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HEROIC HUMILITY

*What the Science of Humility Can Say
to People Raised on Self-Focus*

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PREFACE

This book is about a particular type of excellence or virtue that we think is crucial for the 21st century. It is critical because in Western culture, we have been immersed in individualism and orientation toward the self, and now culture shifts have brought about increasing discord, angry political diatribes, and even violence. Arguably, this public discord is due (at least in part) to self-absorption and xenophobia. Politicians seem to be locked in mortal combat. Relationships seem to be about individuals wanting their way. Divorces and cohabitation breakups are common. Many religious people are intolerant and fearful of those of different religions. Refugees and immigrants are often not welcome. Disgruntlement with police and new or renewed racial and ethnic tensions abound. There is civil unrest over gay marriage. Instead of civil discourse, leaders seem so keenly aware of their own constituencies that every utterance is made for their own supporters, so opposing sides not surprisingly grow continually further apart.

Youths want life to matter. They sincerely want to help the needy. Sometimes, though, our observation is that some youths only seem to want to help at times and in ways that are convenient to them. Of course, any altruism is usually a good thing, but today, it seems, even altruistic motives can often be tinged with self-interest.

In the private sphere, if there is a private sphere in today's world of social media, things are just as self-interested. In 2014, Google noted that its customers alone—not counting other consumers—take about 93 million “selfies” daily (Brandt, 2014; Van Tongeren & Myers, 2017). Van Tongeren and Myers (2017) reported that Twitter declared 2014 the “year of the selfie.” People might, from those data, conclude that humility is the virtue that time forgot. If billions of selfies are shared each year and in the era of blood-sport politics, it is legitimate to ask whether humility matters today.

We believe humility does matter. It is key to self- and societal transformation. Thus, this book is about humility, a commonly recognized virtue. We believe that understanding and building more humility will move individuals and society toward some relief from the tensions that beset our culture. Humility demands that we see ourselves accurately, present ourselves modestly, and orient ourselves toward helping others. Humility serves as a corrective to self-focus and ingroup orientation.

Self-absorbed people think of themselves as more, and occasionally less, important than they actually are. They think they can act with either brash in-your-face egoism or aw-shucks-toe-dragging false humility. They think they can be self-interested and live considering only their own ingroup, and somehow that will promote peace, harmony, and worldwide flourishing. As we shall see, research on narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (i.e., the dark triad) and fragile self-esteem suggest that a me-first life orientation does not spread content widely throughout one's social network. Perhaps it is time to look to some new direction. That might be recapturing the classic virtue of humility and then practicing it with heroism even to self-sacrifice.

But humility is not easy to develop or practice in an individualistic culture. It requires courage and moments of extraordinary heroism superimposed over a life of heroic self-sacrifice for the good of others. To help others, leadership is necessary. We thus combine humility, heroism, and leadership in this book.

We hope you will be enriched, enlightened, and encouraged in your study of humility as you read these pages.

HEROIC HUMILITY

INTRODUCTION

Heroic humility is inspirational humility—humility that leads us to want to emulate it. To begin our journey of understanding it, let’s consider how heroism, humility, and leadership might intersect. Scott and his colleagues developed a five-factor theory of leadership (Allison & Goethals, 2011, 2013; Goethals & Allison, 2012). The theory focuses on the leader’s (a) persona, (b) vision, (c) ethics, (d) actions, and (e) influence. But not all leaders are heroic leaders. Heroic leaders are exceptional. Allison and Goethals (2011) surveyed people and factor analyzed the responses. They identified what they called the Great Eight traits that describe heroes: *caring, charismatic, inspiring, reliable, resilient, selfless, smart, and strong*. Where the Great Eight traits of heroes overlap with the five factors of leadership, there is the heroic leader. The intersection centers on helping other people achieve their potential. Heroic leaders have courage and seek to help others, sometimes at great costs to themselves.

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Heroic Humility: What the Science of Humility Can Say to People Raised on Self-Focus, by E. L. Worthington Jr. and S. T. Allison

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Not all heroic leaders are humble. Genghis Khan was a heroic leader, but he was not humble. Some of the great presidents of the United States were heroic leaders, such as Teddy Roosevelt. Although admired, they were not humble heroic leaders, such as George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. That addition of humility to the heroic leader zeroes in on some very exceptional people—those who are not just pursuing leadership positions for the sake of power and personal aggrandizement, or even self-sacrificially but for the betterment of only their own political group or country. Rather, heroically humble leaders are willing to serve others, lead others, and endure costs for others, even for those who might not be in a narrowly focused ingroup.

Humility has three qualities. Humble people are those who (a) have an accurate sense of self, know their limitations, and are teachable; (b) present themselves modestly in ways that do not put others off by arrogance or by false, insincere modesty or displaying weakness; and (c) are especially oriented to advancing others—not through groveling weakness but through power under control, power used to build others up rather than squash them down. This definition is based on numerous research studies that have accumulated since 2008 from the labs of Worthington, Don Davis, Joshua Hook, Daryl Van Tongeren, and our colleagues. Although the definition derives originally from Worthington (2007) and from D. E. Davis, Worthington, and Hook (2010), it has been elaborated on by adding to it the idea of teachability (see Owens & Hekman, 2012), the concept of modest self-presentation (see D. E. Davis, McElroy, Rice, et al., 2016), and a distinct ramping up of focus on being other-oriented (see Worthington, Goldstein, et al., in press). At this point, no single instrument can assess all aspects of the definition. A set of targeted instruments is required.

It is within the grasp of most of us to rise to moments of humility. In fact, we often see interviews with heroes who say such things as, “I didn’t do anything special. I just did what anyone would do.” (They may only have run through a hail of bullets into a fire or through an earthquake to save orphans.) Those are indeed humble heroes, and we are usually astounded by their sincerity in such self-effacing statements about their hero status. Yet, as admirable as such humble heroes are, in this book we are more concerned with a different type of humility. We are concerned with people who are truly humble—self-aware, modest, and other-oriented—but who take that to levels and depths that most of us struggle merely to understand. These are not just humble heroes; they are exemplars of heroic humility. Usually, they are leading organizations and social movements, like Nelson Mandela or Mother Teresa did. But sometimes they are just everyday people whom we cannot help but admire. They seem to be uncaring about their own advancement and promote others—sometimes even others they don’t know but simply think are worthy of advancement. And as one of those exemplars of heroic humility,

they become leaders. In Table 1, we compare aspects of heroes, leadership, and humility to get a sense of what those heroically humble people might be like.

Heroically humble leaders are the noble champions of society that most people are inspired by and aspire to be. They are not weak but are strong at their core. They can employ their assorted virtues to successfully achieve the goals of a group and the people within it. They are virtuous and have worked hard to build positive character, glimpsing the goal to which they personally aspire; practicing virtue until it has become a habit of the heart; meeting tests, trials, temptations, and suffering while maintaining integrity; and experiencing a deep satisfaction (even if they are not exactly happy) because they feel that they are doing the right things.

Most people look up to, and perhaps even learn from and are inspired by, heroic (especially heroically humble) leaders. Although not everyone aspires

TABLE 1
Comparison of Aspects of Leadership, Heroism, and Humility

Five-factor leadership model	Great eight traits of heroes	Definition of humility
<p>Persona: shows high energy, tolerates stress, acts emotionally mature and confident, engenders trust</p> <p>Vision: appeals to the values, hopes, and ideals of the followers; embodies society's most noble ideals</p> <p>Ethics: uses power wisely consistent with the morals and ethics of society; integrity; honesty</p> <p>Actions: acts to benefit the group; works hard to benefit the group; creates (ideas, opportunities, environment for accomplishing goals), communicates, collaborates</p> <p>Influence: communicates their vision to others; models energy and loyalty; builds trust and unity; honors commitments; provides feedback; delegates effectively; coaches others to improve; motivates; inspires</p>	<p>Caring: compassionate, empathic, kind</p> <p>Charismatic: dedicated, eloquent, passionate</p> <p>Inspiring: admirable, amazing, great, inspirational</p> <p>Reliable: loyal, true</p> <p>Resilient: accomplished, determined, persevering</p> <p>Selfless: altruistic, honest, humble, moral</p> <p>Smart: intelligent, wise</p> <p>Strong: courageous, dominating, gallant, leader</p>	<p>Accurate self-appraisal including awareness of limitations</p> <p>Modest self-presentation</p> <p>Other-orientedness that uses one's power under control to lift others up and not squash them down</p>

to be a leader, many people want to build heroic virtues, such as humility, that are uplifting to others and built to last. Not all leaders are humble. Some might touch on humility at times, but few reach the level of heroic humility. Instead, today we are more likely to equate business leadership with just the opposite—hubris, arrogance, and pride.

THE NEED FOR A BOOK ON HEROIC HUMILITY

Humility is a key ingredient for people of today. Yet, finding recent resources about it is difficult.

Generations Have Neglected It

Humility has, until recently, been virtually unaddressed in the popular and scientific literature, though religious resources are more numerous. Many people have been reared on “do your own thing” (the 1960s) high self-esteem (the 1980s and 1990s). Recently, youth have been called “Generation Me” or “iGen,” as Jean Twenge (2014) sometimes refers to the generation from their midthirties and younger. Twenge has devoted countless pages to documenting evidence of this increasing self-focus (see Twenge, 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). With the generations of self-focus, humility is increasingly needed. It might be needed to tear apart the welding of political gridlock, to negotiate across cultures and countries, or to prevent breakups and divorces in romantic relationships.

We Have Forgotten Powerful Heroes of Humility

Humility, at first blush, sounds like something only a weakling would do. It sounds like capitulation, like self-imposed humiliation and self-flagellation. It seems anemic. We seem to have forgotten the heroes of humility like Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, boxer Joe Louis, scientist Marie Curie, activist Harriet Tubman, and rescuer of people in ill-health Mother Teresa. Humility is not a tame virtue. There is power there, but not wild power. Humility involves power under control.

Humility can sometimes be found amid humiliation because humiliation often pushes us to the end of ourselves. Frederick A. Douglass, orator and advocate for freedom from slavery, was raised as a slave. Biographer David J. Bobb (2013) wrote,

Frederick began to see the power of humility through lessons learned in his early life. Whether by negative examples (his masters and mistresses and slave interests throughout his life) or positive examples (his mother

and Uncle Lawson), Frederick saw what it took to be humble even in the midst of humiliation. Submission of one sort was thrust on him as a slave, but before he could escape the bonds of slavery, Frederick had to make himself a student. His humility as a learner was preparation for his life as a leader. In humbling himself as a seeker, he gained the pride and dignity that unfitted him for slavery. (p. 188)

Douglass found other exemplars of humility after escaping from slavery. He worked with abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. After Lincoln released the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass paid honor to Garrison in a speech at Hillsdale College on January 21, 1863. Even though Douglass had broken with him 12 years earlier, he still recalled how much he owed to Garrison and honored his tireless work. Douglass said of Garrison, "Truth was powerful; a single individual armed with truth was a majority against the world" (Bobb, 2013, p. 181).

Humility Seemed to Be Relegated to Religious People

In the early 20th century, humility was seen as something fit for religion, but to be hidden behind sacred doors and out of secular view. Humility was not a seemly virtue, it was thought, for business or community organizations. During the late 1970s, writers suggested that humility might help organizations. In 1979, Christopher Lasch claimed that the United States had embraced a culture of narcissism. (Oh, how prescient.) He suggested that humility was essential to successful cultural progress. After those early writings, even with the brief popularity of Greenleaf's (1977) servant-leader model, humility lay dormant in both organizations and secular society.

Suddenly the Need for Humility Became Starkly Apparent

In the early 21st century, the need for humility burst through church doors into the halls of corporate power. A series of accusations of fraud and dishonesty occurred. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Enron Jeff Skilling and former CEO of Enron Kenneth Lay were accused of fraud in 2001. Bernie Ebbers met a similar fate in 2002. Tyco's CEO Dennis Kozlowski and Chief Financial Officer Mark Swartz were added to the wall of shame. In 2003, HealthSouth's CEO Richard Scrushy (shall we say) slightly exaggerated their assets to the tune of \$1.4 billion to appease shareholders, and Freddie Mac's executive management team also exaggerated (by \$5 billion) their assets and were caught at it. In 2005, Hank Greenberg (American Insurance Group's CEO) and Lehman Brothers' executives and auditors were caught hiding \$50 billion in loans disguised as sales. Not to be outdone, Bernie Madoff used a Ponzi scheme to bilk investors out of \$65 billion. The trend continued. In almost all of these

cases, analysts agreed that massive pride, hubris, entitlement, and arrogance were root causes (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013).

In a decade, these ethical failures, with pride at the base, created questions about business leadership. Were business leaders being trained in profit-at-any-cost self-interest that ignores others—investors, shareholders, individuals in the company, legitimate competitors within the industry, and the general population? Weick (2001) observed that humility was a vital, yet at that point neglected, personality trait for business leaders in the 21st century. Hess and Ludwig (2017) surveyed the recent advances in artificial intelligence and dubbed humility “the new smart” because *smart* humans have to recognize our limits.

Enter a Science of Humility

Fortunately, just as the social, relational, and personal needs for humility became critical, the science of humility exploded. Many studies of humility have burst on the scene in the past 10 years. Several grants have funded subaward grant competitions that, in turn, have funded (or will fund) multiple research labs, principal investigators, collaborators, postdocs, and graduate students. The infrastructure is being constructed right now for a robust science of humility.

One area in the psychological literature could address humility’s obverse—narcissism. H. M. Wallace and Baumeister (2002) observed that people with subclinical narcissistic personality traits seek esteem in their own and others’ eyes by competitively trying to outperform others and thus win admiration. The level of subclinical narcissism moderates this relationship. People on the high end of the (subclinical) narcissism continuum tend to work harder to reach their goals when they know people are watching, whereas people on the low end tend to work equally hard regardless of whether they believe people are watching. Some of the personal and societal difficulties that we have noted have arisen from 21st-century narcissistic entitlement and to a lesser extent from the millennial mindset. Those might be dealt with by applying basic research to narcissism—especially subclinical narcissism. However, to do so, we believe, would set up a negative framework. It would focus attention on what not to do or how not to be narcissistic. It would not tell what to do. We know that in many areas, the absence of one thing does not necessarily imply its opposite. The absence of diseases does not mean one is healthy. The absence of depression does not mean one is happy. The absence of anxiety does not mean one is peaceful. Similarly, the elimination of narcissism does not mean one is acting humbly in a positive, health-producing, society-benefiting way. Some characteristics need cultivation to promote flourishing. We believe one of those is humility.

Thus, humility might be a virtue that holds promise in an age when vanity in the form of narcissism seems to be an ever-increasing phenomenon (Twenge, 2014). Political humility is needed in an age of embittered, name-calling, belittling gridlocked politics (Worthington, 2017). Relational humility is needed in an age of divorce, couple conflict, organizational power politics, and institutional frauds (D. E. Davis, Placeres, et al., 2017).

INTEREST IN THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF HUMILITY

Worthington, Davis, and Hook (2017) searched PsycINFO on July 1, 2016. We adapted their findings in Table 1. In 4-year increments, we summarize next the number of indexed publications that used the word *humility* (see Table 2).

We can see that there is much existing research and theoretical writing on humility. The rate of publication is increasing, and that uptrend started with the initiation of the positive psychology movement (1999–2000). In fact, the rate of increase of publication is a modest exponential curve—an appropriately humble growth rate. Much of the writing prior to 1999 was theoretical. It encouraged developing a virtuous character or recommended humility as a trait for successful psychotherapists. Little research was empirical except for a measure of personality traits (i.e., the HEXACO model on Honesty–Humility). However, since positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), with its commitment to the empirical study of the virtues, took hold (probably 2002–2003), the tide has changed. Much research and scientific theorizing has taken place. The doubling time for number of publications has been about 4 years.

We are seeing many signs that a science of humility has taken root. In 2008, I (Ev) was fortunate to receive a grant to study humility in couples making

TABLE 2
PsycINFO Publications Indexing the Word Humility
(1,339 total hits from 1900–2015)

Years	Number of publications indexed in PsycINFO
1900–1995	211
1996–1999	36
2000–2003	77
2004–2007	186
2008–2011	292
2012–2015	537
2016–June 28, 2017 (18 months)	337 (on schedule for 854 in 4-year period)

the transition to parenthood, which gave me a leg up at establishing a program of research on humility. That grant led to a national conference on humility research in Atlanta in 2015 and an edited book on humility (Worthington et al., 2017). In the 2010s, the John Templeton Foundation funded three grants that had provisions for funding more research on humility. Although humility has now been increasingly mentioned in almost 1,700 articles, the direct and principal focus of empirical research articles on humility is less—more like 483 articles in which *humility* is a keyword. This is great news for investigators jumping into its scientific study. There is still much low-hanging fruit.

Research has accumulated in a curve matching the rate of increase in Table 2, but publications are now poised to explode. We estimate that about 30 research teams have been funded on those initiatives. Research teams engage doctoral-level collaborators, use postdocs, train doctoral and master's students, hire paid research assistants, and expose volunteer undergraduate research assistants to the research. The infrastructure of researchers who will study humility in the next decade is growing daily.

Furthermore, the exposure has cut across disciplines. All manner of psychologists—social, personality, health and neuro-, organizational, clinical, and counseling psychologists—have studied humility. Other fields have joined the fun—marriage and family specialists, human development scientists, management scholars, leadership scholars, neuroeconomists, biologists, nurses, physicians, psychiatrists, psychometricians, conflict resolution specialists, and peace workers. We believe that this book will entice people from many disciplines to study humility and could entice a variety of professional applications to diverse other fields.

Although we draw research and illustrations from this variety of disciplines, we have a special affinity for several of the fields because the overlap with and integration into those fields is most obvious. First, we draw heavily from positive psychology, which itself is eclectic. Most positive psychologists would define the field as either the psychological science of character strength and virtue or of happiness and well-being. We find humility to snuggle in most comfortably to a definition that emphasizes character strength and virtue. But as with positive psychology, liberal support is drawn from topics, methods, and styles from personality, social, psychophysiological, clinical, counseling, and other subdisciplines.

Second, we draw on research and theory from social psychology. At the very basic level, we emphasize the power of the situation—with relationships being a key to structuring situations. Thus, we incorporate interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and sociometer theory (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995), which focus on the ways people shape their personalities (including their senses of self and their self-esteem; see Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003) and relationships

in response to social perception. We clearly acknowledge people's unconscious biases, which Kahneman (2011) helped identify and social psychology expanded by thoroughly investigating self-enhancing biases (Kwan, John, Kenny, Bond, & Robins, 2004). And we examine the difficulty of maintaining and practicing virtuous behavior through referring frequently to topics such as willpower and ego depletion (see Baumeister & Tierney, 2011) and self-control (Finkel & Campbell, 2001).

Third, we often draw on personality psychology as well. We refer to the helpfulness of the person–perception strain of personality (Funder, 1995) in measuring humility, and we examine the personality correlates with humility (for a review, see Leman, Haggard, Meagher, & Rowatt, 2017).

Fourth, we are particularly grateful to counseling, clinical, and organizational psychologies. Together, they help us apply many of the findings from more basic research using positive psychological and social psychological methods.

Accordingly, we hope to address many theoretical, empirical, and practical questions in this book. These are relevant to (a) scientists who study humility and its antecedents and sequelae and (b) psychological scientists who apply the findings to psychotherapy, business, organizations, leadership, political science, and other areas.

FOCUS OF THE BOOK

We seek to analyze the rapidly emerging science of humility. We contextualize it within the current need for heroic humble leadership in society, relationships, and personal lives. We arrive at the fundamental concept of the book—heroic humility. This is a trait by people who practice humility consistently, especially when their ego is placed under strain and the practice of humility is difficult. We are particularly focused on one aspect of heroic humility—its warm orientation toward others, seeking to lift others by using power under control, tempered by promoting good in those others.

What We Seek to Accomplish

David Brooks, *New York Times* syndicated columnist, wrote a brilliant book in 2015, *The Road to Character*. In it, he described Frances Perkins (1880–1965). She was one of two aides to stick with Franklin D. Roosevelt for his entire term as president, and she was a major force in shaping the policies of Roosevelt's New Deal administration. She was the central force in creating Social Security, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Public Works Administration, and (by way of the Fair Labor Standards Act) the

first minimum wage law and overtime law. She was deeply involved in child labor legislation and unemployment insurance. After ending her time in government, she wrote a biography of Roosevelt.

I began to see what the great teachers of religion meant when they said that humility was the greatest of virtues. . . . If you can't learn it, God will teach it to you by humiliation. Only so can a man be really great, and it was in those accommodations for necessity that Franklin Roosevelt began to approach the stature of humility and inner integrity which made him truly great. (Perkins, 1946/2011, p. 29)

Brooks (2015) described her education at Mount Holyoke College (South Hadley, Massachusetts). We were struck with how much his description captures themes explored in this book:

A dozen voices from across the institution told students that . . . a well-lived life involves throwing oneself into struggle, that large parts of the most worthy lives are spent upon the rack, testing moral courage and facing opposition and ridicule, and that those who pursue struggle end up being happier than those who pursue pleasure.

Then it told them that the heroes in this struggle are not the self-aggrandizing souls who chase after glory; they are rather the heroes of renunciation, those who accept some arduous calling. . . . It emphasized that performing service is . . . a debt you are repaying for the gift of life.

Then it gave them concrete ways to live this life of steady heroic service. . . . The Mount Holyoke education was dominated by theology and the classics—Jerusalem and Athens. The students were to take from religion an ethic of care and compassion, and from the ancient Greeks and Romans a certain style of heroism—to be courageous and unflinching in the face of the worst the world could throw at you. (pp. 29–30)

Misconceptions We Seek to Combat

We believe that the public perception of humility is sometimes negative. By the end of the book, we hope you will not share those unhelpful perceptions. For example, many people think of humility as follows (misconceptions in italics): (a) *Humility is a Christian topic.* It isn't. It is a human topic. We approach it as a secular topic. Although some studies we review have assessed Christians (and other religious people), most have not. (b) *It is associated with humiliation.* This is a misunderstanding of humility. Our emphasis on heroic humility—humility so deeply embraced that it is of heroic proportions—and on our tripartite definition should easily discredit this. (c) *It means one has to present oneself (and perhaps actually become) a person of low self-esteem, "aw-shucks" modesty, and personal weakness.* That will hamper achievement. Our emphasis on heroic humility should easily discredit this, too. (d) *Humility*

is thought of as a doorway to being taken advantage of and abused, because it is assumed to be equated with absolute deference to authority. This is false. We treat it not as a lack of power but as power under control. Professor and writer John Dickson (2011) defined humility (incompletely, we think, but partially true in this regard) as “willingness to hold power in service of others” (p. 24). (e) *Humility is often thought of as something that might be favored by the already powerful but not good for the disempowered and socially marginalized.* We disagree. Gandhi was among the disempowered and socially marginalized, yet he brought the British Empire to heel. Nelson Mandela was imprisoned and abused, yet he, through tender-hearted, tough-minded humility, took down apartheid and united South Africa. (f) *Being more humble is a matter of willpower, self-control, or exerting conscious ego control over unconscious impulses.* We confess that we do hope that many people who read this book will personally conclude that they would like to become more humble more of the time. We believe wholeheartedly that such transformation requires some willpower, self-control, self-regulation (Ng et al., 2012), and grit (Duckworth, 2016) to stick with the transformative process when it threatens to grind to a halt. But grasping at humility by force of willpower is like trying to close your fingers on air. It is elusive. Rather, it is through focusing actively and passionately on others that one finds one has become more humble.

None of these common beliefs is true. Just the opposite of each is actually true. It is for Christians *and* people who are not Christian. It is not being humiliated, which is accepting a position of degraded worth, but it is understanding one’s true worth. It is not merely a self-presentational style, but it is an attitude of living that is respectful of self and other. It is not failing to stand up for oneself or others who are needy, but it is using power under control to stand up for those who need power. It is possible to be humble even when having no political or social power and yet emerge with more social power.

Organization of the Book

In the first part of the book, we provide a scientifically informed description of humility. We examine the different types of humility. We also show how humility is measured.

In the second part, we discuss what science has shown to be related to humility, including social correlates; relationships to other virtues and vices; mental health and physical health sequelae; relationships with religion, spirituality, and philosophy; and the promise of connections between humility and a better life for individuals and society.

Then, in the third part, we discuss the need for heroic leadership and humble leaders. In that portion, we argue that heroic humility can be a personally stabilizing, even a world-stabilizing force today.

In the final part, we draw together the insights and integrate them with the scientific findings. We offer direct advice, bolstered by scientific findings, on how people might be more heroically humble, and we describe the results of clinical trials that have studied the efficacy of a workbook to promote humility. In an epilogue, we extract important lessons from the book.

Questions

Several important questions arise from our review. These questions suggest that learning more about humility is vital in this modern world.

Aren't We Just Talking About Learning Humility From Humble Models?

We describe many humble heroes and people exhibiting heroic humility. We draw from well-known leaders, but we also discuss everyday heroes and hope to inspire more. In fact, we pepper the book with exemplars of heroic humility. Cognitive psychology tells us that most learning isn't due to rational, logical teaching. Rather, learning involves intuition and experience, and we can gain much of that intuition and experience by observing models, exemplars, and heroes. But learning humility is not just about copying models as described by social learning theory (Bandura, 1963). Rather, heroic humility is more than demonstrating behaviors or attitudes. We can learn to drive by watching experienced drivers, like our parents, yet from such models we don't usually decide that we want to be the next NASCAR champion. But many people who saw the work of Mother Teresa and Gandhi were inspired to change their lives and also have the humility they were observing. This is the difference between copying models and being inspired by heroic humility.

Will I, a Psychological Scientist, Be Interested in This Book?

Certainly, high-profile researchers like Jean Twenge (2014) and her colleague Keith Campbell (Twenge & Campbell, 2009) have called attention to today's narcissistic trends in "normal" self-expression. This might suggest that research is needed to balance narcissistic pressures. On one hand, more and better research on humility has appeared within the past 15 years. Numerous researchers are studying humility. Even better, young researchers who are looking for a field to devote themselves to can join early in the field's development. Studying humility, providing more information about it, and helping those who wish to become more humble are noble acts. Humility can benefit individuals, couples, families, communities, societies, and the world as a whole. You'll catch that glimpse throughout this book. The supply and demand are coalescing. We hope you agree with our analysis: This is a scientific field on the cusp of explosion.

*Will I, a Psychological Scientist, Find the Book and Topic
to Be One That Sustains My Interest?*

There are several reasons, given next, to believe that people will once again come to embrace humility as a cherished virtue and that this will repay scientific study. People are seeing that some mental health disorders are due to competitiveness, stress, narcissism, and self-focus. Best-selling books by David Brooks (2015) and Jean Twenge's (2014) *Generation Me* suggest that the problems with self-focus and the solutions afforded through humility can make inroads into public consciousness. The need for knowing more about humility is important to life today. This is true for business, professions, politics, religion, relationships, and the person on the street. In fact, Worthington et al. (2017) recently edited a collection of scholarly articles on humility. In their introduction, they pointed out important topics to look for throughout the book. They stated five hypotheses—that humility might be related to virtue, social functioning, health, societal peace, and satisfaction with life—which they thought were vital connections. But they also identified seven other important, but probably not essential, questions. Next, we paraphrase some of those questions regarding religious, political, intellectual, cultural, and relational humility (see Worthington et al., 2017, pp. 8–9).

Religions value humility, and worldwide, most people still are religious (Berger et al., 1999). Virtually all religious and spiritual traditions value humility and provide mechanisms and rituals by which their adherents are encouraged to be more humble. If people exercised more *religious humility*, religious conflict and violence would probably lessen. Religious humility speaks to the conflicts that have recently intensified between radical Muslims and other religions and people in secular societies. This has shown up in such ways as the massacre of over 2,000 people in Nigeria by Boko Haram and by the attacks on a variety of sites in Paris, Turkey, and throughout the world. Muslims of differing theologies need to dialogue to work out a position that decreases violence and prevents worldwide reaction against Islam. In fact, people of all religions need to be in dialogue with each other. Conflicts involve every major religion. Religion is a major motivator of behavior. It is imperative in the modern world to be able to respect others' religions while humbly adhering to one's own religious beliefs and practices.

If people exercised more *political humility*, we might have more civil political campaigns and elections. Political gridlock would be lessened because mutual respect might engage lawmakers more in finding solutions than in pandering to special contingencies. Conflict will likely never be eradicated, but more worldwide political humility might lead to fewer political struggles within nations—and (we can dream) fewer wars. For a civil society that values differences and freedom to talk about those differences, political humility is also necessary. In recent decades, political dialogues have become

more polarized. Even within parties, polarization has germinated, sprouted, and grown—like a cancer, some might say. Understanding how humility might mitigate polarization could help promote more thriving and peaceful governments.

If people exercised more *intellectual humility*, they might share more risky ideas, engage in synthetic win-win problem solving, and express less intellectual arrogance. To have civil conversations and discuss ideas that advance knowledge usually requires thinking outside of the box. So, for productive discussions, we need intellectual humility. Ideally, intellectual communities might correct self-interested biases. But we live in a deeply self-justifying world, so we often tend to bolster biases instead of correct them. But, to the extent we can become more intellectually humble, perhaps some of those biases might be put aside. That might help many communities not become so entrenched in the absolute “rightness” of their ideas.

If people exercised more *cultural humility*, we might improve international relations, help international businesses thrive, and have better relations across ethnicities. In today’s worldwide culture, we need humility to deal with multinational corporations and in international travel. We spend each day interacting with and exchanging information with people across cultures. (Just today, I [Ev] have arranged a meeting with a lawyer from Colombia, e-mailed a professor from Germany and another from Spain, and worked on a grant with people from both Ghana and South Africa—a typical day.) Within the helping professions, cultural humility is crucial. A helper must understand many people’s problems in the context of their culture.

If people exercised more *relational humility*, we might live more peaceably in romantic partnerships, families, workplaces, and communities. Relational humility refers to our ability to place the needs of the relationship over self-interest. Thus, relational humility looks different in different types of relationships. We must be sympathetic to the other person, consider his or her needs, and then—because in humility we are other-oriented—we elevate the other person’s agenda for the good of the relationship. We create a context where sacrificing for the relationship becomes self-reinforcing because partners value each other. This can contribute to a sense of trust. In support of a warm other-orientation as an essential component of humility, Thielmann and Hilbig (2015) examined personality traits (using the HEXACO model) within a trust game. Trustworthiness was predicted by unconditional kindness—operationalized by honesty-humility—but not by either positive reciprocity or negative reciprocity. This at least hints at a warmth component of humility. Partners can become more committed when they perceive each other as trustworthy and can enjoy giving to each other. Humility helps relationships thrive.

In short, we believe your interest in humility, and research on it, can be self-sustaining. This is true because its importance and relevance today and in the future will likely increase.

Will the Scientific Study of Humility Enrich Humanity?

Taken together, more knowledge about the varieties of humility and more examples of how people throughout history have acted humbly in very difficult situations can pay off for individuals, families, groups, communities, societies, and the world. The stakes are high. Egos are on display everywhere and conflict with each other. And humility often hides when egos are strained. So, now is the time for us to consolidate the knowledge and experiences we have in a variety of areas regarding humility so that we can formulate agendas that set the next steps to social improvement. In the following chapters, we seek to consolidate scientific knowledge while making an important case that humility is formed and nurtured as people are oriented toward others.

We believe that the field needs consolidation, and we are taking a step in that direction with this book. The new generation of researchers who are actively pursuing research in humility, as well as their postdocs and students, are all pursuing research agendas. We hope to describe some of those agendas in the remaining pages. We try not to “preach” humility as the cure to all ills or human suffering. But we certainly believe that humility has a lot of payoffs, that heroically humble people have things to teach us, and that a nascent science of applying humility can teach us things about self-improvement, character development, organizational living, and leadership.

INTRODUCTION TO AND THEMES OF HEROIC HUMILITY

Throughout the book we keep returning to several major themes.

1. Scientific study of humility has burgeoned. There is consensus about the definition of humility. One major question remains: Is humility merely lack of self-focus, or is it focusing on others (and thereby focusing less on the self)? We take the latter position.
2. The scientific study of humility has progressed because scientists have gotten past the measurement conundrum—that one cannot trust self-reports of humility.
3. Hypotheses can be formulated regarding humility. Many have received empirical support. These include our definition of humility; humility’s connection to other virtues; the relationship

of humility to good social relationships; and the benefits of being humble to physical health, mental health, spirituality, society, and one's ultimate life satisfaction.

4. If humility is to experience a cultural resurgence, we must be weaned from the self-focus that Western culture has been nursed on. That will require heroism, leadership, and humility. Developing humble heroic leadership is personally and culturally beneficial.
5. This is possible in our very me-oriented culture. We provide examples in historical, religious, political, and public life that illustrate aspects of humility, show how it looks in practice, and inspire people to move toward development of heroic humility.
6. Many have become heroically humble, some even rising from adversity or from dishonor.
7. We draw researchable life lessons from both the science of humility and from the models of heroic humility that we identified to show how people can develop humility in the midst of a self-focused culture. We discuss the strains and challenges of being humble.
8. Clinical trials have tested the use of a humility-promoting workbook, *PROVE Humility*.
9. There are practical ways that psychological and clinical scientists can help others be more humble and reap humility's benefits.

As we move into the in-depth study of humility, we begin, in Part I, at the most basic level. What is humility? How does it reveal itself? How is it assessed?

WHAT DID WE LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER?

1. Heroic humility is inspirational. It is humility so deeply ingrained in a person and so consistently practiced that we want to emulate it to be a more noble person.
2. Humility has three characteristics: Humble people (a) have an accurate sense of self, know their limitations, and are teachable; (b) present themselves modestly; and (c) are especially oriented to advancing others by using their power under control to build others up and not to squash them down.
3. We need a book on heroic humility because (a) recent generations have neglected humility; (b) we have forgotten many inspirational heroes of humility; (c) it isn't just for religious

people; and (d) arrogance has led to spectacular falls from power in business, and 2016 political campaigning was hardly a paragon of humility on either side.

4. The study of humility—religious, political, intellectual, cultural, and relational humilities—can help people be better and build a better world. It can engage scientists in a new ground floor field, which is on the verge of exploding in activity.
5. We identified nine themes to which we will repeatedly return.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What are the differences between a humble hero and heroic humility?
2. Where do you stand on the definition of humility? Must people simply be less self-focused to be humble, or do they need to be oriented to help others?
3. Which is the most important reason to study humility scientifically, and why: because deficits in humility show how very much individuals and society need humility or because we might do good things through the study.