

Humility in Historical and Contextual Perspective

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CATALOG DESCRIPTION

Humility has long been regarded as a keystone of the Christian faith, and is also a foundational virtue for a number of major world religions. This course aims to introduce students to key texts, figures, and concepts associated with the virtue of humility. While the primary discipline of engagement will be Christian theology, students will also interact with material from psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and Muslim, Buddhist, Confucian thought in light of the Southeast Asian context.

The first half of the course will focus on historical debates about humility, while the second half of the course will focus on contemporary challenges. In addition to giving students a deeper acquaintance with historically influential texts, the course will also seek to help students formulate an understanding of the virtue that is relevant for their cultural context, attending to the unique ways in which humility is understood and embodied in various times and places.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students should show measurable improvement in their ability to:

- Assemble the biblical data on humility in a coherent and thoughtful manner.
- Identify the distinctions between various definitions of humility within the Christian tradition, and between Christian tradition and other faiths.
- Explain contemporary social science focused on the measurement and cultivation of humility.
- Make critical assessments of the various accounts of humility covered in the course, describing their benefits and liabilities in their own words.
- Develop an account of humility that is relevant to their cultural and vocational contexts.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Primary Sources*

- Confucius. *The Analects*. Translated by Raymond Dawson. New York: Oxford, 2008.
- Holmes, Michael, trans. *The Apostolic Fathers in English*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
- Waddell, Helen, trans. *The Desert Fathers*. New York: Vintage, 1998.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. New York: Oxford, 2008.
- Benedict of Nursia. *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. Translated by Timothy Fry. New York: Vintage, 1998.
- Haleem, M. A. S. Abdel, trans. *The Qur'an*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Bernard of Clairvaux. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*. Translated by G. R. Evans. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist, 1987.

Thomas Aquinas, Questions 161–162 in the second part of the second part of the *Summa Theologiae*.

Luther, Martin. *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*. Translated by Gerhard O. Forde. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996.

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. John B. Stewart, 2nd ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1966).

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

*Note that almost all of these sources are in public domain and available readily online; while students may be better able to engage with the readings with books in hand, they are also welcome to inquire regarding where to find the best online translations of these resources. If resources are available, we may also arrange to have a copy of the relevant excerpts of each text bound into a course manual.

Contemporary Sources

Foulcher, Jane. *Reclaiming Humility: Four Studies in the Monastic Tradition*. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian, 2015.

Essays and articles listed below will be provided to students electronically.

Suggested Choices for Book Reviews

Bobb, David J. *Humility: An Unlikely Biography of America's Greatest Virtue*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013.

Brooks, David. *The Road to Character*. New York: Random House, 2015.

Burton-Christie, Douglas. *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Dickson, John P. *Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

Driver, Julia. *Uneasy Virtue*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Lounibos, John B. *Self-Emptying of Christ and the Christian: Three Essays on Kenosis*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.

Richards, Norvin. *Humility*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Book Review** – Students will write a 1200–1500-word review of a book related to humility. They may choose a book from the list of readings above, or may request to have a different book approved by the professor. Reviews should be 1/3 to 1/2 summary, and 1/2 to 2/3 analysis and critique.

2. Final Project – For their final project, students may either write a paper or produce a summative project. Those who choose to write a paper will write a **4000-5000-word research paper** focusing on the **intersection of humility and some area of particular interest**. Students are encouraged to consider their cultural and vocational context when choosing a paper topic. Thus, students living or working in a predominately non-Christian environment may wish to examine more closely the relationship between a classic or contemporary Christian formulation of humility and the accounts of humility (or lack thereof) prevalent in their contexts. Similarly, students may wish to examine a specific issue arising from their vocational or ministry context—from church ministry to military service—and develop a systematic and thoughtful approach to the ways in which a Christian account of humility can aid in addressing such needs.

Papers should be written in Chicago style, and should make use of scholarly books and articles to explore their topics. Where culture plays a key role, students should strongly consider the use of accessible anthropological literature rather than relying merely on first-hand accounts.

Every student also has the option of completing an alternative summative project.

These projects should achieve the same objectives as the paper—exploring the relationship between a Christian conception of humility and contextual (cultural or vocational) concerns, using suitable scholarly literature in the process—but may take a variety of formats. Thus, students may wish to write a catechism designed to aid Christian education and formation by defining humility clearly and noting its implications in a particular context. Or students may wish to develop a “humility intervention” designed to aid in the cultivation of the virtue in their workplace, ministry context, or church.

Alternative summative projects should be accompanied by a 2–3-page document explaining the rationale for the approach taken, the project’s intended outcomes, and the challenges encountered in the process of development. A bibliography of the resources the student consulted should be attached. Further arrangements will be made between the professor and students on an individual basis.

Final Projects are due on the final day of the course, but students should submit a brief prospectus to the professor by Class #7.

3. Participation and presentations – Students are required not only to come to class, but also to be active participants in the process of learning. In concrete terms, this means (1) coming prepared with questions about the reading—at least 1 for each chapter read, (2) participating in classroom discussion, even when it feels difficult or irrelevant, and (3) listening well to the professor and/or fellow students as they speak throughout the course. In addition, students will have the opportunity to sign up to lead a discussion of at least one (perhaps two, depending on the number of students) reading. Students are expected to do extra research and analysis in order to facilitate a thoughtful discussion of their assigned reading. Each student may have 1 unexcused absence without penalty.

4. Reading Quizzes— Six times throughout the semester, there will be an unannounced quiz over the day's reading assignment. The questions will be easy enough so that anyone who has read the assignment *thoroughly* should receive a perfect or near-perfect score, but hard enough that anyone who has not read will miss most of the questions. At the end of the semester, the lowest quiz score will be dropped.

GRADING AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

Grading

Weight of Assignments:

Book Review	25%
Final Project	40%
Participation	20%
Reading Quizzes	15%

A Word About Electronic Devices: I am fully supportive of the wise use of technology to aid in the educational process. However, I have also observed (and experienced!) the remarkable levels of distraction that laptops, tablets, and cell phones can bring students. The sad reality is that many students are missing out on learning opportunities during their brief time here because of these devices. Therefore: **I request that all students leave their cellphones aside for the 2 hours of class, except in cases of emergency. I also reserve the right to ban tablets or laptops if they seem to be distracting some or all of us from our primary task together.**

Academic Dishonesty

Like all educational endeavors, this course is partially about learning content, and partially about acquiring intellectual virtues. In some regards, these virtues are a more important aspect of your education than learning the content. Academic dishonesty occurs when a student breaches the institutional policies in place, and usually includes (but is not limited to) suggesting that someone else's work is one's own. Violations will be treated in accordance with institutional policies, and can jeopardize your enrollment. More importantly, academic dishonesty prevents you from gaining all that you can from the course, and damages students' integrity. *If you're ever unsure about whether something may violate good ethical standards, please ask. I'm here to help.*

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Format:

We will aim to spend about 1/3 of our class time in lecture, about 1/3 in student-led discussion, and about 1/3 in professor-led discussion.

Class #1: *Introduction*: The Promise and Peril of Humility

DUE: Foulcher, "Introduction: Why Humility," and "Virtue or Vice? Humility among the Virtues," pp. xix–xxiii and pp. 1–36 in *Reclaiming Humility*.

→Sign up for student-led discussions.

Class #2: *Foundations*: Humility in Scripture and the Apostolic Fathers

DUE: Psalm 8; Hebrews 2; I Cor 1:18–2:16; Philippians 2:1–11; John 13:1–20.

Apostolic Fathers (Holmes): *1 Clement* (pp. 36–72) and Ignatius's *To the Ephesians* and *To the Smyrneans* (pp. 87–102 and 121–125).

Class #3: *New Development*: Humility in Early Christian Monasticism

DUE: *Desert Fathers* (Waddell): pp. 63–135.

Benedict of Nursia, *Monastic Rule*: chapter 7, on humility.

Foulcher, "Humility and Community," pp. 95–164.

Recommended: Foulcher, "Humility and the Self: Desert Monasticism," pp. 37–86.

Class #4: *Deus Humilis*: Augustine on Human and Divine Humility

DUE: Augustine, *Confessions* (Chadwick): Books 1 and 7 (pp. 3–23 and 111–132).

John C. Cavadini, "Pride," pp. 679–684 in Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini, eds.,

Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

Dunnington, "Humility: An Augustinian Perspective," *Pro Ecclesia*, forthcoming.

Class #5: *Mystical and Rational Developments*: Medieval Meditations on Humility

DUE: Thomas Aquinas, Questions 161–162 in the second part of the second part of the *Summa Theologiae*.

Bernard of Clairvaux (Evans): pp. 99–144, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride."

Overmyer, "Exalting the Meek Virtue of Humility," *Heythrop Journal* 56, 650–662.

Recommended: Foulcher, "Humility and Public Life: Bernard of Clairvaux," pp. 165–242.

Class #6: *From Luther to Kant*: Early Modern Accounts of Humility

DUE: Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation* (Forde): theses 19–24, pp. 23–102.

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Pluhar): pp. 334–355, 408.

Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility*: pp. 133–162.

Class #7: *Things Get Complicated*: Modern Objections to Humility

DUE: Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Stewart): pp. 106–124.

Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (Todd): pp. 198–209.

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Smith): pp. 87–100.

→**Final Project Proposals**

Class #8: *Intellectual Humility, Part I* Definitions and Measurements

DUE: Wood and Roberts, *Intellectual Virtues: A Regulative Epistemology*, pp. 236–256.

Whitcomb et al., “Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91 (2015).

Selections from forthcoming special issue of *Journal of Positive Psychology* on intellectual humility.

Class #9: *Intellectual Humility, Part II*: Implications and Cultivation

DUE: Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar*, pp. 1–22

Pardue, *The Mind of Christ: Humility and the Intellect in Early Christian Theology*, pp. 157–182.

McElroy, Stacey E., Kenneth G. Rice, Don E. Davis, Joshua N. Hook, Peter C. Hill, Everett L. Worthington, and Daryl R. Van Tongeren. “Intellectual Humility: Scale Development and Theoretical Elaborations in the Context of Religious Leadership.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 42 (2014): 19–30.

Class #10: Kenosis: Christian and Buddhist Developments

DUE: Daphne Hampson, "On Power and Gender," *Modern Theology* 4 (1988): 234–50.
Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 1–39.
Lounibos, *Self-Emptying of Christ and the Christian: Three Essays on Kenosis*, 85–102.

Class #11: Alternative Accounts: Humility in Islam and Confucianism

DUE: *Qur'an*, Surrahs 7, 18, 43.
Analects Book 15.
Jamie Schillinger, "Intellectual Humility and Interreligious Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23 (2012): 363–80.
Sara Rushing, "What Is Confucian Humility?," in *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism*, ed. Stephen C. Angle and Michael Slote (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 173–181.

Class #12: Practices: Interventions for Cultivating Humility

DUE: Lavelock, Caroline R., Everett L. Worthington, Don E. Davis, Brandon J. Griffin, Chelsea A. Reid, Joshua N. Hook, and Daryl R. Van Tongeren. "The Quiet Virtue Speaks: An Intervention to Promote Humility." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 42 (2014): 99–110.
Results of Andrew Cuthbert's Experiment, "A Church-Based Humility Intervention."
Foulcher, "Conclusion: Reclaiming Humility for the Twenty-First Century," pp. 307–316.

Class #13: Catch-Up Day and/or Student Presentations of Final Project Findings

DUE: None.

Class # 14: Student Presentations of Final Project Findings

DUE: Final Paper or Summative Project
