**The Values and Varieties of Humility**

The contemporary philosophical landscape is populated by a diverse range of accounts of virtuous character traits such as humility. One approach to navigating this terrain has stressed taking each account of a particular character trait one by one and testing it with counterexamples based on intuitive judgments with the aim of determining which account best approximates our pre-theoretical concept of the trait.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the case of humility, for example, such proposed counterexamples will be successful just in case they show that the account of humility in question either implies that some person is humble whom we would intuitively judge not to be humble or it implies that some person is not humble whom we would intuitively judge to be humble. For several reasons to be articulated in Section 1 below, I am inclined to think there is a better approach to evaluating accounts of character traits. In the case of humility, for example, the better approach is less concerned with evaluating whether some particular account of humility best matches our pre-theoretical concept of humility than it is with evaluating the values of the various traits which have been identified with humility. Pursuing such a value-based evaluation of traits identified with a virtuous character trait such as humility is more conducive toward accomplishing an important aim of virtue ethics than is pursuing the counterexample-based evaluation thereof. The aim of virtue ethics I have in mind is that of identifying and increasing our understanding of valuable traits the possession of which can enhance human life.[[2]](#footnote-2)

After defending the foregoing methodological point and explaining the general nature of the value-based approach to evaluating accounts of virtuous character traits in more detail in Section 1, I go on to pursue a value-based evaluation of contemporary accounts of humility in Section 2. One interesting fact that will emerge from this evaluation is that contemporary accounts of humility either identify humility with a trait having only ameliorative value or they identify it with a disposition toward a certain kind of accuracy in one’s beliefs, affections, and/or behaviors. There is, I argue, both conceptual space and motivation for developing an account of humility which does not involve a disposition toward such accuracy but which nonetheless has a non-ameliorative value. For, in addition to the conceptual vacancy just mentioned, it is also the case that a good many of our typical humility ascriptions are explained well by a trait which has a non-ameliorative value but does not involve a disposition toward accuracy. Accordingly, in Section 3, I offer a novel account of humility with precisely these features—an account of a trait which has a non-ameliorative value but which does not involve a disposition toward the kind of accuracy highlighted above. Following the methodological point of Section 1, I do not claim to have hereby identified a trait which matches better than every other trait our intuitive concept of humility. But, I do claim to have identified a trait with a unique value, one the possession of which can enhance human life, and one which makes good sense of at least some of our humility attributions.

**1 Value-Based and Counterexample-Based Assessments of Contemporary Accounts of Virtues**

Given the variety of competing accounts of virtuous character traits alluded to above, it would be helpful to have a procedure for evaluating these accounts and comparing them with one another. My aim in this section is two-fold. First, in 1.1, I explain in further detail the approach to evaluating accounts of character traits that I favor. In that section, I articulate five important distinctions concerning ways a virtuous trait may be valuable which will aid in our evaluation in Section 2 of the value of traits which have been identified with humility. Second, in 1.2, I argue that the value-based approach to evaluating accounts of character traits has significant advantages over the counterexample-based approach to evaluating accounts of character traits.

* 1. The Values of Virtuous Character Traits

Conducting a value-based evaluation of various accounts of a virtuous character trait provides one way to compare these accounts to one another. The aim of a value-based evaluation is to clarify in what way, if any, the traits identified by these accounts are valuable. Undertaking such an evaluation involves distinguishing different kinds of value and determining which kinds are possessed by the various traits. Once these values are discovered, comparisons of the values of the various traits can be made. The goal of this evaluation is not to discern which of the competing accounts of a trait best matches our pre-theoretical concept of that trait. The goal is instead to determine whether the various traits are valuable and to determine, if they are valuable, in what way they are. The end result will provide us with some guidance concerning what traits we should aim to possess and under what circumstances we should pursue them if we wish to enhance our lives.

I should be clear before continuing that it is not my claim, nor is it a claim of the approach to evaluating accounts of virtuous character traits I am advocating, that each account of a given character trait is equally as good an account of that trait as the next. Nor is it my proposal that *every* proposed accountof a trait, no matter how unmotivated, should be treated in a value-based assessment of competing accounts of a given character trait. Instead, I propose the following procedure. We begin by identifying a variety of competing accounts of a virtuous character trait each of which has significant motivation because it makes good sense of at least some of our attributions of the virtue in question. We then perform a value-based assessment of each of *these* accounts as described above. The results may identify one valuable trait or several. The traits identified may have the same value or different values. But, importantly, the one conducting the evaluation needn’t make any commitment concerning whether any of the traits identified isthe one and only trait to be identified with the virtuous trait under investigation. She can remain neutral about this, having fulfilled her duty of identifying and improving our understanding of a range of traits the possession of which can enhance human life where each of these traits arguably explains at least some of our attributions of the virtuous trait in question.

As I have said, the value-based evaluation will be best performed if we distinguish between several ways in which virtuous traits may be valuable. In this section I explore five distinctions which will prove especially helpful in the evaluation of accounts of humility performed in Section 2.

The first distinction is between that which is instrumentally valuable and that which is non-instrumentally valuable. The instrumentally valuable is that which is valuable “for the sake of something else.” On the other hand, the non-instrumentally valuable is valuable “for its own sake” and not for the sake of something else. Many philosophers have thought that there must be some things which are non-instrumentally valuable if there is to be anything instrumentally valuable. And a variety of proposals have been made concerning what there might be that is non-instrumentally valuable, such as happiness,[[3]](#footnote-3) a good will,[[4]](#footnote-4) or pleasure.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental value can be used to distinguish different explanations of the value of virtuous character traits. On some approaches, virtues are instrumentally valuable, because they make their possessors more reliable in bringing about something else which is non-instrumentally valuable. Julia Driver (2001), for example, proposes a consequentialist theory of virtues according to which virtues are identified precisely by their reliability in bringing about other non-instrumentally valuable states of affairs.[[6]](#footnote-6) On the other hand philosophers such as Zagzebski (1996) and Baehr (2011) have thought that virtues are non-instrumentally valuable. There is a certain value that they have that is independent of whether they provide reliable means for bringing about other non-instrumental values. Accordingly, as we consider accounts of humility below, we should attend to whether the trait these accounts specify is best seen as having an instrumental value or a non-instrumental value.

Among the non-instrumentally valuable things there is also sometimes a second distinction drawn—a distinction I will characterize as that between derivative and non-derivative non-instrumental value. The distinction may seem a strange one at first glance, as one might think that anything the value of which is non-instrumental couldn’t have a *derivative* value. But, for those who would favor such a distinction (e.g., Beahr 2011, Korsgaard 1983, Hurka 2001, and Kagan 1998), the idea is as follows. While certain things might have a value that is not due to their being instrumental to attaining other values, this needn’t imply that their value is fixed entirely by their intrinstic, non-relational properties. For, they nonetheless may be such that their value derives from their relationship to other things of value, but not because they are reliable means to obtaining these other things. For example, a certain pen may have a non-instrumental value because it was used by Lincoln to sign a famous proclamation. Here the value of the pen far outstrips any instrumental value it has (it might not even be usable as a pen); but, the additional value it has is not explicable in terms of its intrinsic properties alone. On the other hand, that which is both non-instrumentally and non-derivatively valuable does not have its value on account of anything other than itself. It is perhaps most appropriately called “instrinsically valuable.”[[7]](#footnote-7) For our purposes here, it is important to note that there have been both philosophers (e.g., Zagzebski 1996) who have attempted to explain the value of virtues as a non-derivative non-instrumental value as well as philosophers (e.g., Baehr 2011, Hurka 2001) who have attempted to explain it as a derivative non-instrumental value. The former claim that virtues have a value that is not in any way explained by their relation to other valuable entities, whereas the latter typically claim that the virtues have their value by virtue of their (non-instrumental) relationship to their valuable intentional objects, such as goodness or knowledge. On the latter proposal, if virtues are identified with traits of character, they will likely be explicated as dispositions to think, feel, and behave positively concerning the good and to think, feel, and behave negatively toward the bad.

A third helpful distinction is between monistic theories and pluralistic theories of non-instrumental value. According to monistic theories, there is only one kind of thing that is non-instrumentally valuable, whereas according to pluralistic theories there are multiple kinds of thing that are non-instrumentally valuable. A simple example of a monistic theory is the classical utilitarian theory according to which the only kind of thing that is non-instrumentally valuable is pleasure.[[8]](#footnote-8) An example of a pluralistic theory would be one which included as non-instrumentally valuable both pleasure and knowledge.[[9]](#footnote-9) Those who would advocate a monistic theory of non-instrumental value have two choices when it comes to explaining the value of virtues. Either virtues themselves are the only non-instrumentally valuable entities (and so they also are non-derivatively valuable), or every virtue is instrumentally valuable as a means to the only kind of thing that is non-instrumentally valuable. On the other hand, those who advocate a pluralistic theory of non-instrumental value have a wider range of options. Not only could virtues have a non-derivative non-instrumental value, but they could have a non-instrumental value that derives from a variety of other non-instrumental values. Some virtues, for example, may derive their non-instrumental value from distinctively moral goods and some from distinctively epistemic goods (cf. Baehr 2011). Likewise, virtues could have an instrumental value with respect to a variety of different non-instrumental values, such as epistemic and non-epistemic achievements (cf. Greco 2010 and Sosa 2007). This distinction between monistic and pluralistic theories of non-instrumental value will be helpful in assessing accounts of humility below because certain accounts of humility identify a trait that is instrumentally or derivatively non-instrumentally valuable with respect to some non-instrumental values, but not others.

Move to a fourth distinction—that between special and non-special value. That which has a special value has a value that is not replaceable by anything else. For example, if, following Byerly (forthcoming), there are traits such as self-reliance which are *required* for attaining certain non-instrumental goods, these traits will have a special value—a value which cannot be had in their absence. By contrast, that which has a non-special value is replaceable. The same value can be attained without it as with it. When Robert Adams (2006) identifies virtues with those traits which *can* contribute to complete virtue, he leaves open the possibility that some of these traits may have a non-special value. For, while they can contribute to complete virtue, perhaps they aren’t necessary for it. Below, we will see that numerous accounts of humility are such that whatever value the trait identified with humility has is a value that is obtainable without this trait; thus, the trait identified as humility does not have a special value, on these views.

Finally, consider the distinction between ameliorative and non-ameliorative value. Something has an ameliorative value when its value essentially involves overcoming disvalue. For example, a strongly right-leaning libertarian might hold that government has an ameliorative value. Given human corruption, it is good to have a government because having a government helps curb our evil tendencies; but, if we didn’t have such tendencies, government would no longer be valuable. That which has a non-ameliorative value, on the other hand, is such that its value does not essentially consist in overcoming disvalue. Those who think, for example, that part of the function of government is to aid citizens in engaging in cooperative endeavors may think that government has a value that is not entirely ameliorative. More to our task here, there have been philosophers who have argued that virtues have only an ameliorative value as well as philosophers who have argued that virtues have a non-ameliorative value. For example, Jeanine Grenberg (2005) defends a version of Kantianism according to which the value of every virtue is ameliorative in that every virtue “is in some way a counteraction against human corruption (73).” On the other hand, many authors have thought that virtues are valuable because of their relation to that which is good, independently of whether they somehow involve overcoming that which is bad. The virtues are not just for those in need of moral self-improvement, but for the morally excellent as well. Again, we shall consider whether the accounts of humility to be discussed below provide us with traits which have ameliorative or non-ameliorative value. The five foregoing distinctions above will prove useful for developing what I called above a value-based assessment of the accounts of any virtuous character trait. In Section 2 below, I apply them to accounts of humility.

* 1. Value-Based Evaluation vs Counterexample-Based Evaluation

In Section 2, I will employ the five distinctions of Section 1.1 in order to offer a value-based assessment of the various traits which have been identified by contemporary authors as the virtue of humility. Before doing so, however, I will here explain why the value-based approach to evaluating accounts of these traits has significant advantages over the counterexample-based approach—an approach to evaluating accounts of these traits aimed at testing through the use of intuitive counterexamples whether they best fit with our pre-theoretic concept of humility.[[10]](#footnote-10) What I say here in defense of this approach to evaluating accounts of humility applies *mutatis mutandis* to the evaluation of accounts of other virtues as well. I will identify two reasons here for favoring the value-based approach to the counterexample-based approach.

The first reason I prefer the value-based evaluation of traits identified with humility is that by pursuing it we will be much less likely to overlook the value that these traits have than if we instead evaluate the accounts of these traits using the counterexample-based assessment. The temptation when using the counterexample-based assessment of these traits is to simply ignore the values of those traits the account of which does not jive best with our intuitive conception of humility. To be sure, it has been common for practitioners of the counterexample-based method to engage in an evaluation of the value of a trait once they have determined that the trait *does* best match our pre-theoretic conception of a particular virtue. But, what is not common is to engage in such an evaluation after determining that an account of a trait faces an intuitive counterexample. Yet, this practice is unfortunate. For, even if a proposed trait is not the best match for our pre-theoretic concept of a particular virtue, it may still have a value such that its possession by a person will enhance her life. By focusing on the value of the various traits which have been identified with humility, we will make it far less likely that we will overlook the value of these traits and we thereby do a better job fulfilling at least one important task of virtue ethics—the task of identifying and improving our understanding of traits that can enhance our lives (cf. Annas 2011).

A second reason for favoring the value-based evaluation of traits identified with humility derives from the possibility of value pluralism.[[11]](#footnote-11) Virtue ethicists such as Jason Baehr (2011) and Linda Zagzebski (2010) take seriously the idea that more than one account of virtue has a legitimate role to play in increasing our understanding of the ethical domain. As Baehr (2011: 98) puts it, the idea would be that there may be “more than one way” for a trait to be a virtue. For example, Baehr allows that his own account of intellectual virtues is only concerned with virtues of an internalist sort, a sort that has derivative non-instrumental value. But, he is happy to acknowledge that there may be alternative, externalist accounts of traits where the traits at issue have an equal claim to being called “virtues” and where these traits have primarily instrumental value, as in Driver’s account. Someone sympathetic with Baehr’s position here might claim that some of the traits identified with humility below are virtues of one sort, while others are virtues of another sort. Perhaps she would even claim that each trait, or several of the traits, is equally well called “humility.” An approach like that I am taking here which remains noncommittal as to whether there must be one single account of humility which best matches our pre-theoretical concept of this virtue can accommodate a view like Baehr’s and Zagzebski’s much better than can the more typical, counterexample-based approach. For, on the typical way of pursuing the counterexample-based approach, if one finds a plausible counterexample to an account of a virtue, one thereby concludes that the account is not a successful account of that virtue. But, given value pluralism, this may not be correct. That there is a plausible counterexample to an account of a virtue may show only that the account is not a successful account of one particular version of that virtue. But, there may be other versions of that virtue, and the account in question may capture quite well one of those versions.[[12]](#footnote-12) Accordingly, given the possibility of value pluralism, we should keep it open as a live possibility in our present endeavor that the accounts of humility surveyed below are accounts of different versions of this virtue. These versions may fit a diverse range of pre-theoretical concepts of humility, each of which is of a trait whose possession can enhance the life of its possessor. There are, then, two reasons for favoring the value-based approach to the counterexample-based approach.

1. **A Value-Based Evaluation of Contemporary Accounts of Humility**

It is now time to offer a value-based assessment of a variety of traits identified with humility by contemporary authors. As I have stressed above, it is not my purpose here to adjudicate which of the proposed accounts best fits a pre-theoretical concept of humility some of us might have. Rather, my interest is to consider what kinds of value, if any, are possessed by the traits identified with humility by these authors. I emphasize here again that I consider these proposals because the traits identified by them plausibly account for at least some of our humility ascriptions.[[13]](#footnote-13) My question, then, is: How might possessing *these* traits, each of which plausibly accounts for some of our humility ascriptions, enhance a person’s life?

Following Garcia (2006), my evaluation below groups proposals into two categories. Section 2.1 investigates accounts of humility which are broadly self-directed in that the humble agent is understood as disposed to think, feel, and/or behave in certain ways concerning certain of her own features. Section 2.2 then investigates broadly others-directed accounts of humility, where the humble person is typically conceived as disposed to think, feel, and/or behave in certain ways toward others. As I present various accounts of humility, I will evaluate the values of the traits identified by these accounts using the distinctions developed in Section 1.1. My aim throughout remains to discern in what ways, if any, the proposed traits are valuable so as to provide some guidance for determining which of them ought to be sought and under what circumstances.

* 1. Self-Directed Accounts of Humility

This section discusses the value of various traits which have been identified with humility, where these traits involve a disposition to think, feel, and/or behave in certain ways concerning features of oneself. I further subdivide the accounts into accounts which focus on the humble person’s orientation toward *valuable* features of herself and accounts which focus primarily on the humble person’s orientation toward *disvaluable* features of herself.

Among the accounts of humility which focus on the humble person’s orientation toward valuable features of herself, some are purely epistemic. That is, the accounts propose that humility consists in a disposition to take certain *doxastic* attitudes toward one’s valuable features. One approach, exhibited in (Driver 2001), has been to identify humility with a stable disposition to *underestimate* one’s valuable features; whereas another, exhibited in (Flanagan 1990), is to identify humility with a disposition *not to overestimate* one’s valuable features.

Against the *underestimation* account it is often urged that underestimating one’s valuable features is a vice rather than a virtue. It is, in particular, epistemically disvaluable to be disposed to believe wrongly about oneself.[[14]](#footnote-14) What I think this objection shows is that being disposed to underestimate one’s valuable features is not non-instrumentally valuable. That is, if there is no other value to be gained by being disposed to underestimate one’s valuable features, then being so disposed is not worthwhile at all. It is not good for its own sake to be disposed to underestimate one’s valuable features. But, this observation is compatible with there being some instrumental value to underestimating one’s valuable features. Indeed, Driver defends the value of underestimating one’s valuable features precisely in this way. She proposes that being disposed to underestimate one’s valuable features will prevent problems from arising in social situations by, for example, preventing others from becoming jealous.[[15]](#footnote-15) One might also think that the disposition to underestimate one’s valuable features is instrumentally valuable in that it will drive one to work more consistently in concert with others, and that cooperating with others to attain joint achievements is valuable.

If the disposition to underestimate one’s valuable features does have such instrumental value, it does not have it specially. That is, while it may be that consistently underestimating one’s valuable features will help prevent jealousy or that doing so will help promote joint, cooperative achievements, consistently underestimating one’s valuable features isn’t *necessary* for attaining these values. Even if you correctly estimate the value of your valuable qualities, you needn’t draw attention to them publicly; and, even if you do draw attention to them publicly, others who are well-formed morally needn’t become jealous of you on account of them. Further, it is quite possible, as we will see below, to be motivated to cooperate with others to attain joint achievements even if one accurately estimates the value of one’s own qualities. Thus, we can conclude that the value of the disposition to underestimate one’s valuable features is chiefly a non-special instrumental value. We can also conclude that the value of this disposition is ameliorative, since it is only if other valuable qualities are lacking in oneself (e.g., qualities which motivate cooperation with others) or in one’s company (e.g., qualities which work against jealousy) that having this disposition will be a suitable means to attaining the values highlighted here.

What about the disposition not to overestimate one’s valuable features? One important observation about this account of humility is that it can be satisfied by the disposition to underestimate one’s valuable features. Thus, if it is to differ in value from the former disposition, it will be because it can also be satisfied by a disposition to *accurately* estimate one’s valuable features. So, we should ask whether there is a difference in value between the disposition to underestimate one’s valuable features on the one hand and a disposition to accurately estimate these features on the other.

There is indeed a difference. For, while it is implausible to claim that the disposition to underestimate one’s valuable features is non-instrumentally valuable, it is far more plausible to claim that the disposition to accurately estimate these features is non-instrumentally valuable. It is good, for its own sake, to be disposed to have accurate beliefs about one’s good features. Certainly being disposed in this way is better, even independently of its being instrumental to other values, than would be the disposition to have inaccurate beliefs about one’s valuable features. This non-instrumental value may nonetheless be a derivative value, as the disposition to have accurate beliefs about one’s valuable features may derive its value from the value of having accurate beliefs about one’s valuable features.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The disposition to have accurate beliefs about one’s valuable features is also instrumentally valuable with respect to certain other values. For example, it is instrumentally valuable as a means to obtaining true beliefs about one’s valuable features. Likewise, it is a means to not overstating one’s valuable features publicly, and so a means to avoiding jealousy in the sort of way previously discussed. Certainly, however, this latter value—the value of not overstating one’s features publicly—could be achieved without the disposition to have accurate beliefs about one’s valuable features and so this disposition will be only non-specially instrumentally valuable with respect to this good. One could simply be disposed to refrain from commenting on such matters, for example. It is also likely that this disposition is not specially instrumentally valuable with respect to attaining accurate beliefs about one’s valuable features, either, since this could also be attained through a disposition to hold beliefs about one’s valuable features which fit one’s evidence—assuming, that is, that the world cooperates in that following one’s evidence is a reliable guide to the truth in one’s circumstances.

Finally, it is worth noting that there is no good reason to think that the disposition to accurately estimate one’s valuable features has only an entirely ameliorative value. It is not the case that having this disposition only has each of those values we have said that it has if its possessor has faults or if those with whom its possessor cooperates have faults. Even for the faultless person surrounded by other faultless persons, it is non-instrumentally good to be disposed to accurately estimate her valuable features, and it is instrumentally (though non-specially) good to have a trait which is a means to attaining true beliefs about oneself. Thus, the trait of being disposed to accurately estimate one’s valuable features is derivatively non-instrumentally valuable as well as non-specially non-amelioratively instrumentally valuable.

A second kind of account which defines humility in terms of a person’s orientation to her own valuable features is more overtly behavioristic rather than doxastic. For example, Driver (2001) considers an account of humility according to which the humble person is disposed to under*state* her valuable features. Similarly, Spiegel (2003) offers an account according to which the humble person “*plays the role of* the unworthy” or lowly person, where this might include speaking-as-if one is unworthy or deferring honors to others as-if one is unworthy.[[17]](#footnote-17)

One concern with these approaches parallels the concern with the underestimation account of humility above. For, it seems that one can fulfill these accounts of humility, and perhaps can *only* fulfill these accounts of humility, by either being deceptive or by being ignorant.[[18]](#footnote-18) Either one correctly estimates the value of one’s valuable features but nonetheless talks and behaves as if these features didn’t have this value, or one behaves as if one’s features didn’t have the value they do and one does not accurately estimate the value they have. But each of these options is in an important way disvaluable, since being deceptive or ignorant is disvaluable. Thus, if there isn’t something else valuable to be obtained through being deceptive in this way or through being ignorant in this way, then being these ways is not worthwhile.

Again, I think this criticism shows only that these traits are not non-instrumentally valuable. They may still be instrumentally valuable as means to obtaining something else valuable. For example, the disposition to understate one’s valuable features may be instrumentally valuable, as suggested above, in that it serves to prevent jealousy.[[19]](#footnote-19) And, the disposition to act-as-if one is unworthy may be instrumentally valuable for the same or for ensuring that honors are not distributed inequitably. But, again, these dispositions are only *non-specially* instrumentally valuable. For, avoiding jealousy can be secured in other ways—say, if those nearby have learned to restrain themselves even when one in their company makes accurate statements about her valuable features. And, the same goes for ensuring that honors are not distributed inequitably; for, this can be achieved if persons have a disposition to ensure that honors are distributed *equitably*. It is only if persons do not have such traits that the dispositions here identified with humility will be valuable. So, we should conclude that these dispositions have a non-special, *ameliorative* instrumental value.

Garcia (2006) offers a third self-directed account of humility according to which humility involves one’s orientation towards one’s valuable features, but this orientation is more than epistemic and less than overtly behavioral. For Garcia, the humble person is humble about her being F, where F is one of her valuable features, “if, only if, and to the extent that, she has a stable, deep-seated, and restrained disposition to play down in her own thinking, self-concept, and feelings—and therein to decenter, to (place in the) background, (not to stress, focus on, make much of, relish, or delight in)—the significance of her being F (418).” He continues: “She has the virtue of humility, at least, when this disposition is not excessive and is grounded not in any contemptuous dismissal of others and their talents, skills, and so on, but either in her commitment to personal moral self-improvement or in her concern that other persons and factors get due recognition (from herself and others) for their part in her having F, and also in her reasonable appreciation of the magnitude and significance of her own failures, imperfections, flaws, weaknesses, dependency, and limitations, as well as her duties and responsibilities (ibid).” Simplifying a bit, Garcia’s proposal is that a person is humble to the extent that she is disposed to be “unimpressed with” her valuable features, where this disposition is grounded either in her commitment to moral self-improvement or in her concern that other persons get due credit for their role in her having these features and in her appreciation of her own failures.[[20]](#footnote-20)

One common criticism of accounts like Garcia’s comes from those who are more sympathetic with an others-directed account of humility. For example, Sara Rushing (2013) objects to accounts of humility like Garcia’s which identify humility with modesty (something Garcia clearly intends to do) because the trait identified by these accounts is of little to no political value. In particular, Rushing is skeptical that the traits identified by these accounts are an effective means to promoting effective participation in democratic government. She writes, “This humility as affective modesty among high achievers—again, what I call the ‘Academy Awards’ conception of humility . . . comes at a price because affected modesty among high achievers is not a particularly *political* virtue. It neither facilitates democratic conflict, nor encourages perseverance over apathy and disillusionment (215).”

To the extent that such criticisms are successful, I think they only show, and are perhaps only intended to show, that the traits identified by those sympathetic with Garcia’s account lack certain instrumental values. These traits are not instrumentally valuable as a means to certain non-instrumental values, such as perseverance in political engagement. But, this does not imply that the trait Garcia has identified has no value, that it is not a virtue, or even that it is inappropriate to call it “humility.” It may be that the trait is non-instrumentally valuable. Or, it may be that it has an instrumental value as a means to *something else* of non-instrumental value which has nothing to do with political engagement—at least given the assumption of pluralism about non-instrumental value discussed in Section 1.1.

Is the trait identified by Garcia non-instrumentally valuable? Garcia at least thinks that his account of humility does not face the same kind of challenge to its non-instrumental value faced by the *underestimation* and *understatement* accounts of humility above.[[21]](#footnote-21) That is, he thinks that her account does not involve any kind of epistemic disvalue or vice. But, it is hard to see why this is the case. Perhaps he thinks this because his account does not require that the humble person has an inaccurate estimation—i.e., inaccurate *beliefs* about—the values of her valuable features. Yet, his account does require that the humble person “play[s] down” the significance of these features—that she does not “stress” or “focus on” or “delight in” these features. In short, she must be “unimpressed with herself.” One worries here that his account does still face a parallel problem as that facing the underestimation and understatement accounts. For, it would seem that the humble person’s traits have a certain significance, and that Garcia’s account is requiring that the humble person be oriented inaccurately toward the significance of these traits. Whether the downplaying, not stressing, and not being impressed with is epistemic or affective, there seems to be an inaccuracy of sorts required of the humble person’s orientation toward the significance of her features. Her beliefs or attitudes are inaccurately attuned to their objects. Thus, absent some value to be attained through this inaccuracy, the inaccuracy is not worthwhile and so the trait identified is not non-instrumentally valuable.

Nonetheless, there are at least two ways in which the trait Garcia identifies may be instrumentally valuable as a means to other non-instrumental goods. Being unimpressed with one’s features is a good way to get oneself to speak little about them, thus guarding against jealousy as we have discussed previously. And, more importantly, where one’s finding one’s features to be unimpressive is grounded in one’s commitment to moral improvement, one’s possessing this trait may be a means toward such improvement.

This instrumental value, however, is again both non-special and ameliorative. It is non-special because avoiding jealousy and pursuing self-improvement can be accomplished without the trait identified by Garcia. We saw alternative ways of avoiding jealousy above. And, a trait such as the disposition to aspire to moral perfection will motivate self-improvement just as well as the trait Garcia identifies. Moreover, it is clear that the value of the trait identified by Garcia is ameliorative. Indeed, it is a trait that can only be possessed by those who either are in need of “moral self-improvement” or those who have a “reasonable appreciation of the magnitude and significance of [their] own failures, imperfections, flaws, weaknesses, dependency, and limitations.”

In contrast to the foregoing self-directed accounts of humility which define the trait largely in terms of the subject’s orientation toward her *valuable* qualities, the final two conceptions define humility in terms of the subject’s orientation toward features of hers which are disvaluable or at least non-valuable. On one approach, defended by Grenberg (2005), humility is “that meta-attitude which constitutes the moral agent’s proper perspective on herself as a dependent and corrupt but capable and dignified rational agent (133).” Like other virtues, this is supposed to be a “settled pattern of affective expression and rational endorsement (82).” A similar approach is advocated by Snow (1995), who claims that “humility can be defined as the disposition to allow the awareness of and concern about your limitations to have realistic influence on your attitudes and behavior (210).” On both accounts, humility is constituted not by a disposition to have a certain orientation toward one’s valuable features, but by a disposition to have a certain orientation towards features of oneself that are not valuable.

Insofar as the affective expressions and rational endorsements discussed on Grenberg’s view are accurate—i.e., the agent in fact has a dependent and corrupt yet capable and dignified status—her view will not face a difficulty paralleling that faced by Garcia’s view or the understatement or underestimation views. It may well be valuable in itself for the agent who in fact is dependent and corrupt but capable and dignified to respond affectively and rationally in the ways Garcia has in mind. For, the agent’s orientation toward herself will match herself—it will be accurate given what she really is like. Similarly, Snow is probably on to something when she proposes that the trait she identifies is “intrinsically valuable (211).” It is at least good for its own sake to be aware of one’s limitations and to be appropriately concerned with them, given that one in fact has them. Thus, Grenberg’s and Snow’s views share with the accurate estimation view a non-instrumental value. Here the value arguably derives not just from the non-instrumental value of true belief but from the non-instrumental value of accurate affections.[[22]](#footnote-22)

It is also promising that the traits identified by Grenberg’s and Snow’s accounts are instrumentally valuable as means to securing other non-instrumental goods. Grenberg argues that humility on her account is necessary for attaining the good of self-knowledge and that it is necessary for successfully showing beneficence toward others. Possessing the trait Snow identifies is also arguably an effective means towards achieving certain goods which involve cooperating with others. Those who are aware of their limitations and who behave in accordance with this awareness are more likely to engage in joint projects where cooperation with others overcomes the limitations of individuals.

As has been pointed out by Frierson (2005), Grenberg’s argument that humility is necessary for self-knowledge and beneficence toward others depends upon her view that human beings are essentially limited and corrupt. For, simply put, if human beings are not essentially corrupt and limited, then it is not necessary that they appreciate their limitedness and corruption for them to know themselves. And the same will go for their being beneficent to one another. Thus, humility as Grenberg defines it has the instrumental value that Grenberg alleges for it *specially* only given this thesis about human nature. This observation, of course, makes it clear that the value of humility, for Grenberg, is entirely ameliorative. Hers is again a view where humility can only be possessed by the corrupt. The morally excellent cannot be humble; humility has no value for them.

Snow’s view, by contrast, appears to have a value that is not entirely ameliorative. For, it is arguably the case that those who are morally excellent, even those who have no room for moral improvement, can have limitations. They may be such that they are unable to achieve certain ends by themselves. For such persons, it will be valuable that they be aware of these limitations and behave appropriately in light of this awareness—for example, by cooperating with others. Humility as Snow conceives of it is both available to and valuable for those who do not have faults.

But it isn’t clear that the trait Snow identifies has a *special* value. For, there are other traits which may promote cooperation just as well as a disposition to recognize one’s limitations and act accordingly. Even someone who is perfectly able to achieve some end on his own, who is not limited with respect to achieving this end as others are, may cooperate with others to achieve it, if he simply prefers to engage in such joint projects rather than going it alone. Thus, while Grenberg and Snow both identify traits with non-instrumental value, Grenberg’s humility has an ameliorative and (in some cases) special instrumental value whereas Snow’s has a non-ameliorative non-special instrumental value.

By way of summary, what we have found in this subsection is that self-directed accounts of humility fall into two broad categories. There are accounts which identify traits having non-instrumental and non-ameliorative instrumental value on the one hand and accounts identifying traits with only ameliorative instrumental value on the other. Interestingly, each of the accounts in the former category identifies a trait involving a disposition toward a certain kind of accuracy—accuracy of belief, affection, and/or behavior concerning one’s own features. Thus, every account of a trait with a non-ameliorative value thus far has been an account of a trait involving a disposition toward accuracy. Yet, it is not implausible to think that at least some of our humility ascriptions are made of traits which are non-amelioratively valuable, but which do not consist in a disposition to respond accurately to one’s own features. After evaluating others-directed accounts of humility in the following subsection, I offer an account of humility which does not involve a disposition toward accuracy but which nonetheless does have a non-ameliorative value in Section 3.

* 1. Others-Directed Accounts of Humility

I now turn to others-directed accounts of humility. These accounts define humility as a disposition to take some orientation toward others. The three accounts I will discuss fall into two broad categories—those which focus more on the humble person’s attitudes toward others and those that focus more on the humble person’s overt behaviors toward others.

First, Roberts and Wood (2003) offer an others-directed account of humility involving the attitudes one takes toward others.[[23]](#footnote-23) Specifically, they are interested in the way the humble person exhibits a lack of concern for the opinions of others about her own features. They write, “Humility, as vanity’s opposite, is a striking or unusual unconcern to be well regarded by others, and thus a kind of emotional insensitivity to the issue of status (2003: 261).” They also claim that humility is opposite to arrogance, writing that “the person with the humility of unarrogance . . . is relatively inattentive to the ego-exalting potency of his entitlements (ibid).” Humility here is a disposition toward certain kinds of inattentiveness toward oneself and unconcern towards others. I’ll focus here on the latter as it is the aspect of the account that is others-directed.

The first thing to notice is that there is an illuminating parallel between this others-directed account of humility and some of the self-directed accounts discussed above. For, this account appears to require the humble person to exhibit epistemic or affective disvalue in a way very similar to the underestimation and understatement accounts, Garcia’s unimpressiveness account, and Spiegel’s act-as-if account. For, it may be that it is quite appropriate epistemically and affectively for others to regard one well. But, in that case, it will be disvaluable to *not be concerned* that these others regard one well. To not be concerned about this is to not care about others’ taking appropriate doxastic and affective attitudes. Being disposed to exhibit such unconcern is not valuable for its own sake; it is not non-instrumentally valuable. If it is valuable, it is valuable only instrumentally.

How could a disposition to be unconcerned about others’ opinions about oneself be instrumentally valuable? Perhaps because too many of us would otherwise be all too obsessed with what others think of us; and, being unconcerned in this way helps us avoid such disvaluable obsession. Or, perhaps being unconcerned in this way will help us take morally valuable risks that we might otherwise not have taken for fear of what others would (rightly or wrongly) think of us. But, it should be clear that whatever instrumental value there is here is a non-special and ameliorative instrumental value. It is non-special because the same values can be achieved through the possession of other traits. For example, one who is disposed to have an appropriate concern that others have accurate beliefs and affections toward one’s valuable qualities will avoid obsessing over the beliefs and affections of others concerning one’s valuable qualities. An *appropriate* concern here is incompatible with obsession. Likewise, one who has sufficient moral courage will take moral risks despite what others might rightly or wrongly think of one for doing so. The value of being unconcerned about the opinions and affections of others, moreover, lies in the non-special ability this trait has to help us overcome faults, such as our disposition toward obsessing over what others think of us and our moral cowardice. The value of the trait Roberts and Wood identify, then, is an ameliorative, non-special instrumental value.

A second others-directed account of humility which focuses in the first instance on our attitudes toward others is one which has been defended by several political theorists.[[24]](#footnote-24) Dissatisfied with the non-political nature of self-directed accounts of humility which identify this trait with modesty concerning one’s own valuable features, these political theorists have proposed that we view humility as involving awareness of both our own limitations and the limitations of those political structures in which we find ourselves. The resulting account of humility is much like Snow’s self-directed account above, except that the limitations one is aware of and in light of which one exhibits appropriate behaviors are not limitations of oneself alone. Perhaps the clearest statement of the view is offered by Button (2005), who writes that humility is a “cultivated sensitivity toward the limitations, incompleteness, and contingency of both one’s personal moral powers and commitments, and of the particular forms, laws, and institutions that structure one’s political and social life with others (851).” This humility, he continues, “takes the basic facts of fallibility and limitation, and turns them into an affirmative, public practice of attentiveness and generous listening (853).”

Such a trait has the values of the trait Snow identifies with humility and perhaps more. It is non-instrumentally valuable insofar as the person who possesses it is disposed to have accurate beliefs and affections about the limitations, incompleteness, and contingency of both her own powers and the political structures in which she finds herself. It is also non-amelioratively instrumentally valuable in that those who possess it will be likely to participate effectively in certain joint ventures, including joint political ventures, even if they do not themselves have moral faults. But, it is non-specially valuable in that even those without the relevant limitations could participate effectively in such joint ventures, if they were disposed to prefer such participation to going it alone. There are, in other words, traits which are just as valuable instrumentally as this one but which are not such that their possession requires that one remain ever limited by the here-and-now contingencies with which Button is concerned. The trait I describe in Section 3 is one example of such a trait.

The final others-directed account, developed by Nuyen (1998), is more intensely focused on overt behaviors toward others. He defines humility in terms of the equitable giving of credit. He writes, “Being equitable, modest people want to proportion the credit to all those who have a share in one’s success (108).” Humility here is the disposition to give credit for one’s accomplishments to those who deserve credit for them, and this will almost always include giving credit to others.

Arguably, the disposition to give equitable credit is non-instrumentally valuable. Just as it is good in itself to be disposed to accurately estimate one’s worth, it is good in itself to be disposed to accurately distribute credit. As the disposition to accurately estimate one’s worth plausibly derives its non-instrumental value from the value of true estimations, the disposition to accurately distribute credit plausibly derives its non-instrumental value from the value of true professions and truthful acknowledgements.

The disposition to equitably distribute credit is also instrumentally valuable as a means to equitable distributions of credit. And equitable distributions of credit may themselves be instrumentally valuable as means to achieving social harmony. Notably, this value is non-ameliorative, in that even those without faults can and should give credit equitably. But, it may be that the disposition to equitably distribute credit is not *specially* instrumentally valuable with respect to equitably distributing credit. For, this might be achieved through a disposition to distribute credit in accordance with one’s evidence concerning who deserves credit, so long as the world cooperates in that one’s evidence is a reliable guide to the way the world is. Thus, Nuyen’s credit-based conception of humility identifies a trait with a non-instrumental value as well as a non-ameliorative, non-special instrumental value.

To summarize the results of this subsection, we found that all three others-directed accounts of humility have an instrumental value, but that two have a non-ameliorative instrumental value while one has an ameliorative instrumental value. We found, again, that those accounts of humility that identified a trait with non-ameliorative instrumental value did so if and only if they identified a disposition to be in a certain way accurately oriented—either in one’s distributions of credit or in one’s estimation of the limitations of one’s own abilities and those of one’s political structure. This is not unlike the result of the previous subsection, where we saw that those traits with non-ameliorative instrumental value also involved accuracy of orientation. Thus, again, what we are seeing is that there is a significant impetus toward thinking about humility as involving something other than a disposition toward accuracy in belief, affection and/or behavior, but that accounts of humility which explain it without the notion of accuracy have identified traits with only non-ameliorative instrumental value. There is, accordingly, conceptual space for developing an account of humility that identifies a trait with non-ameliorative instrumental value which does not involve a disposition toward such accuracy. And, in the next section, I will argue that there is motivation for developing such an account as well.

1. **Humility as Preferring to Promote Others’ Good Rather Than One’s Own**

My aim in this section is to provide an account of a trait in the near vicinity of humility which has a non-ameliorative instrumental value but which does not have an accuracy-based non-instrumental value. This trait must be a disposition which either does not have a non-instrumental value or which has a non-instrumental value not derived from its involving an accurate orientation—an orientation toward accurate beliefs, feelings, behaviors; yet, it must also be a trait which is still non-amelioratively instrumentally valuable. Further, given the methodology articulated in Section 1.1, the trait must be motivated in that it accounts for at least some of our typical humility ascriptions. The trait I identify below has each of these features.

The trait I am interested in is a disposition to prefer the promotion of what is good for others rather than what is good for oneself in cases where one cannot equally promote each of these goods and where the value of what is good for others is equal to or incommensurate with the value of what is good for oneself. The idea is as follows. Oftentimes, we are faced with situations where we can either promote something that is good for ourselves—say, an individual achievement—or we can promote what is good for others, where these others are either other individuals or groups which may or may not include ourselves, but where we cannot promote both goods equally. In some such cases, the value to be achieved through promoting one’s own good is significantly greater than the value to be achieved through promoting the good of others. But, in other such cases the value to be achieved through promoting the good of others is equal to or incommensurate with the value to be achieved through promoting one’s own good. I propose a conception of humility according to which the humble person is that person who is disposed in these latter cases to prefer promoting the good of others rather than one’s own good.

Such a trait has the features highlighted above that none of the accounts of humility discussed in Section 2 has. It is a trait with a non-ameliorative instrumental value which does not involve a disposition toward accurate beliefs, feelings, or behaviors. First, the trait has an instrumental value with respect to promoting the goods of others in cases where these goods are equal or incommensurate to the goods one can promote for oneself. For, a person with the trait described is likely to promote these goods of others in such cases. The instrumental value is also non-ameliorative. For, its value is not exhausted in helping persons overcome their faults. Even a morally excellent person in a community of morally excellent persons could possess this trait. Even a person in need of no moral improvement or a person who lacked the very here-and-now limitations discussed above could possess the trait. So, it has a non-ameliorative instrumental value. Second, it does not involve a disposition toward accurate beliefs, feelings, or behaviors. Being disposed to prefer the promotion of what is good for others as opposed to what is good for oneself, where these goods are equal or incommensurable in value, does not involve having accurate beliefs about what is good for others being somehow objectively preferable to what is good for oneself. Nor does one who is affectively drawn more toward promoting what is good for others than what is good for oneself in such cases have more accurately attuned affections than someone who does not have such affections. There isn’t here the kind of match of accuracy between one’s feelings and beliefs about the world and the way the world really is that one finds in the accuracy-based accounts of humility above. Here the humble person has a subjective preference for promoting the goods of others over her own good which does not match more accurately the value of the world than does the absence of such a preference in someone else. Thus, we have a trait with a non-ameliorative instrumental value where this trait does not involve a disposition toward any kind of accuracy. What is unique here, of course, is that this account also does not require any *in*accuracy. The idea is that the preferences in question are neither accurate nor inaccurate; they are of a category to which the accuracy/inaccuracy distinction simply does not apply.[[25]](#footnote-25)

I will not insist that this disposition has a non-instrumental value. Some readers may think the trait admirable in itself and so may be inclined to regard it as having a non-instrumental value. A different reason for thinking that it is non-instrumentally valuable is simply that it is better to have *some* preference or other in the kinds of cases described than it is to have no preference at all. For, one worries that those without any preference at all may be left paralyzed. But, at least this second motivation is arguably insufficient for thinking that the trait is valuable for its own sake. For, one will avoid paralysis equally well by having a disposition to prefer promoting one’s own good rather than equal or incommensurate goods of others. It seems at least somewhat objectionable to say that *both* of these dispositions are non-instrumentally valuable, since no person could possess both of them, and it is not unreasonable to think that all dispositions which are non-instrumentally valuable can at least in principle be possessed by a person. Accordingly, I will not insist on the non-instrumental value of the trait. The important point here, rather, is that whether or not the disposition I have highlighted has a non-instrumental value, its value does not derive from the kind of accuracy from which the non-instrumental value of the traits identified with humility by other accounts of humility derive their non-instrumental value. The trait I have identified does not involve a disposition toward such accuracy, and yet it does have a non-ameliorative instrumental value.

Nor is it implausible to claim that the trait I have identified is one in the near vicinity of those traits we typically call “humility.” Classically, the behaviors of serving others, of putting others ahead of oneself, have been thought typical of the humble person.[[26]](#footnote-26) But such behaviors are quite likely to be a part of the person’s life who has the trait I have been discussing—the disposition to prefer promoting the goods of others to one’s own good when these are equal or incommensurate in value. If, for example, Sally and Joe are each working on writing projects of equal or incommensurate value, and both Sally and Joe need to solicit the verbal feedback of the other, and Sally knows this and is humble in the sense I have identified, then she will prefer to hear about Joe’s work and give him feedback rather than to present her work and get Joe’s feedback. She will prefer this even if it means that she doesn’t get the opportunity to get Joe’s feedback on her work. I am claiming that when people behave on the basis of preferences like this we typically regard them as humble. And so the present account of humility explains these attributions well.

An especially dramatic illustration of the way in which the present account of humility resonates with typical attributions of humility comes from the way in which humility is ascribed to the pre-incarnate Christ in the Christian story of the incarnation. Paul explains this story in his letter to the Philippians, where he clearly intends for the humility of Christ, which is displayed through and partially explains his incarnation, to be a model for Christ’s followers. He writes:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:3-7, NASB)

As the passage continues, Paul goes on to describe Christ’s obedience “to the point of death, even death on a cross.” And, of course, it is precisely on account of this obedience and death that Paul will claim that Christ has promoted the great good of salvation for his followers.

One attractive way to understand the trait being ascribed to the pre-incarnate Christ here where this trait serves as a model for Christ’s followers is to think of it as the trait I have been describing as humility. The pre-incarnate Christ prefers to promote the goods of others—their salvation—to his own good—retaining the particular relationship he had with God antecedent to the incarnation. It would have unattractive consequences to maintain that in doing so Christ was preferring to promote *lesser* goods (others’ salvation) as opposed to greater ones (his pre-incarnate union). And, those who think that humility consists in something other than a disposition toward accuracy will want to maintain that it is also not the case that Christ is here promoting *greater* goods to lesser ones. An attractive account, then, is that when Christ becomes incarnate, he does so out of a dispositional preference to promote the goods of others to his own good, where these goods are of equal or incommensurate value. And it is such a preference that Paul encourages his readers to adopt as well, as he tells them to refrain from acting “out of selfishness and empty conceit” and instead to “regard one another as more important than yourselves” and to “look out for” the interests of others and not merely “your own personal interests.”

Several of the authors whose accounts of humility were surveyed in the previous section have been happy to acknowledge Christ as an exemplar of humility and have attempted to explain how Christ could be considered humble given their account of humility.[[27]](#footnote-27) But, the proposed accounts of humility above either do not identify traits which could be possessed by a morally perfect pre-incarnate Christ or they identify traits which hold little promise for doing the explanatory work of motivating the incarnation which the trait called “humility” does in this passage from Philippians. None of the accounts of humility which have a merely ameliorative value in helping their possessor engage in a project of moral improvement or overcome faults or avoid jealousy on the part of others will do here. Nor is it enough for Christ to have accurate beliefs and affections toward his own valuable features, as this will not explain the incarnation. Nor again will a disposition to give equitable credit to others explain the incarnation. Nor still will accurate self-attitudes and attitudes toward political institutions help to explain the incarnation. Yet, humility of some sort is supposed to partially explain the incarnation. Thus, the Christian story of the incarnation appears to require an account of some version of humility like that I have proposed here which could be possessed by the pre-incarnate Christ and which would partially explain the incarnation.

To summarize and conclude, in this section I proposed an account of a version of humility where this consists in a disposition to prefer promoting the goods of others to one’s own good where the value of these goods is equal or incommensurate. The trait I have identified with humility is unique in that it is a trait that has a non-ameliorative instrumental value without involving a disposition toward accurate beliefs, affections, and behaviors; and, further this trait is one which is in the near vicinity of those traits we commonly identify as “humility.” Possessing the trait can add value to a person’s life. And, like other traits including virtuous traits, its possession can be cultivated through practice and training. For example, young persons can be trained to promote the goods of others as opposed to their own goods in appropriate circumstances through reward and punishment. This kind of training may be a means toward encouraging them to obtain a disposition to *prefer* such promoting. And so it can be a means of guiding them toward the possession of a trait which enhances human life.

1. **Conclusion**

The aim of this paper has been to make a three-pronged contribution to contemporary discussions of the character trait of humility. The first prong involved arguing that there is an attractive alternative to the contemporary practice of evaluating accounts of character traits primarily on the basis of using intuitive counterexamples. This alternative approach involves assessing the value of the various traits which have with one degree of plausibility or another been identified with a particular character trait. The second prong of my contribution here has been to engage in a value-based analysis of contemporary accounts of humility. One interesting lesson gleaned from this analysis was that contemporary accounts fall into one of two categories: either they identify a trait with only ameliorative value, or they identify a trait with a non-ameliorative value where this trait involves a disposition toward a certain kind of accuracy in belief, feeling, and/or behavior. This lesson prompted my third contribution, which was to propose a trait in the near vicinity of our concept of humility which has both a non-ameliorative value and which does not involve a disposition toward accuracy. The trait identified was one wherein the possessor of the trait is disposed to prefer promoting the goods of others to his own good where these goods are of equal or incommensurate value. I do not claim that this trait best matches our intuitive concept of humility, or even that others do not match that concept better than it does. In fact, allowing for Baehr’s and Zagzebebski’s value pluralism, I remain non-committal about whether there is a single trait best identified as “humility.” I claim only that the trait I have identified is in the near vicinity of our humility concept and that it has a unique value which can enhance human life.

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1. An excellent example of this approach in the particular case of humility is (Garcia 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For discussion of such a role for virtue ethics, see (Annas 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. E.g., Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics* 1094a. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E.g., Kant *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. E.g., (Mill 1863). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. also (Hursthouse 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Korsgaard (1983) suggests using this terminology. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See (Mill 1863). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See (Moore 1903). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I don’t mean to suggest that those who employ the counterexample-based method do not employ any other criteria for evaluating accounts of virtuous traits besides intuitive counterexamples. As an anonymous referee correctly pointed out, such theorists may also employ such criteria as fit into an overall theory of virtue. Of course, those who employ the value-based method will also appeal to such criteria. The reason why I focus in the text on the particular way in which counterexamples are used by practitioners of the counterexample-based method, then, is that this is the point which distinguishes the counterexample-based method from the value-based method. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. I personally have found it very helpful to compare this value pluralism with Alston’s (2005) pluralism about epistemic justification. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. One might think that, while the counterexample-based method as defined in the text cannot accommodate such value pluralism, a slightly modified counterexample-based method could. This modified method would proceed by first identifying how many versions of a particular virtue there are, and then by taking accounts of a virtue one-by-one and discerning whether each account faces counterexamples *as an account of each version of the virtue*. While I grant that this modified approach would do better at accommodating value pluralism, it still faces significant problems. For, the value pluralist may very well think that in many cases we are not in a position to tell up front how many versions of a virtue there are. She may take the fact that an account of a trait faces a counterexample *as an account of each version of the trait we have thus far identified* to indicate not that the account fails as an account of the trait, but that the account has identified an as-of-yet unidentified version of the trait. The value-based method discussed in the text better accommodates this possibility than this modified counterexample-based method. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I won’t *argue* here that each of these proposals plausibly accounts for at least some of our humility ascriptions, because I take this to have been demonstrates sufficiently by those who have argued that their proposed account of humility was the only version of humility. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See, e.g., (Garcia 2006) and (Sidgwick 1907). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See (Driver 1999). Cf. (Swanton 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For a helpful overview of the value of true belief, see chapter one of (Kvanvig 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Spiegel also considers that the humble person may *believe-*as-if she is unworthy—i.e., she may underestimate her valuable features. I overlook this aspect of his account here because it overlaps with the first proposal above. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See again (Garcia 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. There is in fact some psychological research supporting this point. See (Exline and Geyer 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. (Ridge 2000) offers a similar account which involves de-emphasizing one’s valuable features; but, for him, the disposition to de-emphasize these is grounded in a lack of concern for the opinions of others. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Nonetheless, she *is* skeptical of non-instrumental value. See (Garcia 2006: 432-3). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For an account of emotions which accommodates their being accurate or inaccurate, see (Roberts 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cf. the account in (Scheuler 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See, in addition to the account discussed in the text, (Keys 2008) and (Rushing 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. A very similar account of preferences is put to use in certain contemporary accounts of divine creation in the face of incommensurate and/or equally valuable creative possibilities. See, e.g., (Leftow 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See, e.g., (Scheler 1981). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Garcia (2006: 425-6) is explicit about this, though he focuses on the *post*-incarnate Christ. See also the discussion of Grenberg’s (2005) view in (Frierson 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)