

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE QUEST OF PLACING THE FIRST IN A RANK ORDER OF VALUES AND VIRTUES

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The question, which virtue should be regarded as supreme, to be emphasized and pursued above all others,¹ has been a subject of inquiry since the ancient Greek philosophers. Today a branch of Philosophy of Ethics, called Axiology, looks for the essence and relationship of values, searching for answers as to what is really good and honorable. The topic itself involves a number of different sciences—Theology, Psychology and extending into Sociology.

It appears surprising that one virtue seems to have been widely overlooked in this inquiry—that of humility.

I approach this subject with a certain amount of trepidation, since others have come to different conclusions, and therefore I find myself at odds with them. In any case, I hope to provoke further thought and inquiry on this subject, since a choice of priority for action plays a large role in all situations of life.

After a historical review, I will argue that only the ideal of **humility**, when seen with new understanding, can constitute the true foundation for all virtues, especially in a renewed and reflected Christianity. Undoubtedly, in a philosophical framework, it remains the unnegotiable basic condition for all values as well, including love and wisdom, implying a desire to subordinate the self to them. Without this quality, all other virtues and values become dubious or worthless. Especially psychological and doctrinal implications of this have been bypassed for a long time, so some important aspects need to be addressed in this context.

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¹In fact, all virtues and values are interrelated, and in each situation, one or another stands in the foreground of consciousness and action, becoming the guiding principle of truth. This means also then subordinating other concerns in rank or priority. The question remains, which one is more permanently basic to others, or if it was missing, might invalidate others. The insufficiency of definitions and formulations appears here, for not only a passive readiness is implied, but an active and creative mental energy searching in the direction indicated is implied too, containing motivation and feelings, with individual as well as social implications.

We must take into account that this subject is fraught with many obstacles, beginning with the difficulty of defining the subject, and the challenge of implementing priorities in life. On the other hand, the pursuit itself can be rich with inner rewards and important for a mature conscience.

HISTORICAL OBSERVATIONS

Most ancient Greek thinkers established a rank order of virtues that put wisdom at the top.² Rephrasing Kant's observation: The Epicurean declared that awareness of a principle (maxim) leading to happiness was the highest virtue, while the Stoics declared that awareness of virtue is happiness.³ Socrates, quoted by Plato, ascribes to awe and obedience an inner spiritual warning perception as the primary virtue,⁴ and taught that a humble recognition of our ignorance is the first condition for wisdom. This was early expanded by recognizing and adding the moral qualities of justice, courage and temperance, and thereby developing a list of four great main virtues. The Mosaic Decalogue established devotion and obedience to one God as the first and central concern, although the motivation and implementation is not spelled out in today's terms. The prophets of old Israel indicated that devotion to God in deep humility was the primary virtue⁵ and repeatedly chastised pride among the worst vices, without specifically establishing a definite order of rank among other virtues.

²In Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. Vol. 20, p. 472/3, he declared *kalokagathia* (perhaps to be translated as "nobility") specifically as the highest virtue (*arte*), above goodness, although in other places, wisdom is put into this place, defining it as goodness in the rational part, in his treatise *On Virtues and Vices* p.488f (ibid.). "Noble (*kala*) things are the objects of praise, base things of blame". His list of virtues would probably be called values in today's terms. After wisdom follows pleasure, equated with good, but qualified by wisdom. It is followed by physical health, again qualified by virtue. The final conclusion is "serving and contemplating God" as the "best mode, and the most beautiful standard" (p.476; ibid.), my translation from the original. (His "Nikomachian Ethics" is headed by Friendship.)

³Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft* [Critique of Practical Reason] Reclam publ. Stuttgart 1963, edited by Joachim Kopper, p. 179 (transl. by author). Kant also adds the observation that happiness and awareness cannot be compared on the same level.

⁴Greek: "daimonion"; in the *Apology of Socrates* n. 19, it is specifically defined as perceptive insight or inner evidence, not quite the same as what is understood by conscience today.

⁵Among many examples stands out Micah 6; 8 "... what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

In ancient Rome, during a triumphal procession, the slave holding a golden crown over the conqueror, had to whisper into his ears that he was only human.

The founder of Christianity left a legacy in the first sentence of the Sermon on the Mount that is almost the sum and title for everything that follows: the promise is blessedness for what is translated as “the poor in spirit,” but can also be rendered more correctly “beggars for the spirit,”⁶ obviously an appeal towards humility. Love (agape=charity) toward God is proclaimed as the greatest commandment, adding to the Old Testament quote the requirement “with all your reason” (often translated as mind or soul) as an element of it.⁷ As a foundation for this and necessary condition, humility is featured in many places, especially as His own example,⁸ and specifically stressed in the parable of the publican and the pharisee.

Later Christian thinking, led by Augustine, added three “Theological Virtues” to the old Greek list of four: Faith and hope with love as the highest.⁹ Among later thinkers of early Christianity sincerely searching for priorities, the main representative of the Desert Fathers, John Climacus,¹⁰

⁶ Greek: “Makaríoi hoi ptochoi to pneumati,” using a term for the highest blessedness applying to gods and heroes in Greek literature. In the Gospel of Luke, this is also in the beginning of the address (6:17) in a “level place.”

⁷ Greek: Dianoia, Matt. 22:37, also in Mark 12:30, Lk. 10: 27. This concept does not occur in the Deut. text : 6:5; it is a significant addition.

⁸ Matt. 11:29 in the King James Version: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [New International Version (NIV): “gentle and humble in heart”] Greek: *tapeinos en kardia*, for which humility is a better translation than lowliness. The parable of the publican and the pharisee Luke 18:9-14. Luke 14:11 “...everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (NIV). Especially the quality of children is lifted up, including humility and innocence.

⁹ St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) *The Enchiridion*, ed. J. Paolucci, Gateway ed.(Chicago: Henry Regency Co., 1961). “Love is the End of all the Commandments, and God Himself is Love,” p. 139.

¹⁰ John Climacus, abbot of Mt. Sinai monastery ca. 550-649 in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 218, 219 Step 25 “On Humility”: “this treasure is of a quality that eludes adequate description.” “... ‘Humility is constant forgetfulness of one’s achievements,’ someone says. ‘It is the admission that in all the world one is of the least importance, and also the greatest sinner,’ another says. ‘It is the mind’s awareness that one is weak and helpless’ a third says. ‘It is to forestall one’s neighbor at a contentious moment and to be the first to end a quarrel.’ ‘It is the acknowledgement of divine grace and divine mercy,’ ‘It is the disposition of a contrite soul and the abdication of one’s own will.’ ...my (his) own definition: ‘Humility is a grace in the soul and with a name known only to those who have had experience of it. It is indescribable wealth, a name and a gift from God...’”

more widely known in the Eastern Church, regarded humility as one of the highest stages of ascent to God, seeing in it contrition and self-abnegation, but admitting that all definitions fell short. He observed that if this virtue is sought for oneself, it remains forever out of reach.

The holy number of seven virtues defined in ancient times (love, faith, hope, wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance), which does not contain humility as such, was soon matched by a contrasting list of seven vices or sins, which placed pride at the top, followed by greed, envy, anger, sloth, avarice and lust.¹¹ A critical philosophical analysis shows many shortcomings in this double list, as well as overlaps and serious omissions.

The 14th century movement, known as “*Devotio moderna*,” of which the famous “*Imitation of Christ*” by Th. a Kempis¹² is the outstanding representative, put a special emphasis upon humility implicitly as the highest virtue without specifically establishing order. Upon a closer look, one sees that this humility was partially understood in an ascetic tradition as servility, submission and self-annihilation, combined with a denial of the world. Following the “*negative Theology*,”¹³ humility was mainly defined in reverse terms: the opposite of pride, opposite of commanding, the opposite of all desirable qualities connected with the self. But in medieval thinking, there was still a widely held belief in merit—few noticing that any striving for self-merit is inevitably the opposite of real humility. In contrast to, and as a reaction against the established church, an early Protestant movement, the Waldenses in France, (which was cruelly prosecuted) stressed humility in dress and life-style among the highest requirements. This was soon matched by the Catholic order of the Humiliati, which was later dissolved by the pope when the Waldenses were almost completely eradicated, and organizational problems appeared in 1570.¹⁴

¹¹ Karl A. Olsson, *Seven Sins and Seven Virtues* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952, 1962).

¹² Thomas A. Kempis (1380-1471), *Die Nachfolge Christi*, German transl. by J.M. Sailer (Koln: Atlas Verlag, no date). Title of Chap. 3: “Think lowly of yourself” and of chap. 4: “Not to make anything of oneself and gladly to esteem others as better and higher than oneself is great wisdom and perfection.” Many singular passages. (Transl. by author.)

¹³ This Theology, widely popular in the Middle Ages, declared that the main approach to God is by contrast: *not* finite, *not* bound to time, etc.

¹⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica* (London, New York, 1929/30) vol. 11, p.882. The humility of Lombardy joined the Waldenses.

The Reformation put faith as the highest virtue, sharply contrasting it to good works and any claims for merit based upon them.¹⁵ It does not take much proof to show that this attitude is still widely influential in traditional Protestantism. However, the Puritans accepted humility in dress and behavior as very essential, and propagated this in their settlements in America.

An entirely new, though little noticed, positive definition of humility was presented through E. Swedenborg. In these writings, the essence of humility is defined as the complete attribution of all good and truth to God, along with minimizing the ego,¹⁶ but if, and only if, this humility is developed not only with the head, but also with the heart. This involves an effort as if oneself, but ultimately a profound acknowledgment of all good as a gift of God. This is pointed out as the foundation of all other virtues. Interestingly enough, the same attitude in a slightly different shade is called "innocence,"¹⁷ emphasizing that without such a quality, no true worship or love can exist. Whether this is declared as the foundation of all virtues and values, or the highest virtue in itself, may be debatable, but it is irrelevant when establishing moral priorities. It has to be interjected here that philosophically, this interpretation modifies and opposes the image of a purely otherworldly deity such as is found in deism and often in theism, where the concept of God is purely remote and transcendental. Instead,

¹⁵ *Concordia or Book of Concord* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1922). "We believe, teach and confess also that good works should be entirely excluded, just as well in the question concerning salvation as in the article of justification before God...the elect retain the Holy Ghost even though they fall into adultery and other sins and persist therein." (p.222)

¹⁶ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia* n. 1153 (2). This is preceded by acknowledgment "...that with self there is nothing alive and nothing good..." Similarly "...in humiliation of heart there is the acknowledgement of self, that it is nothing but filth, and at the same time the acknowledgement of the Lord's infinite mercy towards such a thing..." (AC 1999) "...when a man is in humiliation he is averse to evil and falsity in himself...on the removal of which the Divine can inflow with good and truth...this is the genuine reason for man's humiliation before the Divine" (AC 4347).

¹⁷ Swedenborg, *ibid.* n. 3994 "...innocence is the essential itself of love and charity...the proprium of innocence consists in knowing, acknowledging and believing...that there is nothing but evil from self and that all good is from the Lord." Similarly n. 7902, only adding: "...and also to believe that one does not know or perceive anything from self, but from the Lord. Also "When a man is being regenerated, and is becoming wise, then the innocence of infancy which was external, becomes internal" (AC 4797 (2)). *Heaven and Hell* n. 281 "...wisdom is wisdom in proportion as it derives from innocence; in a like manner, love, charity and faith..."

the presence of God in all creation is stressed here, a thoroughgoing **Pan-en-theism**¹⁸, which includes many levels of influence.

The leading thinker of the modern age, Immanuel Kant, sees the highest virtue as an obligation of duty to follow an internal moral law (called a categorical imperative) of fairness, coupled with a perception of awe before the starry universe. Kant specifically investigated the conditions for establishing value priorities from a logical perspective.¹⁹

More recently, Rudolf Otto²⁰ expanded the idea that a profound feeling of awe (expressed in different ways) before something holy is the foundation of all religion in various cultures.

Modern thinking widely relinquishes an objective "bag of virtues" approach and focuses more upon values, which do not necessarily imply duty or specific logical and emotional perceptions.²¹ The question, whether humility is a virtue or a value is answered here by noting that both designations apply to it, since the definitions of value and virtue are themselves somewhat fluid, and yet humility does not fit neatly into either category, because it can more profitably be seen as the basis for establishing any virtue of value.²²

¹⁸ This term was coined by the philosopher K.C. Krause (1781-1832), stimulated by Swedenborg. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan-Collier, 1967), vol. 4, p.363; it is still not widely used, but often recognized.

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Reason*, "The dialectics of Pure Reason in the determination of the concept of the Highest Good" (p. 177). This is seen as a function of genuine rationality.

²⁰ Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) *The Idea of the Holy* tr. by J.W. Harvey (New York, 1958). Common to all religions is a feeling of awe for something holy, a fascination for the numinous, a type of humility (*Encycl. of Philosophy*, vol. 6, pp. 13-15). Also H. Kunz "Über das Wesen der Demut" (The essence of Existential humility) in *Philos. Jahrbuch* 64, 1956, based upon a "consciousness of...infinite distance towards desired perfection." *Philosophisches Wörterbuch*, (Stuttgart: Kroner, 1965) p. 99; (my translation); psychologically, this is not a positive motivation.

²¹ In Swedenborgian terminology, aspects of truth and love. This is especially evident in the leading German-Jewish philosopher of values, Max Scheler (1874-1928) in *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (Leipzig, 1915), where he espouses a phenomenological-intuitive approach, stressing that there is a specific and unique perception of value, a topic of my doctoral studies in Berlin at the Free University.

²² Both value and virtue are defined in different ways that are not standardized; see *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 8, p. 229. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1968), vol. 23, p. 48 defines virtue "...conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality." In vol. 22, p. 866, value is defined: "...standard of worth." (Both definitions are analytic, not adding anything substantially new.) The discovery of a general theory of value has been held by some to be "the greatest philosophical achievement of the 19th century."

Swedenborg's formulation of the essence of humility appears simple, but a closer investigation reveals a striking difference from nearly all previous and present explanations. We hear that it is "...an acknowledgement that everything living and good is from the Lord: the more a man acknowledges this, not with the mouth but with the heart, the more he is in humiliation..."²³ This implies also a devaluation or rejection of any claims of eminence attached to the ego, or the unregenerate self. No worship (including prayer) can be genuine without this.²⁴ The reason is not "...for the sake of the love of glory in the Lord, but for the sake of the Divine Love..." which cannot be assimilated otherwise. He establishes Love as the highest energy or value, combined with Wisdom, both of them being the core of the manifestation of God, and both of them necessitating humility for reception. These energies are infinite in themselves, but can be incorporated by humans in increasing approximations, according to receptiveness. Swedenborgians have often seen a striving for usefulness as the resulting goal for life.²⁵ The General Church has a greater emphasis upon authority, virtues²⁶ and education, while Convention places more accent upon freedom and tolerance.²⁷ The assimilation of any virtue means a continual reception of energies from a higher source (or influx), depending upon the degree of acknowledgement of their Divine origin. A growing humility of this type secures a dignity and power that is considerably different from former interpretations of self-annihilation, contrition and submission to other people or servility. Instead, it demands submission to Wisdom and Love, as qualities of God, wherever they are represented in human individuals or organizations or elsewhere, especially in Scripture.

²³ Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, n. 1153 (2)

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2327 (2) "...In all worship there must be humiliation...The expression of this is prostration" (AC 2153). "...gestures...bending of the knees, kneeling down..." (AC 5323).

²⁵ Frank Sewall, *The Ethics of Service*; Wilson van Dusen, *Uses* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1985).

²⁶ George de Charms, *Worship Talks on the Moral Virtues* (Academy Bookstore, 1973) mentions specifically honesty as the greatest virtue (p. 1), followed by justice, prudence, courage, mercy, patience, and courtesy. Frederick L. Schnarr, *The Use of the Moral Virtues*, (Bryn Athyn, Pa., no date) lists honesty, sobriety and chastity. Neither of these mention humility in a specific way.

²⁷ A typical expression of this is by John Bigelow, *Toleratation* (New York: New Church Press, 1927).

The modern awareness of shame²⁸ has pointed back to the fact that a healthy dignity and confidence in one's abilities is necessary to prevent a number of morbid states, which are related to an inferiority complex. By necessity, the foundation for the integration of love as well as wisdom must be humility, and this means that it may be regarded as the supreme virtue.

THE OPPOSITE OF HUMILITY

The essence of pride in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is a desire in various degrees to be like god,²⁹ to establish superiority over other humans and thus to control and dominate them, to use them as pawns, or at least to obtain admiration from them.

In psychological observation of life situations, this is expressed in self-righteousness, wanting to elevate oneself to be the authority or in charge, looking down on others, in bragging or presenting oneself only in the best light. Many forms of exaggerating, flaunting education, rank or wealth are related, called "one-upmanship" in common usage, involving vanity, vain-gloriousness, self-admiration, loftiness and arrogance. Our language has many terms to characterize different shades and types of this basic attitude, which is generally not noticed and often fiercely denied by those who harbor these qualities. Often, this may be over-compensation of a deep feeling of shame (or fear of inferiority) that calls for expression to counteract it. Also, some people who have been subdued and humiliated may show a stronger need for proving themselves.

What comes into focus here is not primarily behavior, but the underlying psychological energies or tendencies that produce corresponding actions, and are continual stimuli in themselves. These are from the subconscious and influence and penetrate behavior without a full awareness of an individual who has not critically examined his attitudes and motives. It appears obvious that any of these attitudes will immediately

²⁸ John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that binds you* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, 1988).

²⁹ This is the expression termed the voice of the serpent tempting Adam and Eve in paradise, causing them to lose their innocence in the symbolic story in Genesis 3: 4 "You will be like god, knowing good and evil."

reverse any value of any or all the moral and theological virtues and values mentioned. The classical New Testament examples are the attitudes of the scribes and the pharisees that brought Jesus to the cross. In modern times, religious and secular authorities are often prone to such attitudes; the airs of institutional administrative units were analyzed by sociologists investigating attitudes and actions of bureaucracies.³⁰ Schools and academic institutions also have their own ways of claiming (and demanding recognition for) authority and superiority. Individual or group claims to possess a special access to a high heaven, or being enlightened, or the elect, are also related. Special temptations exist with theologians to regard their own views as exclusively correct and superior without openness to other interpretations—unfortunately a sad occurrence, where openness and fair inquiry would be hoped for to bring consensus.

Common forms of contemporary group conceitedness include asserting superiority because of some doctrinal or creedal allegiance; and those who classify people according to their “Intelligence Quotient” succumb to a similar temptation, since the accuracy and value of tests and scores is easily exaggerated (in spite of embittered opposition to these claims).³¹

Accepting a negative self-image and seeing oneself as inferior (the “inferiority complex”) is far from real humility, which takes a certain self-emptying and de-emphasis of vain, purely “rational,” perspectives.³²

HEALTHY DIGNITY

A natural self-assurance and poise in accepting one’s position as a worthy human being can be observed in some individuals, who have not been made insecure or humiliated. This can be understood as a virtue in itself, when it comes from a good conscience, and can be combined with a

³⁰ Max Weber’s (1864-1920) work is a classic investigation in *Essays in Sociology 1920*,” a humorous and very pertinent characterization in “Parkinson’s Law”

³¹ The originator of these tests, Alfred Binet (1857-1911), recognized the limitations very early, but this insight reached America only much later. A scathing criticism was voiced by the world renowned Harvard sociologist P. Sorokin in *Fads and Foibles in modern Sociology and related sciences* (Chicago: Henry Regenery, 1958). Ch. 4, and 5 (“Testomania”) pp. 51-82. B.F. Skinner denies human dignity by denying a freedom of choice in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*

³² Thomas A. Harris *I’m OK – you’re OK, a practical guide to transactional analysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), in section “What is religious experience?” (p. 235) emphasizes the childlike attitude as necessary.

natural humility of being open to listen and learn without servility. Children who have received proper acceptance and love may exhibit this quality in a delightful way, as well as people of genuine maturity. A hearty dignity may include assertiveness in the proper place, shown by Jesus in a number of situations, as in the cleansing of the temple.

Not all defiance has to proceed from pride, and not all obedience is really humble or even desirable.

GENUINE HUMILITY

To begin with psychological observation, there are many styles of modesty, or unassuming tact and politeness that are the consequence of an inner awareness of boundaries. There are also many degrees of this, beginning with an awe towards that which is acknowledged as noble, holy and exalted, ascending to a fear of offending against any higher law or order. Progress towards greater genuineness and depth is possible throughout life. This can be a position of great strength: Abraham Lincoln exhibited great power often combined with genuine humility,³³ and his power was increased by the respect that his personality radiated. In the scale of spiritual development outlined in Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia*, the main assessment of sacred advancement is the degree of attribution of all goodness in one's own actions to God.³⁴

There can never be any real love or charity without humility—imagine anyone feeling superior, congratulating himself or expecting admiration for loving acts and attitudes! It is not necessary to hide all the good qualities, as long as it can be continually and wholeheartedly acknowledged that all this is a gift from God.³⁵ "What is good is not from me" is one way of expressing this dependency.

³³ Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Reader's Digest Assoc., 1954), vol. 4, contains many examples, as on p. 290 in the Final Emancipation Proclamation there is an appeal to a higher truth.

³⁴ Swedenborg, *Arcana*, n. 39, commenting on the fifth day of Creation (of the regeneration or maturity of a person turning to God) "...by now he is vivified by love and faith and believes that the Lord works all the good that he does and all the truth that he speaks..."

³⁵ Swedenborg, *ibid.*, n. 10219 (3) "...the moment that (a person) acknowledges and believes that goods flow in from the Lord, and not from himself, and that the evils are from hell, the goods and the truths affect him and the evils do not adhere to him, and, moreover, in so far as goods affect him, so far evils are removed, thus he is purified and liberated from them."

All progress of insight and wisdom in a society is continually held back by pride, by people rejecting better advice because it is not "my idea." Honesty about oneself can only come with a profoundly humble attitude, including a readiness to repent. A continual openness to humble oneself before the truth, to ask questions and being ready to listen, and also to question one's own interpretations, belong to any true scientist and are characteristics of humility. It is especially important for teachers to continue to develop their understanding of (and respect for) learners as well as their own limitations. All racism or chauvinism is an expression of a lack of this humility. Any disparaging of anybody as being inferior or less informed is a sign of pride, and real humility is a continual awareness that we all are involved in a search for love and truth. Such a humility is most powerfully conveyed by example, and never by criticism or nagging. It can never be forced, only chosen individually with help from above.

Such a humility is not a sad, contrite condition, looking mainly at imperfections, but involves always a creative, accepting and open attitude towards everyone, remaining receptive of higher truth as coming from God, and it cannot be reached immediately regardless of effort. A spontaneous readiness to forgiveness as well as gratitude are consequences of such a frame of mind, a readiness to give full credit to God and humans for all goodness received and observed. Punctuality, conscientiousness in work and word are also consequences of reduced self-importance, while perfectionism can be indicative of an anxious pride. A readiness to always let others save face is a delightful oriental attitude, often underdeveloped in Western cultures.

The question comes up, how humility can be recognized and isolated from its many counterfeits, which may look very close. The perception is genuine, if it is recognized as a grace, a joyful gift, not primarily as a duty. In such states, it is a function of growing insight,³⁶ developed through a continual effort to apply these in one's whole life, not through rational thought alone. An almost continual awareness of a Divine energy animating and uplifting can be developed, which assists us against all lower impulses (influx). We can be filled with an attribution that all insight and

³⁶ It becomes an internal philosophical evidence, a perception a priori as an identification of a motive.

all effort are continuously renewed gifts from a higher source. Many people have been touched by this in moments or periods of life, including myself. As soon as a reliance upon one's own willpower, or a favorable comparison comes up with others, this peaceful strength disappears. While a keen individuality can be noticeable, there is also a desire to overcome individual isolation and separation. This does not mean weakness (for mature modesty is free of anxious self-consciousness) but rather a real awe, penetrating the feeling and becoming an inspiring motivation. These qualities are often missing in religious groups, where gossip is an indicator of their deficiency.

The continuously repeated chant of the monks of the Eastern Church (esp. the Hesychasts): God, have mercy, (Kyrie eleison), is one path towards greater freedom from self-reflection, self-mirroring and self-concern, when it is deeply internalized.

There can be a specific state of rapture or ecstasy in self-abandonment, even in self-sacrifice, which cannot be achieved by any act of wilful effort, but children may be graced by it in innocence while they are completely absorbed in a play, or in mature people after periods of intense spiritual struggle.

The most useful test that reveals real philosophical insight and application of humility is the degree of simplicity of the soul, that which shows its real greatness in seeing itself in a true perspective as a receiver of all goodness and insight from a higher source. This means a new and quite different state of self, or a new proprium, and a new perspective of God, full of profound awe. This greatest virtue and value, the highest moral excellence, the foundation for everything else, can never coexist with self-elation, but only comes gradually by reducing self-importance, and by increasing progress towards a joyful and freeing humility of heart. This alone offers a new dignity reaching into the rational as well as emotional realm (the spiritual and celestial), and opens our soul towards timeless wisdom and love. □