

Truth and Humility

1. The essence of humility

- Josef Pieper: “One of the goods in which man naturally seeks fulfillment of his being is excellentia: superiority, pre-eminence, consideration. The virtue of temperance, insofar as it relates this natural urge to the order of reason, is called humility. The ground of humility is man’s estimation of himself according to truth. And that is almost all there is to it.”¹
- Misunderstandings

2. Transcending oneself

- The autonomous person does not stand above himself, or outside of himself. Can he laugh at himself?
- nicht, as Kant teaches, the consciousness and feeling of the insignificance of one’s own moral value in comparison with the the moral law, which prevents us from comparing ourselves with other people.²
- rather like Fichte, who criticizes “falsehood toward oneself”: “Let us be happy in the simple faithfulness to the divine in us.”³

3. No negative connotations

- Pieper: “In the whole tractate of St. Thomas concerning humility and pride, there is not a single sentence to suggest an attitude, on principle, of constant self-accusation, of disparagement of one’s being and doing, of cringing inferiority feelings, as belonging to humility or any other Christian virtue.”⁴
- Every inclination, even concupiscence, is good
 - including the inclination of reason.

¹J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance*, transl. Daniel F. Coogen (New York: Harourt, Brace, 1965), 188 (= http://archive.org/stream/fourcardinalvirt012953mbp/fourcardinalvirt012953mbp_djv_u.txt)

²Cf. I. Kant, *Akadem.-Ausg.*, vol. 6, 435.

³J. G. Fichte, *Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte, vol. 11, 394. (My translation)

⁴J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 188.

- Thomas Aquinas: “Whatever is contrary to a natural inclination is a sin, because [*quia*] it is contrary to a law of nature.”⁵

4. Opponents

- The predominant notion of humility today
- We ourselves are probably the first opponents.
- Sheryl Overmyer: “Humility appears an anti-modern virtue that can help us address the problems of the post-modern Age.”⁶
- Nietzsche: the morality of slaves
 - Nietzsche views humility as a strategy used by the weak to avoid being destroyed by the strong.
 - In the *Twilight of the Idols* he writes: “When stepped on, a worm doubles up. That is clever. In that way he lessens the probability of being stepped on again. In the language of morality: humility.”

5. Humility is not dishonest

6. Truth

- The truth makes one free.
- Objectivity
- Truth understood as the presence of reality in consciousness
- Aquinas: “Humility has essentially to do with the appetite, in so far as a man restrains the impetuosity of his soul, from tending inordinately to great things: yet its rule is in the cognitive faculty, in that we should not deem ourselves to be above what we are. Also, the principle and origin of both these things is the reverence we bear to God.”⁷

⁵II-II, 133, 1c.

⁶Sheryl Overmyer, “Exalting the Meek Virtue of Humility In Aquinas,” *The Heythrop Journal*, 2013, DOI: 10.1111/heyj.12009, p. 1.

⁷II-II, 161, a. 6c.

- Morality is the relationship of the will to reason.
- Reason is not infallible. Even when it errs, it binds the individual person.

7. The distinction between strengths and weaknesses

- gifts of God vs. what is my own.
- ‘Man’s own’ is not something positive but a deficiency.
- Thomas: “There is in man something great which he possesses through the gift of God; and something defective which accrues to him through the weakness of nature.”⁸

8. Interior attitude of the will

- Pieper: “Humility, which is only apparently the opposite of magnanimity, is not, in any sense, a forgotten virtue, but it is one that is often misinterpreted and misunderstood. To anticipate the grossest misunderstanding, humility is not only not itself an external attitude; it is also not bound to any external attitude. Humility rests on an interior decision of the will. Furthermore, humility is not primarily an attitude that pertains to the relationship of man to man: it is the attitude of man before the fact of God. Humility is the knowledge and acceptance of the inexpressible distance between Creator and creature. It is, in a very precise sense, as Gertrud von le Fort once said, ‘man’s true and proper worth before God.’ Man’s worth, as that of a being possessed of a soul, consists solely in this: that, by his own free decision, he knows and acts in accordance with the reality of his nature – that is, in truth.”⁹
- Intellectual humility does not exist – essentially – in the intellect.
- Humility is not an insight.
- Humility itself is not a feeling.
- Pieper: “Humility [...] is not outward behavior but an inner attitude, born of decision of the will. Regarding God and its own creaturely quality, it is an attitude of perfect recognition of that which, by reason of God’s will, really is above all, it is

⁸*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 129, a. 3, ad 4.

⁹J. Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, transl. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1997), 102.

candid acceptance of this one thing: that man and humanity are neither God nor ‘like God.’”¹⁰

- Sheryl Overmyer: “... Humility suffers a lowly place in the Thomistic hierarchy. Humility is a virtue of the concupiscible appetite, not of reason. Humility regulates one’s interior disposition – it does not contribute directly to the common good. It moderates and restrains activity – it does not strengthen and encourage activity like magnanimity does. Since it is less excellent than the theological virtues, humility does not have the last end as its object.”¹¹

9. A Virtue

- Thomas Aquinas: “The difficult good has something attractive to the appetite, namely the aspect of good, and likewise something repulsive to the appetite, namely the difficulty of obtaining it. In respect of the former there arises the movement of hope, and in respect of the latter, the movement of despair. For those appetitive movements which are a kind of impulse towards an object, there is need of a moderating and restraining moral virtue, while for those which are a kind of recoil, there is need, on the part of the appetite, of a moral virtue to strengthen it and urge it on. Wherefore a twofold virtue is necessary with regard to the difficult good: one, to temper and restrain the mind, lest it tend to high things immoderately; and this belongs to the virtue of humility: and another to strengthen the mind against despair, and urge it on to the pursuit of great things according to right reason; and this is magnanimity. Therefore it is evident that humility is a virtue.”¹²
- Not in social reality.
- Not in reason, not an insight
- In the will
- Its relation to reason
- A virtue is a habit and takes some time to attain.
It is not an individual act, but it arises from individual acts and leads individual acts.
- The ‘maturity’ of a capability, of a potency.

¹⁰J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 190.

¹¹Sheryl Overmyer, 2–3.

¹²*Summa theologiae*, II-II, 161, 1c.

- The alternative is not either a reflected moral decision or instinct, as Konrad Lorenz claims.¹³
- “Second nature”
- *ultimum potentiae*¹⁴
- Meister Eckhart: People should not think too much about what they should do; they should think about what they should be.
- Character

- Oscar Wilde sees humility as the secret of life revealed in suffering:
 - Wilde finds the metaphor of a treasure appropriate:

“But while there were times when I rejoiced in the idea that my sufferings were to be endless, I could not bear them to be without meaning. Now I find hidden somewhere away in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the whole world is meaningless, and suffering least of all. That something hidden away in my nature, like a treasure in a field, is Humility. It is the last thing left in me, and the best: the ultimate discovery at which I have arrived.”¹⁵
 - “There is about sorrow an intense, an extraordinary reality. I have said of myself that I was one who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. There is not a single wretched man in this wretched place along with me who does not stand in symbolic relation to the very secret of life. For *the secret of life is suffering*. It is what is hidden behind everything.”¹⁶
 - “I have lain in prison for nearly two years. Out of my nature has come wild despair; an abandonment to grief that was piteous even to look at; terrible and impotent rage; bitterness and scorn; anguish that wept aloud; misery that could find no voice; sorrow that was dumb. I have passed through every possible mood of suffering. Better than Wordsworth himself I know what Wordsworth meant when he said – ‘Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark / And has the nature of infinity.’¹⁷”¹⁸

¹³Konrad Lorenz, *Das sogenannte Böse. Zur Naturgeschichte der Aggression* (Wien 1963), 361.

¹⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 1, ad 1

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Wilde, *De profundis* (emphasis added).

¹⁷Wordsworth, *The White Doe*, line 5–6.

¹⁸Wilde, *De profundis*.

10. The importance of humility

- Augustine (*De Virginit.* xxxi): “Almost the whole of Christian teaching is humility.”

- Whether humility is the greatest of the virtues?
 - Thomas: “The good of human virtue pertains to the order of reason: which order is considered chiefly in reference to the end: wherefore the theological virtues are the greatest because they have the last end for their object. Secondarily, however, it is considered in reference to the ordering of the means to the end. This ordinance, as to its essence, is in the reason itself from which it issues, but by participation it is in the appetite ordered by the reason; and this ordinance is the effect of justice, especially of legal justice. Now humility makes a man a good subject to ordinance of all kinds and in all matters; while every other virtue has this effect in some special matter. Therefore after the theological virtues, after the intellectual virtues which regard the reason itself, and after justice, especially legal justice, humility stands before all others.”¹⁹

- Is humility *the* Christian virtue?
 - Mt. 11:29: “Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.”

 - Matthew 23:12: “He who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted“

- Temperance, to which humility belongs, is the last of the cardinal virtues.
 - “As the Philosopher declares (*Ethic.* I.2) ‘the good of the many is more godlike than the good of the individual,’ wherefore the more a virtue regards the good of the many, the better it is. Now justice and fortitude regard the good of the many more than temperance does, since justice regards the relations between one man and another, while fortitude regards dangers of battle which are endured for the common weal: whereas temperance moderates only the desires and pleasures which affect man himself. Hence it is evident that justice and fortitude are more excellent virtues than temperance: while prudence and the theological virtues are more excellent still.”²⁰

¹⁹*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 161, a. 5c.

²⁰*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 141, a. 8c.

- Pieper: “Temperantia is distinguished from the other cardinal virtues by the fact that it refers exclusively to the active man himself. Prudence looks to all existent reality; justice to the fellow man; the man of fortitude relinquishes, in self-forgetfulness, his own possessions and his life. Temperance, on the other hand, aims at each man himself. Temperance implies that man should look to himself and his condition, that his vision and his will should be focused on himself. That notion that the primordial images of all things reside in God has been applied by Aquinas to the cardinal virtues also: the primordial divine mode of temperantia, he states, is the ‘turning of the Divine Spirit to Itself.’”²¹

- Humility is the foundation of virtue in the sense that it removes the main obstacle, namely pride:

Thomas: “Just as the orderly assembly of virtues is, by reason of a certain likeness, compared to a building, so again that which is the first step in the acquisition of virtue is likened to the foundation, which is first laid before the rest of the building. Now the virtues are in truth infused by God. Wherefore the first step in the acquisition of virtue may be understood in two ways. First by way of removing obstacles: and thus humility holds the first place, inasmuch as it expels pride, which ‘God resisteth,’ and makes man submissive and ever open to receive the influx of Divine grace. Hence it is written (James 4:6): ‘God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.’ In this sense humility is said to be the foundation of the spiritual edifice. Secondly, a thing is first among virtues directly, because it is the first step towards God. Now the first step towards God is by faith, according to Heb. 11:6, ‘He that cometh to God must believe.’”²²

- Humility hinders the striving to become great in earthly things:

“The reason why Christ chiefly proposed humility to us, was because it especially removes the obstacle to man’s spiritual welfare consisting in man’s aiming at heavenly and spiritual things, in which he is hindered by striving to become great in earthly things. [...] Thus humility is, as it were, a disposition to man’s untrammelled access

²¹J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 146.

²²*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 161, a. 5, ad 2.

to spiritual and divine goods. Accordingly as perfection is greater than disposition, so charity, and other virtues whereby man approaches God directly, are greater than humility.”²³

11. False humility

- Martin Luther: “The truly humble person is not aware that he is humble.”²⁴
- C.S. Lewis: “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”²⁵
- C. S. Lewis: “Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.”²⁶
- The falsehood (ignorance) does not lie in reason. Even if I judge myself wrongly, the virtue can still exist.
- Too much humility is pride.
- Uriah Heep represents the reverse of the humble person.
“I am well aware that I am the ‘umblest person going.’”

“‘When I was quite a young boy,’ said Uriah, ‘I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, ‘Hard hard!’ When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. ‘People like to be above you,’ says father, ‘keep yourself down.’ I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I’ve got a little power!’”²⁷
- a temptation: The last shall be first.
- the rare ability to laugh at oneself
- no gratitude

²³*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 161, a. 5, ad 4.

²⁴M. Luther, Weimarer Ausg. 7, 560; 562

²⁵C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

²⁶C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 128.

²⁷Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, chap. 39.

12. Humility and Magnanimity

- The contrary direction of humility and yet the same object.
- Humility is a pulling back from, magnanimity is a going out to great things.
- Pieper: “Nothing lights the way to a proper understanding of humility more tellingly than this: humility and high-mindedness not only are not mutually exclusive, but actually are neighbors and akin; and both are equally opposed to either pride or pusillanimity.”²⁸
- Pieper: “What is meant by high-mindedness or magnanimity? It is the striving of the mind toward great things. High-minded is the man who feels the potentiality of greatness and prepares for it.”²⁹
 - Magnanimity denotes the “stretching forth of the mind to great things.”³⁰
- Pieper: “The high-minded man is not crushed by dishonor; he disregards it as something beneath him. The high-minded man despises everything small-minded. He would never prize another man so highly as to do anything improper for his sake.”³¹
- Magnanimity is a part of fortitude, while humility belongs to temperance.
- Pieper writes that humility that “a ‘humility’ too weak and too narrow to be able to bear the inner tension of cohabitation with high-mindedness is not true humility.”³²
- According to the *Historical Dictionary of Philosophy* [*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*] Thomas solves the question on the relation of humility to magnanimity by referring Aristotelian magnanimity to the field of nature and Christian humility to the supernature.³³
- Thomas Aquinas: “There is in man something great which he possesses through the gift of God; and something defective which accrues to him through the weakness of nature. Accordingly magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great

²⁸J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 188.

²⁹J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 188.

³⁰II-II, 129, 1c.

³¹J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 189.

³²J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 189.

³³*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Art. Demut, vol. 2, p. 58]

things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God: thus if his soul is endowed with great virtue, magnanimity makes him tend to perfect works of virtue; and the same is to be said of the use of any other good, such as science or external fortune. On the other hand, humility makes a man think little of himself in consideration of his own deficiency, and magnanimity makes him despise others in so far as they fall away from God's gifts: since he does not think so much of others as to do anything wrong for their sake. Yet humility makes us honor others and esteem them better than ourselves, in so far as we see some of God's gifts in them. [...] It is therefore evident that magnanimity and humility are not contrary to one another, although they seem to tend in contrary directions, because they proceed according to different considerations."³⁴

- The magnanimous person does not despise external good, but makes use of them.³⁵
- But he does despise great honors and is not uplifted by them.
- The magnanimous person does not complain.
 - “The high-minded man does not complain; for his heart is impervious to external evil. High-mindedness implies an unshakable firmness of hope, an actually challenging assurance, and the perfect peace of a fearless heart. The high-minded man bows neither to confusion of the soul, nor to any man, nor to fate but to God alone.”³⁶

13. Pusillanimity

- Pieper: “Nothing lights the way to a proper understanding of humility more tellingly than this: humility and high-mindedness not only are not mutually exclusive, but actually are neighbors and akin; and both are equally opposed to either pride or pusillanimity.”³⁷
- Whether pusillanimity is opposed to magnanimity?

“Pusillanimity may be considered in three ways. First, in itself; and thus it is evident that by its very nature it is opposed to magnanimity, from which it differs as great and little differ in connection with the same subject.”³⁸

³⁴*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 129, a. 3, ad 4.

³⁵“The magnanimous man despises external goods, inasmuch as he does not think them so great as to be bound to do anything unbecoming for their sake. Yet he does not despise them, but that he esteems them useful for the accomplishment of virtuous deeds.” *Ibid.*, 129, a. 8, ad 2.

³⁶J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 189.

³⁷J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 188.

³⁸*Summa theologiae*, II-II, 133, a. 2c.

- Pusillanimity makes a man fall short of what is proportionate to his power:

“Whatever is contrary to a natural inclination is a sin, because it is contrary to a law of nature. Now everything has a natural inclination to accomplish an action that is commensurate with its power: as is evident in all natural things, whether animate or inanimate. Now just as presumption makes a man exceed what is proportionate to his power, by striving to do more than he can, so pusillanimity makes a man fall short of what is proportionate to his power, by refusing to tend to that which is commensurate thereto. Wherefore as presumption is a sin, so is pusillanimity. Hence it is that the servant who buried in the earth the money he had received from his master, and did not trade with it through fainthearted fear, was punished by his master.”³⁹

- The allegory of the talents.

But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. Last came forward the man who had the single talent. ‘Sir,’ said he, ‘I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant!’”⁴⁰

- Pusillanimity may be the result of pride, “when, to wit, a man clings too much to his own opinion, whereby he thinks himself incompetent for those things for which he is competent.”⁴¹

14. Pride

- Pieper: “Humility, too, is not primarily an attitude in human relationships. Humility, too, looks first to God. That which pride denies and destroys, humility affirms and preserves: the creaturely quality of man. If to be a creature to be created is the innermost nature of man, then humility, as ‘subjection of man to God,’ is the affirmation of this essential and primordial fact.

Second: Humility, consequently, is not outward behavior but an inner attitude, born of decision of the will. Regarding God and its own creaturely quality, it is an attitude of perfect recognition of that which, by reason of God’s will, really is above all, it is candid acceptance of this one thing: that man and humanity are neither God nor ‘like God.’ At this point we get a glimpse of the hidden connection that links the Christian

³⁹II-II, 133, 1c.

⁴⁰Mt 25, 18–22. Cf. Lk 19, 20–22.

⁴¹Ibid., ad 3

virtue of humility with the perhaps equally Christian gift of humor.”⁴²

- Desiring to be like God?
- Desiring to be like God is not sinful, for every creature desires to be like God as far as possible. But if this inclination is not guided by reason, then it is sinful.
 - “Reason has the direction of those things for which man has a natural appetite; so that if the appetite wander from the rule of reason, whether by excess or by default, it will be sinful, as is the case with the appetite for food which man desires naturally. Now pride is the appetite for excellence in excess of right reason. Wherefore Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xiv, 13) that pride is the desire for inordinate exaltation’: and hence it is that, as he asserts (De Civ. Dei xiv, 13; xix, 12), ‘pride imitates God inordinately: for it hath equality of fellowship under Him, and wishes to usurp His dominion over our fellow-creatures.’”⁴³
- We may be proud of God’s gifts.
 - “Pride [superbia] may be understood in two ways. First, as overpassing [supergreditur] the rule of reason, and in this sense we say that it is a sin. Secondly, it may simply denominate ‘super-abundance’; in which sense any super-abundant thing may be called pride: and it is thus that God promises pride as significant of super-abundant good. Hence a gloss of Jerome on the same passage (Is. 61:6) says that ‘there is a good and an evil pride’; or ‘a sinful pride which God resists, and a pride that denotes the glory which He bestows.’”⁴⁴
- Humility and magnanimity may have the same objects.
 - Aquinas: “Pride is directly opposed to the virtue of humility, which, in a way, is concerned about the same matter as magnanimity [. . .]. Hence the vice opposed to pride by default is akin to the vice of pusillanimity, which is opposed by default to magnanimity. For just as it belongs to magnanimity to urge the mind to great things against despair, so it belongs to humility to withdraw the mind from the inordinate desire of great things against presumption.
Now pusillanimity, if we take it for a deficiency in pursuing great things, is properly opposed to magnanimity by default; but if we take it for the mind’s attachment to

⁴²J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 190.

⁴³II-II, 162, a. 1, ad 2.

⁴⁴Ibid., 162, a. 1, ad 1.

things beneath what is becoming to a man, it is opposed to humility by default; since each proceeds from a smallness of mind. In the same way, on the other hand, pride may be opposed by excess, both to magnanimity and humility, from different points of view: to humility, inasmuch as it scorns subjection, to magnanimity, inasmuch as it tends to great things inordinately. Since, however, pride implies a certain elation, it is more directly opposed to humility, even as pusillanimity, which denotes littleness of soul in tending towards great things, is more directly opposed to magnanimity.”⁴⁵

- Pride is not the cause of all sins:

Aquinas: “It must, however, be observed that this generic character of pride admits of the possibility of all vices arising from pride sometimes, but it does not imply that all vices originate from pride always. For though one may break the commandments of the Law by any kind of sin, through contempt which pertains to pride, yet one does not always break the Divine commandments through contempt, but sometimes through ignorance and sometimes through weakness.”⁴⁶

- The breaking of a divine commandment is always a case of pride opposed to God – effectively, but not always affectively.
- Pride does not exist in reason, but one of its causes can be reason.

– “Humility observes the rule of right reason whereby a man has true self-esteem. Now pride does not observe this rule of right reason, for he esteems himself greater than he is: and this is the outcome of an inordinate desire for his own excellence, since a man is ready to believe what he desires very much, the result being that his appetite is borne towards things higher than what become him. Consequently whatsoever things lead a man to inordinate self-esteem lead him to pride: and one of those is the observing of other people’s failings, just as, on the other hand, in the words of Gregory (Moral. xxiii, 17), ‘holy men, by a like observation of other people’s virtues, set others above themselves.’ Accordingly the conclusion is not that pride is in the rational faculty, but that one of its causes is in the reason.”⁴⁷

- The inordenateness in reason does not mean that pride exists in reason.

⁴⁵Ibid., 162, a. 1, ad 3.

⁴⁶Ibid., a. 2c.

⁴⁷*Summa theologiae*, q. 162, a. 3, ad 2.

- A virtue can be an occasion for sinful pride.
 - Aquinas: “Pride arises from virtue, not as from its direct cause, but as from an accidental cause, in so far as a man makes a virtue an occasion for pride. And nothing prevents one contrary from being the accidental cause of another [. . .]. Hence some are even proud of their humility.”⁴⁸
- Pride is not one of the capital vices.
 - Aquinas: “The fact that envy, which is a capital vice, arises from pride, does not prove that pride is a capital vice, but that it is still more principal than the capital vices themselves.”⁴⁹
 - Pride lies even deeper.

15. Humility does not imply esteeming others better than oneself

- Merriam-Webster: “the quality or state of not thinking you are better than other people: the quality or state of being humble”
- *Oxford English Dictionary*: “The quality of being humble or having a lowly opinion of oneself”
- *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Art. Humility: “Humility in a higher and ethical sense is that by which a man has a modest estimate of his own worth, and submits himself to others.”
- Phil. 2:3: “In humility, let each esteem others better than themselves.”
- But that is not a virtue.
- Humility is concerned primarily, essentially with God.
- To other people it is only directed indirectly.
- Aquinas: “We may consider two things in man, namely that which is God’s, and that which is man’s. Whatever pertains to defect is man’s: but whatever pertains to man’s welfare and perfection is God’s [. . .].

Every man, in respect of that which is his own, ought to subject himself to every neighbor, in respect of that which the latter has of God’s: but humility does not require a man to subject what he has of God’s to that which may seem to be God’s in another.

⁴⁸*Summa theologiae*, q. 162, a. 5, ad 3.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, a. 8, ad 3.

Without prejudice to humility they may set the gifts they have received from God above those that others appear to have received from Him.

In like manner, humility does not require a man to subject that which he has of his own to that which his neighbor has of man's: otherwise each one would have to esteem himself a greater sinner than anyone else.

Nevertheless a man may esteem his neighbor to have some good which he lacks himself, or himself to have some evil which another has not: by reason of which, he may subject himself to him with humility."⁵⁰

- Pieper: "In the broad and many-graded area of this reply there is room for the 'contempt of men' on the part of the high-minded just as there is for the self-abasement of St. Francis of Assisi, who took off his cowl and had himself brought before the people with a rope around his neck. Here again it becomes evident that Christian teaching is wary of the tightness and confinement of one-track rules. This caution or, better, aversion is voiced by St. Augustine in another though related reference: 'If one man says you should not receive the Eucharist every day, and another says the opposite, let each one do what he thinks he should, in piety, according to his own belief. For neither did Zacchaeus and the Roman officer dispute with one another, although the one received the Lord with joy into his house and the other said: I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof (Luke 19, 6; 7, 6). Both honored the Redeemer, though not in the same manner.'"⁵¹
- In a certain sense, one may esteem himself the worst of men.

Thomas: "It is possible, without falsehood, to deem and avow oneself the most despicable of men . . . Without falsehood one may avow and believe oneself in all ways unprofitable and useless in respect of one's own capability, so as to refer all one's sufficiency to God, according to 2 Cor. 3:5, 'Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God.'"⁵²

16. Can an atheist be humble?

- Humility seems to be Christian.

⁵⁰II-II, 161, a. 3c.

⁵¹J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 191.

⁵²161, a. 6, ad 1.

- Pieper: “Humility, too, is not primarily an attitude in human relationships. Humility, too, looks first to God. That which pride denies and destroys, humility affirms and preserves: the creaturely quality of man. If to be a creature to be created is the innermost nature of man, then humility, as ‘subjection of man to God,’ is the affirmation of this essential and primordial fact.”⁵³
- Creatureliness can be expressed differently. For example, see one’s strengths as gifts, as a grace, as something for which one is grateful.
- laughing at oneself
- even laughing at the humorous.
- Does one see a transcendence in other people?
- Charity (in the sense of love of God as the end of life) causes humility:

Aquinas: “The humbler one is, the higher. ‘For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.’ But the question can be posed: It seems that this is not true for perfection consists in charity, so that where charity is greater there is perfection greater. It ought to be said that humility necessarily accompanies charity. And you can see this if you would consider anyone who is humble. For as in pride there are two things, an inordinate affection and an inordinate opinion of oneself such is the contrary in humility, because it does not care about its own superiority. Likewise, it does not consider itself worthy. This necessarily follows charity. Every man desires the excellence that he loves. Therefore the more humility a man has, so much the more does he love God, and the more he despises his own excellence, the less he attributes to himself: and so the more charity a man has, the more humility he has.”⁵⁴
- Nevertheless, humility is not a theological virtue.

⁵³J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 190.

⁵⁴Thomas von Aquin, *In Matth.*, chap 18, lectio 1.