...Jessica Still....., affirm that my submitted thesis entitled ……What is Humility?……..... is my own original work, except where otherwise stated, and that I have only shown drafts of it to my supervisor, Prof ……Adrian Moore…….…… (*please fill in*), in approximately eight hours of supervision, and that I have received help in its preparation from Dr/Prof……N/A…… …… *(please list all Oxford Philosophy Faculty members you received help from and specify the sort of help received, or write "N/A").*

Signed: .....  ..... Date: .....08-09-2021.....