



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Learning Intellectual Humility

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This is an unpublished conference paper for the 4th Annual Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues conference at Oriel College, Oxford University, Thursday 7th – Saturday 9th January 2016.
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1. Introduction

How can a person who is deficient in humility — whether from youthful immaturity or well-established habits of adulthood — be moved from a present deficient state to one of greater intellectual humility? The idea of humility that I'll present will suggest some answers. I'll derive the proposals from my concept of intellectual humility, but they will be empirical hypotheses that could be tested by educational psychologists. Even in the absence of controlled empirical support, I think my suggestions will have enough plausibility to warrant giving them a try in the daily world of living, learning, and teaching.

2. Humility Among the Moral Virtues

In earlier writings (e.g., Roberts, 1984) I have distinguished two chief kinds of virtues, ones that turn mainly on some love or concern or caring, and others that turn mainly on some skill or ability or power. Justice belongs to the first kind. The person who is just or fair *cares* that people be given their due — what they deserve or need or have a right to. Another virtue that turns mainly on caring about something is compassion. The compassionate person cares about the sufferings and defects of other human beings and animals, and so is moved to notice and to alleviate such suffering and deficiencies when she can. Both justice and compassion also have skill-like aspects, for example, the conceptual and epistemic ability to recognize justice and injustice, or to discern true cases of others' need and one's own ability to meet such need, and skill at figuring out how to implement justice and avoid injustice and alleviate suffering. But the main feature of these virtues is caring in the right way.

By contrast, self-control is not primarily a concern or desire or love, but rather an ability or skill. People control their emotions (anger, fear, disgust, impatience, discouragement) or their appetites (for food or drink or sex), or perhaps they just control their behavior when under the sway of such urges. These virtues seem to be a combination of will power (a kind of psychological muscle; see Baumeister et al., 2007) and self-management skills. Several virtues can be seen as versions of self-control in this sense. Examples are patience, perseverance, and courage. The ability-virtues will not be exemplified except where the agent is motivated in *some* way. For example, in acting courageously you might be motivated by a concern that a minority population be done justice, or a concern to protect your classic guitar from the flames that are beginning to engulf your house, or the desire to be a good example to your children. A person might persevere out of love for humanity, or love of the truth, or out of selfish ambition to get ahead. Perseverance and courage can be motivated in a wide range of ways, and are not defined by any one kind of motivation. But in the cases where persevering or courageous actions are most virtuous overall, the motivation will come from one or more of the concern-virtues (love, compassion, justice). My point is that no particular kind of care intrinsically goes with the selfcontrol virtues as such — *as* courage, *as* perseverance, etc.

Humility, I think, belongs in neither of these classes. As I have conceived it (Roberts and Wood, 2007, ch. 9; Roberts, 2009; Roberts in progress, ch. 8), humility is *neither* based on a concern, *nor* does it essentially involve any kind of ability. In the larger moral constitution of the humble person, it is surrounded and supported by concerns and abilities, and it supports them in turn, but humility is not itself any concern or ability. The humble person is one who *lacks* some or all of the following vices: snobbishness, vanity, domination (the joy of lording it over others or being an important influence on them), hyper-autonomy (a super-drive for self-sufficiency), pretentiousness, self-righteousness, arrogance, haughtiness, envy, conceit, and possibly others.

These vices have in common that they all involve an inappropriate concern for and sensitivity to glory, honor, personal importance, status, prestige, prominence, favorable notice, or superiority. Despite differences among these objects of concern, they bear family resemblances to one another. Something from this class of vices is roughly what people have in mind when they talk about pride being a vice. But some kinds of pride are not vicious at all, so it's misleading, as well as imprecise, to think that the vice that corresponds to the virtue of humility is simply pride. To make clear that a *diversity* of vices are contraries of humility, I call them "the vices of pride." That way I don't commit myself to the idea that all pride is a vice. As a consequence of lacking these vices, the humble person lacks the patterns of emotional response characteristic of them, as well as the behavior dispositions characteristic of them. Thus humility is not a positive concern, like justice or compassion; nor is it a positive power to do some kind of action, like self-control. I'm proposing that humility is essentially a family of lacks: the lack of arrogance, the lack of vanity, the lack of hyper-autonomy, etc., etc. So it's a little bit misleading to talk of humility as though it's a single virtue. It's just possible that a person might have the humility that consists in lacking hyper-autonomy, and lack the humility that consists in lacking vanity. I do think, however, that these kinds of humility will *tend* to be found together, and likewise the vices of pride will tend to clump.

Consider some of the actions and emotional responses characteristic of the vices of pride:

- After giving birth, the vain woman refuses for months to be seen in public, dieting and furiously exercising until her figure returns to its former beauty, and vows never to let herself get pregnant again. The prospect of being seen in a saggy condition is humiliating to her, even when the cause of it — having given birth to another human being — is obvious to everyone.
- The hyper-autonomous man, having been rescued from financial ruin by the tireless efforts of a friend, secretly resents the friend because thinking of her and what she has done reminds him of his weakness and dependency. It is an understatement to say that this man fails to be grateful to his friend.
- The domineering uncle "gives" his nephews one steer each, to be fattened for market on the uncle's recreational ranch. But on realizing that the nephews are not truckling to his influence in the envisioned way, he repossesses the steers. Later he comments to one of the nephews that there is an art to gift giving, and few have mastered it.
- The envious person feels demeaned to the point of worthlessness when his close friend and fellow surgeon is named head of surgery at a prestigious medical center in town. The friendship cools and the friends' lives, once happily enmeshed, drift apart.
- The self-righteous liberal enjoys the strong impression of his wisdom, tolerance, and broadmindedness that he derives from joking with like-minded friends about the intolerable stupidity, low tricks, and narrow-mindedness of the conservatives. The self-righteous conservative enjoys the strong impression of his wise faithfulness to a solid tradition that he derives from joking with like-minded friends about the intolerable short-sightedness and laxity of the knee-jerk liberals.
- The arrogant movie star feels that his importance in the public eye entitles him to a leniency concerning his practices on the road and in the bedroom that doesn't apply to ordinary people, and feels indignation when he is held to the same standards as everyone else.

The lack of the concerns and ways of thinking characteristic of the vices of pride is an *intelligent* lack of those concerns and patterns of thought. If you lack the concerns and thoughts that mark hyper-autonomy, domination, envy, self-righteousness, and arrogance just because the lobes of your pre-frontal cortex have been scrambled (see Damasio, 1994), then your lack of those vices will not amount to the virtue of humility. Your lack needs to be embedded in a character and life

of at least quasi-coherent projects or concerns. Perhaps you care about others in the ways that compassionate, generous, and just people care about them. Or maybe it's something less personal, like the love of ideas or scientific knowledge, or painting or antique cars that blunts and dampens and moderates your egoistic concerns. Or perhaps you are committed to the purity of Nordic blood. In your white supremacist circles you are egoistically dis-interested: for the good of the cause you are willing to take a back seat in the organization and diligently do small tasks for which you receive no recognition. You have no inclination to envy others when they are celebrated for contributions, or to resent the prominence of others whose contributions to the cause of white supremacy are less impressive than you know your own to be. Even your concern for the purity of your race is disinterested: You don't pride yourself on being a member of it, but simply want superiority to be unpolluted. We may admit variety here, and insist on no particular kind of concern (not even excellent concern) as required for humility, but *some* such aim or concern needs to orient your life beyond yourself if you are to be humble. If you are the white supremacist, we will deny that you are *overall* virtuous; your fundamental project, after all, is despicable despite your disinterestedness. But I think we have to admit that you have the virtue of *humility*.

Here are some of the ways that humility manifests itself. A rising star young professor teaching at a prestigious university gives up that job and returns to teach at his unprestigious undergraduate Christian college. His reason is that he wants to serve in Christian higher education. An onlooker might describe his move as lowering himself, or humbling himself (an act of humility), but the young professor thinks of it as doing what he wants to do: serving in Christian higher education (he's not trying to be humble). Barbara McClintock receives a Nobel Prize for her work in genetics, but finds the fame and honors to be, more than anything, an annoyance, because they interrupt her work and distract her from it (Keller, 1963). John the Baptist has been causing quite a stir and getting a lot of attention from the crowds that gather around him in the wilderness to hear his preaching and be baptized and speculate about his importance in the national life of Israel. When Jesus comes on the scene, John comments, "The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3.29–30). Had John been like most of us, he would have regretted, at least just a little bit, losing the limelight to his greater successor; but instead, he is simply delighted about the progress of Christ's kingdom. It is true that John's statement "I must become less" indicates that he is aware that his action is humble; so the example suggests that being aware of one's humility is not *incompatible* with being humble. But his humility is not what he is rejoicing about. Notice that in these three examples, the relative lack of interest in prestige or prominence or personal importance is coordinate with an intense and coherent interest in something else: the young professor wants to serve in a Christian college; McClintock is devoted to her research; and the Baptist is excited about the advent of God's kingdom. In these cases, the one kind of enthusiasm is pushed out or eclipsed or pre-empted by another teleology. The teleology is virtuous in these three cases; but my earlier example of the humble white supremacist shows, I think, that it need not be so.

Here are two objections to my claim that humility is neither a motivational, nor a skill-like virtue:

Humility can't be just the absence of the concerns of the vices of pride, because actions that exemplify humility have to be *motivated*, and the mere absence of viciously prideful concerns provides no motivation.

Furthermore, to be humble, one needs to *know how* to be humble, that is, how to act humbly, just as the self-controlled person needs to know how to control his emotions and behavior. This is another way that humility needs to be something positive — not merely the absence of a certain kind of motivation.

Notice that both of these arguments turn on appeal to the notion of a humble *action*. Thus, they raise the question about the validity of inferences about the nature of a virtue from the nature of an action that exemplifies the virtue. Such an inference is problematic because most, if not all, virtuous actions exemplify more than one virtue (or a virtue and a disposition that is not virtuous). So the question can always be raised whether the feature of the action (e.g., its motivation, or the skill involved in performing it) is to be attributed to the virtue under analysis (in this case, humility), or whether that feature is coming from some other virtue (or in the case of the white supremacist, a vice). The first argument above fails because humble actions may be motivated by concerns of social justice, compassion, or by some other motive that is not essential to humility. The second argument fails similarly: of course, an agent can perform no action without knowing how to perform it, and thus without the required “skill.” But there is no requirement that humility itself be contributing the skill required for humble actions.

Humility would be an exception to my last claim if it were a matter of practicing humility, in a sense analogous to practicing good manners or law or medicine. In such cases, the practitioner has to have the concept of what he or she is practicing (good manners, law, or medicine), and guides himself by that concept. The ability to engage in the activity excellently might be thought of as the virtue (say, of being a good doctor). The virtue of humility, as I understand it, is a way of being and acting, but it is not a practice in the above sense, because it does not require the person who exemplifies it to have a concept of it. A person can exemplify the virtue of humility without ever intending to be humble or to practice humility, and without awareness of his humility, and even without having a concept of humility.

We do, it is true, sometimes “practice our humility,” and this will be crucial when we come, later in this chapter, to think about *learning* humility. And to practice humility requires that one have a concept of humility, that one know how to practice it, that one employ the concept in the practice, and that one be aware of practicing it. But we can exemplify the virtue without practicing humility in this sense, and we can practice humility in this sense without exemplifying the virtue. In fact, if we have to *practice* humility in this sense, it is most likely because we are *short* on the virtue. You can’t practice justice without *aiming at* justice, but the most perfect humility does not aim at humility; in exemplifying the virtue, the paragon of humility is always aiming at something other than humility.

3. Intellectual Humility

Intellectual humility is a species of general or moral humility. It is differentiated from the larger class in a twofold way. In the vices of pride — intellectual vanity, intellectual snobbishness, intellectual arrogance, intellectual hyper-autonomy, intellectual domination, intellectual envy, etc. — the dysfunctional concern about prestige, power over others, honor, personal importance, status, favorable notice, glory, prominence, superiority, and the like is mediated by something intellectual, such as accomplishment or practice or ability. Thus intellectual vanity is vanity about intellectual accomplishment or natural ability or performance. Intellectual snobbishness will be snobbishness about the intellectual prestige of one’s associates, one’s school, and one’s field of research. Power over others characteristic of intellectual domination will be the power to shape others’ beliefs, skills, interests, methods, and so forth. So one way that intellectual humility differs from broader humility is that the vices of pride of which it is the absence are about intellectual matters. Your intellectual humility can be the absence of snobbishness about your school, your intellectual resources, your education, etc., or the absence of arrogance based on such things, or the absence of vanity about such things.

The second way it differs is that a prominent love or concern of a life that excludes the egoistic concerns and gives the humility its intelligence is also intellectual. An earlier example was Barbara McClintock's relative lack of interest in the Nobel Prize that she won, which was such a mark of intellectual prestige in the larger scientific community. But her lack of interest in the prestige seems to be at least partially caused by positive interest in her research. She views the Prize and all its associated fanfare in a somewhat negative or ironic light as a distraction and interruption of her work (this might be a sense in which she is "proud" of her work). Of course she's glad that her work is being recognized and is having an influence; but *this* gladness does not preoccupy her, and the explanation of it is not that the recognition makes *her* important. She notices the recognition with appreciation — and then wants to get back to work. On the view of intellectual humility that I'm presupposing in this chapter, it isn't simply indifference to intellectual prestige and glory, but a *relative* indifference, or a *kind* of indifference, which can be explained by an intrinsic interest in the intellectual goods. In the intellectually vain, at least some of the interest in intellectual goods will be subordinate to the interest in recognition and instrumental to achieving prestige-enhancing recognition, and the degree of intellectual vanity will be the degree to which the interest in recognition drives one's interest in the intellectual goods.

The importance of intellectual interest to intellectual humility may seem inconsistent with my earlier claim that humility does not have any particular concern and is, therefore, not a motivational virtue. Two responses are relevant. First, there can be any number of "specialized" versions of humility. We pick out intellectual humility as a special virtue because of the enormous importance of intellectual practices and goods in human life, but in principle we might distinguish other specialized humilities such as the Christian humility of John the Baptist or the white supremacist humility of our Nordic blood enthusiast. Such humilities will be "defined" by an associated concern, and so will be, in a sense, exceptions to the claim that humility as such has no special motivation attached. I say, "in a sense," because specialized humilities are not humility as such. They are humilities as embedded in one or another particular set of *other virtues*. The second response, accordingly, is that the motivation, even in the cases of Nordic blood humility and Christian humility, comes from another virtue than humility. The concern that defines John the Baptist's humility is his love of the kingdom; his love of the kingdom creates, or partially creates, his humility, but since humility as such is not defined by any particular pattern of motivation, we can distinguish his humility, as one virtue, from his love of the kingdom, as another, and note that the motivational side of the specialized virtue comes from the motivational virtue and not from humility. In Jay Wood's and my book on the intellectual virtues (2007, ch. 9), we distinguish the love of knowledge, as one virtue, from intellectual humility, as another, and say that intellectual humility derives its specification as *intellectual* (partly) from the love of knowledge. (The other part — that what the intellectually arrogant, vain, and domineering "pride themselves" on is something intellectual about themselves in their relation to others — doesn't supply any motivation to the intellectually humble person. After all, it is the *absence* of such prideful concern that qualifies him as intellectually humble.) Humility is not the same virtue as love of the kingdom of God, but John's love of the kingdom defines *his* humility by way of its relation to that love. It is *humility* because of his not caring about his own glory, status, etc.; but it is *Christian* humility because, in him, this not caring is caused by his love of the kingdom. Similarly, intellectual humility is *humility* by one's caring little about (intellectual) status and glory, but it is *intellectual* humility insofar as it is associated with the love of knowledge.

4. Learning Intellectual Humility

My discussion of the acquisition and refinement of the virtue of humility has two parts. The first part capitalizes on the preceding discussion of the nature of humility by inferring some of the ways an adult might approach the project for self-improvement, or perhaps to counsel another adult who wishes to improve in this dimension of character. I admit it's hard to imagine an academic going for counseling out of a sense that he needs to grow in intellectual humility. But it's not impossible, provided that he's not completely conceited. And anyway, my aim here is to think about what the counselor might recommend in case he did go, or what the academic might try on his own. Then in the second part I will exploit *that* discussion in deriving some strategies for classroom teachers who wish to foster intellectual humility in their students. I remind the reader that, being inferences from the nature of intellectual humility as I have conceived it, the proposals do not include controlled empirical support. The kind of conceptual discussion that I have pursued in the earlier part of this paper is crucial to competent empirical investigation of psychological concepts, and woefully rare in the empirical literature. Put very simply, you can't do an empirical investigation of anything without having some idea what you are investigating, and it's very typical in empirical psychology for operationalizations of the concepts guiding the investigations to be philosophically amateurish distorting oversimplifications (see Roberts forthcoming, 2015).. Empirical researchers may wish to take my proposals as clues to setting up empirical studies of education in intellectual humility.

4.1. Self-help and counseling

If we think of the vices of pride as a minefield that threatens the practices of the intellectual life, the virtue of intellectual humility is a minesweeper for intellectual practices. It clears the minefield created by the intellectual vices of pride. Where humility is deepest and most virtuous, this clearing will be done silently and automatically by the virtue rather than actively by the possessor of the virtue. But other virtues, like gratitude and generosity, are rich in associated practices (the many ways we have of saying thank you and giving gifts), and since gratitude and generosity presuppose some degree of self-forgetfulness, they carry (some) humility with them and foster it, making it possible to practice humility indirectly but actively.

Practice gratitude and generosity. Gratitude is a virtue that requires some humility. It is an acknowledgment of dependence on a giver for some of the good in one's life. A grateful person happily acknowledges her indebtedness to her parents, her teachers, her intellectual forebears, and colleagues from whom she gets ideas and help. Believers in God acknowledge that all the good in their lives — their families, their talents, their education, their colleagues, their work, their opportunities — are owed to God. Thus gratitude counters the vice of pride that I have called hyper-autonomy — the overdrive for self-sufficiency and the tendency to take more credit for one's ideas and one's intellectual skills than is just.¹ Gratitude is a happy and honest willingness to be indebted. The grateful person is open to receiving intellectual help from others.

Gratitude can be practiced, and thus a person can become better at it. As one practices, gratitude becomes second-nature and hyper-autonomy gradually dissolves under its influence. Robert Emmons (2013) recommends a number of exercises in gratitude. One example is gratitude journaling, writing a bit each day about the blessings in one's life, and attributing those blessings to the agents who bestowed them. The practitioner spends some time each day or on a regular basis "collecting" ways in which he or she is indebted for the gracious contributions of others. Another exercise is to write thank you notes to people who have done you favors. A variation is

¹ For a comically exaggerated sketch of hyper-autonomy that drives out gratitude, see Josiah Bounderby in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*.

thank you visits. With these practices grow greater attention to, and appreciation of, the positive roles of others in one's life, and a diminishing inclination to take more credit than is due.

Just as gratitude focuses on the goodness of the benefactor and thus fosters self-“forgetfulness,” generosity is a virtue that seeks the good of the other and brings on a similar diminishment of self-focus. One way to practice generosity is to do intellectual favors for others, say, helping a fellow student or colleague, or volunteering to tutor disadvantaged children. Sometimes you can reframe intellectual duties as gifts by focusing with pleasure on the benefit that your work may do its recipient (rather than, say, focusing with frustration on how doing this duty is costing time away from your own research). Then, even though it *is* your duty to read the colleague's paper or referee a paper for a journal or help a student get over a difficulty, it *feels* to you like a favor that you gladly bestow on the student or the author or the editor or readers of the journal. Thus your generosity grows a bit. And if, in the spirit of real generosity, you genuinely set your mind on *the good* that you do *others* (and not on your own cleverness or virtue or the power you exercise over others' minds), your humility grows as well, by habituating the diversion of your attention away from yourself. Both generosity and gratitude can be faked and become covers for the “fat relentless ego” (Iris Murdoch's phrase), so the person who is practicing one of these virtues as a way to foster humility will need to be self-critical and alert to the pitfalls.

A second way to practice generosity is by practicing admiration. Here, the self-focus that is diminished is that characteristic of envy. If you find yourself envying a friend's or colleague's intellect or achievements, you may be able to mitigate your emotion by complimenting the friend or praising his achievements to others or offering to help him in his work. Such loving extensions of yourself to the other will tend to change your way of construing both yourself and the other. This may be difficult for some academics, because we are socialized to look for flaws in other people's work. Still, it's true that other people's intellectual work has admirable features (otherwise, why would you envy it?), and, again, the discipline is one of reframing or focus: You intentionally look for the excellences in the other's work, in an effort to admire it (and him or her). Because the practice of generous admiration focuses the mind and heart on the excellence of *the other* and away from the self — and on the other as a colleague rather than a rival — it is also a practice of humility. In commending humility to the congregation at Philippi, the apostle Paul speaks of “regarding others more highly than yourselves” (Philippians 2.3). I think he has in mind the practice of admiration. In that case, the quoted words would mean *practice admiration of others instead of fixating on your own excellences or lack thereof*. I don't think Paul means to recommend that we judge one another to be better than ourselves at this or that, in this or that respect. If I am obviously better at logic than my colleague, humility would not require that I deny this and claim and believe that he is better at logic than I. That would conflict quite directly with truthfulness and turn humility into an intellectual vice. But I can make it a policy to look for the admirable qualities of others and then to savor their excellences, whatever they may be, rather than focus my attention admiringly on my own excellences or enviously on my own deficiencies.

Think critically about our culture. Depending on the specifics of the sub-culture in which we carry on, it is likely that our culture trains us to see ourselves, our associates, our accomplishments, and our work in terms characteristic of the vices of pride. We are likely to be conscious of our status within our circle, whether that status be high or low. We're likely to be hyper-aware of the relative importance of the members of our circle, and deeply impressed by honors and glory that come to some and by-pass others. We're likely to have learned from our culture that originality is of great importance and that we get credit just to the extent that the work is our own. Our subculture, in all likelihood, encourages our sensitivity to pecking orders and evaluative personal comparisons, both informally and sometimes formally, by assigning visible and audible marks of rank, from

private to general, from instructor to full professor, from “unranked” to first in our class, from janitor to CEO, from “unranked” to top-ranked for schools and universities.²

We’re not the only species prone to within-group ranking and the emotions, desires, and preoccupations that come with it: dogs, baboons, chimpanzees, and chickens come to mind. So our tendency here is “natural” — not *entirely* to be laid at the feet of culture. Even if our sphere lacks the explicit themes and devices of prestige, rank, honor, class, and influence, we are likely to feel these values and to suffer, to some extent, from the vices of pride. But still, the character of our social environments does contribute to the vices of pride, so to the extent that these generic human tendencies *are* due to the cultural environments in which we work and live, and over which we may have some control, we may be able to weaken these vices in ourselves and our students, or to forestall their development to some extent, by reflecting critically on the institutional arrangements and vocabulary that encourage the vices of pride.

Broaden your disciplinary acquaintance. Intellectual snobbishness can generate a pleasant feeling of superiority, as we look “down” on our lessers and thus feel the pleasant elevation of our social position. It is less well recognized that the same snobbish concern with rank that looks down with complacent pleasure from a prestigious height on those below may look up with anxious distress from ignominious mediocrity at those above. If such snobbery is disciplinary, humility may be fostered by acquaintance (say, between empirical psychology and philosophical psychology, where the up- and down-looking can go in either direction), a closer look at what actually goes on and is accomplished in the despised discipline. Exposing ourselves fairly deeply to the disciplines we despise will usually reduce the sense of qualitative distance between them. This can be a fruit of a liberal education, as contrasted with one that specializes too early. But it might also be dispelled by simply reminding ourselves that whole disciplines, with many intelligent practitioners, are unlikely simply to be shoddy enterprises.

Explain the originality fetish. Academic publication is entangled with the desiderata of at least four of the vices of pride: vanity, snobbery, domination, and hyper-autonomy. It serves vanity by attracting favorable attention to the author and the author’s institution; it serves snobbery by lending prestige to the author’s institution; it serves domination by promising the possibility of influencing the minds of readers; and it fits with hyper-autonomy by trading on the value of originality. It stands to reason that those who publish will get more attention than those who don’t. Institutions, as well as individuals, crave favorable attention, and so they reward prominence in their members. It also stands to reason that there’s not much point in publishing ideas and research that are passé or already known. In this way, a fetish with originality and with having something *new* to say grows up in the academic world, and that world is flooded with research on ever narrower and more specific topics, and with academics straining to find some way to say something new, and to come up with new theories for which they can get “credit.” The strong concern with doing something “original” may sometimes lead to understanding and the discovery of truths, but it seems that the more virtuous motivation would be, not the desire to be original, but the desire to understand something correctly, to uncover the truth about something. Intellectual humility, by reducing the concern for favorable attention, the snobbish interest in prestige, the domineering interest in influence, and the hyper-autonomous enthusiasm for originality, clears the way for the more authentically intellectual concern: the love of understanding and truth. It seems also to be true that the stronger the love of understanding and truth, the less prominent will be the concerns characteristic of the vices of pride. The more an academic person can lose intrinsic interest in prestige, prominence, favorable attention, and

² I write “unranked” in scare-quotes because in this usage “unranked” *is* a rank — a low one.

personal influence, and keep her interest and attention on the intellectual goods, the more intellectual humility she will have.

Act “humbly” against the grain. Outward acts of humility, which express at the same time a relative lack of interest in originality and credit and a purer interest in the essential intellectual goods, will tend to promote humility. A (negative) example in this connection would be the actions of James Watson and Francis Crick in their pursuit of the structure of DNA. Aware that Linus Pauling was also homing in on understanding that structure, they frantically hid their own progress from him so that he would not use it as a clue to the solution and thus beat them to the Nobel Prize (Watson, 1968). Probably, if they had shown Pauling their results, they would all have understood that structure sooner (maybe better, too). But instead of aiming in the most obviously efficient way at the intellectual goods, they were dominated by their desire for the Prize.

Imagine a Watson and Crick who were similar, but different. They want the Prize (and want to share it with as few people as possible), thus showing some vices of pride in their intellectual life. But they have also been thinking about intellectual humility and want to grow in this virtue. They see that they can exemplify the virtue in an imperfect, outward way, by sharing their data with Pauling. They even know that they risk cutting themselves out of the Prize, in case Pauling treats them badly because of their youth and somehow hogs the Prize for himself. But they decide, with emotional resistance, to put knowledge ahead of prestige and to share their data with him. By this “sacrificial” or “risky” act they resist the vices of pride in the interest of intellectual virtue.

An onlooker might admire them for their act of humility, but knowing the emotional resistance they felt in performing the action, they know better: This is not so much an act of humility as an act aimed at acquiring some. It is true, though, that the degree of resistance to the “humble” act can vary from nearly insuperable to mild. So perhaps we should say that somewhere in the course of this continuum the self-managing agent can be said to have *some* humility — that is, enough weakness in his vices of pride to count as some degree of humility. The greater that degree, the easier it will be to perform the corrective action.

Now we might ask, what motivates this action? And if our fictional Watson and Crick are motivated by a concern that’s characteristic of humility, then isn’t humility a motivational virtue? Or, alternatively, if they know how to perform the action, doesn’t that make humility a skill-like virtue? The answer to the first question is that an action performed from the desire to become more humble is not, for that reason, motivated by humility or motivated by the motive characteristic of the virtue of humility. In general, the desire to acquire or grow in virtue V, or to perform an action characteristic of V, is not the motive characteristic of V. So, even if humility were a motivational virtue, the fact that Watson and Crick perform a humility-like action out of a desire to become more humble would not suggest that they acted *out of* humility. However, I think they are right to judge that such actions of self-management might be a basis for an adjustment of the ranking of their cares.

This adjustment will not necessarily occur. If, for example, Pauling ruthlessly takes advantage of their bid for virtue and hogs the Nobel Prize for himself, they might be embittered in their quest and adopt the cynical motto that nice guys finish last. But if the result is that they get the prestige anyway, sharing the prize with Pauling and, at the same time, come to have a deeper and earlier understanding of DNA than they would have had going it alone, they might settle into a more virtuous ordering of their concerns. I mention just these two possibilities, with speculated psychological consequences, but there are many possibilities. The development of character in response to actions taken or not taken remains mysterious. For example, even if Pauling had betrayed their trust and “stolen” the Prize from them, Watson and Crick might have grown, in response to their action, in their resoluteness to put science before prestige.

Name the vices of pride and their "goods." The vices of pride can be very pleasant to exemplify. As long as the pretentious person is submerged in his pretentiousness, it can be quite satisfying. From inside their "world," snobbery and arrogance can be delicious and comforting. Vanity, when satisfied, feels exquisite. It's true that vanity can be wounded, and I have noted that the snobbish impulse and conceptual framework, when experienced from below, are notably uncomfortable. But for the learner or teacher of humility a handy fact of the situation is that, at least in our culture, the names of the vices of pride are all derogatory. Nobody wants to think of himself as a snob, or as pretentious or arrogant or vain or grandiose or domineering or conceited. The student who, sitting in the front of the class, turns to his fellow students and contradicts, in an authoritative, lecturing tone, what the professor has been claiming for the past ten minutes, may enjoy the visceral sense of superiority that his action lends him. But as soon as he or someone else labels his action as pretentious or presumptuous, embarrassment or shame will check his pride. Of course, he may resist the judgment by getting angry. But his anger just makes my point: To apply the term is to inflict a wound. This fact suggests that one way of turning ourselves off to the vices of pride is to reflect on our actions and attitudes using the critical vocabulary of the vices. An essay like the present one, which repeatedly names these vices and sketches examples of them, can be an aid to such meditation and to forming a habit of self-vigilance that favors intellectual humility. I have noted that each of the vices of pride is a dysfunctional interest in some purported good: favorable notice, prestige, prominence, superiority to others, power and influence over others, entitlement based on superiority, and so forth. The naming of the action or attitude as belonging to one of the vices serves to highlight the fishiness of the concern and its counterfeit "good."

4.2. Classroom teaching

It seems to me that most of the adult self-help and counseling interventions that I have sketched can be adapted in classroom teaching that aims to foster the virtue of intellectual humility in the students.

An important basis for the virtue of humility is laid down before a child ever gets to school in the form of what Heinz Kohut (1978) calls "healthy narcissism" and John Bowlby (1988) calls "secure attachment." Through being given an appropriate amount of loving support and attention, along with age-appropriate neglect and autonomy, the child develops a self-security and self-confidence that enable him or her not to have inordinate need for attention, approval, and control, and thus to be free to value genuine goods for what they are worth and become self-forgetfully "absorbed" in them. This developmental achievement forestalls a crazily compulsive yearning for the false "goods" of the vices of pride: a hyper-concern for favourable attention, for competitive superiority, for extraordinary entitlements, for power and control over others, for membership in an elite class. And thus it frees ample space in the child's heart for love of the intrinsic intellectual goods. Loosely following Aristotle (1999, 6.13), we might call this developmental result "natural humility."

However, having had a baby- and childhood that freed us from the craziest compulsiveness in this regard is not a sufficient safety against the vices of pride; natural humility will not, by itself, protect us from these vices. We are prone enough to them even with the best possible developmental history. Everybody needs moral and intellectual character education, and I offer the following as possibilities for training in intellectual humility.

Model intellectual humility. It seems to me that the teacher who seems both uninflated yet pleased with her knowledge and comfortable with admitting the limits of her knowledge but eager to increase it is likely to inspire an intellectually humble attitude in her students. Contrast with this someone who tries to hide the limits of her knowledge, avoids areas where she is weak, and

seems to use her knowledge to lord it over her students, perhaps even to the point of sarcasm when they fail to know something they should. I think that such a teacher subtly conveys to the students that knowledge acquisition serves to exalt the successful and humiliate failures; that it's a competitive "game" whose prize is glory and where conspicuous deficiency is cause for shame. The good teacher of intellectual humility will be so enthusiastic about knowing and understanding things that she seems to forget her authoritative role and to seek and enjoy these goods for their own sake and with the freshness of someone experiencing them for the first time. Thus she models self-forgetful love of the subject. Ron Ritchhart's account of the first day in John Threlkeld's algebra class (2002, ch. 4) is a beautiful example of a teacher modelling intellectual humility.

Practice gratitude and generosity. The teacher arranges for the students to share orally what they have learned from their parents and teachers and fellow students. This could be facts that they have learned, explanations of how things work, practical skills like baiting a fishhook or playing ping pong or riding a bicycle. They should be encouraged to say why they are glad to have this knowledge or understanding or skill and why they are happy to have learned from the particular person who taught them. The children could also be encouraged (or assigned) to thank (orally or in a note) someone they thought of when they were sharing, and to report back how that person reacted to being thanked. Some of these teachers will have shown pleasure in being thanked, while others may deflect the thanks with "it was nothing" or "I was just doing my job." The students should be encouraged to reflect about these different responses and try to explain them. I can imagine this exercise being done from time to time throughout the school year, so that it takes on a ritual character.

The students might also be encouraged to think of times when they taught someone else something. Did it make them happy to see that the other person had learned this? Perhaps each student could be assigned to think of something that he or she can teach someone else, to think carefully about how to go about imparting this knowledge to the other person, and then actually to teach it to another member of the class. Generosity might also be encouraged by an admiration exercise. Each student reads another student's essay or observes another student's performance of an experiment or demonstration, or some other performance, and the assignment is to pinpoint something excellent about it, and then to tell the writer or performer just what was good about it, without comparing its worth with that of anybody else's performance. The aim here is to get the students thinking about excellence itself and not about grades or relativities of excellence (competition, rivalry). It is also to get them to experience giving away knowledge and the joy of doing so.

Such gratitude and generosity exercises are meant to impress on the students that we're all indebted to others for our knowledge and that this inter-indebtedness is a beautiful thing in human life, something that binds us together and helps us appreciate one another. Teaching is a kind of gift giving and learning is a kind of gift receiving. At appropriate moments, when sufficient examples and experiences have been shared, the teacher might try to get the students to formulate such a general conceptualization of the receive-and-give in the process of learning and teaching. For more advanced students, the discussion will naturally raise the question about originality and autonomy in intellectual discovery, and the teacher will take this opportunity to put this fact in the context of our intellectual inter-indebtedness.

Think critically about our culture. Some social studies lessons could be devoted to issues surrounding status, rank, pecking orders, and the use of honors and glory in motivating behaviour in our society. The students could also be cued and encouraged to reflect on the phenomenon of rank and comparisons in the classroom and on the playground. In the context of this discussion

they could be encouraged to try to explain in what sense everybody is equal, despite the great disparity in wealth, privilege, and physical and intellectual endowments among people. In schools that are sufficiently sectarian, the children might be taught some particular doctrine to support the idea of human equality (we all have inherent rights just in virtue of our being human, we all have the dignity of rational creatures, we are all created in the image of God, etc.). They could be taught about the virtue of respect, and thus the distinction between respecting somebody for his achievements or his special abilities or social role, and respecting someone simply because he or she is human.

Since we are thinking here about specifically intellectual humility, emphasis could be placed on ways that our society discriminates on the grounds of intellectual endowment and achievement, and offers rewards of status, prestige, and money for intellectual achievements. The children should be encouraged to distinguish between such extrinsic rewards and the intrinsic rewards of intellectual acquisition. And they could be asked to come up with some guidelines about how to value people with special intellectual powers while at the same time respecting everyone equally. The children might be encouraged to come up with ways to show respect for a person who is getting little respect, and how they might try to convince someone who is disrespecting another in their class or school to show greater respect for him or her. This could be a place to discuss bullying — what motivates it, how it feels to bully, how it feels to be bullied, the varieties of bullying, and why bullying is wrong. Is there such a thing as intellectual bullying? How is it done and what can be done about it?

Name the vices of pride and their “goods.” I think that ordinary people, including fairly young children, can understand virtues and vices if these are appropriately presented to them. They understand quite a bit about how people, including themselves, think and what motivates them. People can grow in virtues through thinking about the concepts of the virtues, because we quite naturally turn the thoughts onto ourselves, using them to evaluate ourselves. Am I humble? Was I being pretentious in saying what I just said? Why do I tune certain people out when they speak to me? What is my thinking there? What makes me do that? Could it be that I’m an intellectual snob? Do I look down on others because they don’t belong to my clique or special elite group? Am I overly concerned with what people think of me? Does it wound my vanity when people correct my intellectual mistakes? Would I be embarrassed to say something that might be shown to be false or misguided or naïve?

The younger students may find the language of the vices of pride — “snobbish,” “pretentious,” “vain,” “arrogant,” “conceited,” “domineering,” “self-righteous,” “egotistical,” “grandiose,” “envious,” — or even the word “humility,” strange. If so, the teacher can undertake to teach them this family of concepts (and of course the concept of humility) by giving examples from life and stories the students know. Literature lessons could be an occasion for such teaching. Pretentious: Mr. Chadband and Mr. Turveydrop in Dickens’s *Bleak House*; vain: Rosamond Vincy in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*; snobbish: Mrs. Woodcourt in *Bleak House*; conceited, egotistical, pretentious, and domineering: Josiah Bounderby in Dickens’s *Hard Times*. To teach this family of concepts is also to teach repugnance for the traits they identify and a liking for their absence in a person. The language of these vices is judgmental in the best sense of the word. It gives the students standards of self-assessment. It lends them a power of moral discrimination. When the teacher has clarified the vices of pride and asked the students to come up with examples from their lives and from stories, then she or he will want to ask them whether they themselves ever act or think in these ways, and, if so, how they might make their thinking, their feelings, and their actions more humble.

Our focus here is the specifically intellectual version of the vices of pride and their counterpart kinds of humility. To teach these concepts is necessarily, I think, to teach the broader concepts of which intellectual humility and pride are specifications. One way to make the application might be this: After laying out the moral concepts of the vices of pride and the virtue of humility, recur to the discussions of intellectual generosity and gratitude. Take some of the examples from that discussion and ask how they would differ if the persons who were grateful and generous had been affected by the vices of pride. When it comes to sharing your knowledge with someone, how would the generosity of it be affected if you were conceited or pretentious or domineering? What about arrogance and snobbishness? And when it comes to being grateful for the intellectual gifts that people have given you, how would your gratitude be affected if you were arrogant or vain about the knowledge you had received? Do you think Rosamond Vincy could be grateful for what her teachers had taught her? Can Josiah Bounderby be grateful for all that his mother taught him?

Act "humbly" against the grain. In a school that works hard to teach intellectual humility in something like the ways I've proposed, the students will be more sensitive than the population at large to the challenge of being a mature person in the aspect of humility and their liability to the vices of pride. We would hope that a dimension of this sensitivity would be a desire to grow in humility, both moral and intellectual. So they might be open to performing some against-the-grain actions with a view to growing in intellectual humility.

In response to a discussion of intellectual arrogance, one of the stronger students realizes that she has been feeling entitled to special attention from the teacher because of her superior performance in algebra. Through the discussions of the vices of pride, she has become aware that this sense of entitlement is false: She has no claim to more attention from the teacher than anyone else in class and, actually, has less need of that attention. She reflects that if she were grateful for her superior native gifts, she would think more of others' needs for attention than of her own pleasure in receiving it. However, she continues to cherish the attention and to be tempted to push for it and exploit it when it comes. So she decides to take action against her urges and, in favor of humility, asks to be reseated in class, not near the front, where she has been sitting, but fairly far back and smack behind a large football player. She reasons that in this position she's less likely to catch the teacher's attention. From her hiding place she contemplates with generous pleasure the progress of a couple of the weaker students that seems to have sped up in the slipstream of her departure to the back of the room.

A student who excels in history finds that he dominates the history discussions, intimidating the students who have less knowledge at the tip of their tongues. As a result of the discussions of the vices of pride, he can diagnose his behavior, and he realizes that he enjoys politely putting others "in their place" by correcting the inaccuracies in their statements and their naïve explanations of events. He is careful never to be rude in the way he does this. The discussions have also refined his understanding of intellectual bullying, expanded its scope and enhanced his distaste for such vulgarity. So he's very careful to contradict other students only indirectly and to drop a compliment here and there to preserve his image as a good guy. But he's come to realize that these gestures make for little more than a civilizing polish on his bully's heart and wants to acquire a truer humility. He decides to get serious about *actually helping* others to become better historians, rather than building himself up at their "expense." So he identifies a student who is backward historically but seems to have good natural talent. He befriends the student, encourages him in his intellectual life, and offers help only when it really will do him good. He finds, that in the

context of friendship, he is much less tempted to enjoy his superiority and can share with the other a simple well-wishing and love of knowledge.³

³ I thank Jason Baehr, Scott Cleveland, and Ian James Kidd for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, and the John Templeton Foundation, for support in the writing of it.