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Humility: Benedictine spirituality and contemporary psychology in dialogue

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
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Dissertation

**HUMILITY: BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY
AND CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY IN DIALOGUE**

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ABSTRACT

Humility is an integral virtue within Benedictine spiritual traditions. It is also the subject of a burgeoning body of empirical literature in the field of psychology. This dissertation undertakes an interdisciplinary dialogue between Benedictine spirituality and contemporary psychological science, exploring the potential for both fields to mutually inform as well as critique respective understandings of humility. Scholarship in Benedictine spirituality has not shown substantial engagement with the field of psychology around the topic of humility since the 1980's. Likewise, no in-depth analysis of the Benedictine spirituality of humility has been conducted within psychology, despite increasing interest in interdisciplinary projects among psychologists of spirituality and religion.

In the body of this dissertation, chapter one sets out to locate this project within the disciplines of practical theology, spirituality studies, and the psychology of religion and spirituality. It also describes the methods used in this dissertation, with particular focus on the dynamics of mutually critical correlation, a method that gives room for both fields to inform, critique, and question the other around their positions regarding the

theory and practice of humility. Chapter two presents an in-depth exploration of Benedictine humility, focusing in particular on themes in the *Rule of St. Benedict* as well as different contemporary interpretations of humility that have emerged over the last thirty years. Chapter three then offers an exploration of the contemporary state of the psychology of humility, documenting the growing body of research on this subject over the last two decades.

Chapter four moves into the interdisciplinary analysis of this dissertation, inquiring how contemporary psychological research on humility could potentially inform Benedictine spirituality. Chapter five then switches to consider how insights and perspectives on humility from Benedictine traditions can also inform theoretical perspectives on humility within psychology, as well as applications in psychological interventions that integrate spirituality. Finally, a concluding chapter highlights some points of learning regarding interdisciplinary research on humility in spirituality and psychology, along with questions for future research and a final selection of key points for practice in both fields.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Instit.	<i>Institutes of John Cassian</i>
RB	<i>Rule of Saint Benedict</i>
RM	<i>Rule of the Master</i>

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation engages in an interdisciplinary inquiry around the virtue of humility, bringing together the two fields of Benedictine Christian spirituality¹ and contemporary psychology into mutually critical dialogue.² To date, these two bodies of knowledge have largely remained segregated from each other, save for a small number of interdisciplinary studies on humility in the Benedictine literature.³ My intention in undertaking this inquiry is that by engaging these fields in a process of mutually critical conversation, the results can lead to generative insights both for Christian praxis as well as for applications of humility in spiritually integrative psychology and psychotherapy. In this introduction, I set out the rationale and plan for my work, including discussion of the key methodological and interdisciplinary considerations that will inform my research process. I also discuss the limitations of my work, and provide an overview of the contents of this study.

¹ I will be referring to the “Benedictine tradition” throughout this prospectus and in my dissertation as indicating the broad tradition of Christian spirituality that traces its inspiration to the life and teaching of Benedict of Nursia (c. 480 – c. 547). This includes as well as extends beyond the ecclesial monastic orders existing primarily within the Roman Catholic church.

² The term “mutually critical dialogue,” as will be discussed again later on in this introduction, derives from David Tracy’s work on religious hermeneutics which describes the interplay between contemporary experience and traditions of theological reflection; see David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975). Several writers in the field of practical theology – which this current study is grounded in – have made great use of Tracy’s method for structuring their own work; see especially Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991).

³ See Antoine Vergote, “A Psychological Approach to Humility in the Rule of St. Benedict,” *American Benedictine Review* 39, no. 4 (1988): 404-429. Discussion of this article and responses to it will be touched on again in this introductory discussion, along with a more substantial engagement in the latter part of chapter two.

Significance of the Problem

Several points can be made concerning the significance of this dissertation within both fields it engages with. Regarding first the Benedictine spiritual tradition, humility itself is such a significant subject given its importance to the spiritual life overall. As an example of this, St. Benedict notes that progress in this virtue leads a person ultimately to “that love of God which, being perfect, casts out fear” (RB 7.67),⁴ an experience which some commentators interpret to mean the entrance of the person into the very life of God.⁵ The interdisciplinary nature of this project can also be seen as significant to Benedictine spirituality, given the long-standing interest in and practice of psychological reflection within the this spiritual tradition. Illustrations of this include the historic monastic writers who engaged in “folk” (as opposed to modern scientific) approaches to psychological theorizing. Members of the early monastic movement such as Evagrius Ponticus and his student John Cassian – the latter of whom would be an important source for Benedict – wrote rich and detailed analyses concerning the dynamics of the mind, the transformation of the will, and the responsiveness of human nature to divine grace.⁶ The medieval Cistercians also maintained a tradition of psychological reflection, apparent for

⁴ Note that all excerpts from the *Rule of Benedict* in this dissertation are taken, unless otherwise indicated within the text, from the English translation by Dysinger; see Benedict and Luke Dysinger, *The Rule of St. Benedict: Latin & English* (Trabuco Canyon, CA: Source Books, 1997).

⁵ See for instance Aquinata Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 212.

⁶ Evagrius, *The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer* (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970); John Cassian and Boniface Ramsey, *The Conferences* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

example in Aelred of Rievaulx's work on human friendship, and Bernard of Clairvaux's detailed exploration of the experience of the love of God.⁷ This current project is oriented toward contributing to this long-standing and important tradition of psychological reflection within the monastic tradition, which from the perspective of Benedictine spirituality can be seen as an important method for generating insight into human nature and experience, as well as the processes by which persons enter into and become transformed through their relationships with God and others.

A case study of monastic psychological reflection with particular relevance to this project is Antoine Vergote's study of Benedictine humility from a psychological perspective, which was completed in the 1980s.⁸ Vergote's analysis, which will be explored in-depth in the second section of chapter two below, provoked a series of carefully constructed responses within the American monastic literature which clearly show the intersection of Benedictine spirituality and psychology to be a significant topic of study and debate. As a sign of the current state of this area of study, it is pertinent to note that two of the foremost commentators on the *Rule* writing at the end of the 20th century name the difficulty inherent in integrating and reconciling modern psychological understandings of the human person with the doctrine and asceticism of humility communicated in Benedict's *Rule*.⁹ Given the dramatic influx of new developments in

⁷ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977); Bernard, and G. R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

⁸ Vergote, "A Psychological Approach to Humility in the Rule of St. Benedict."

⁹ Benedict and Terrence Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 135-168; Benedict and Adalbert de Vogüé, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 121.

psychology, especially around the topic of humility, since Vergote's study, now seems to be an especially opportune time to wade again into the waters of this question. My research below attempts to continue building on previous works in the field by exploring how a sustained and in-depth engagement with contemporary psychological science on humility can meaningfully contribute to contemporary forms Benedictine spiritual praxis.

Moving to consider my project's significance within the field of psychology, my research aligns with burgeoning efforts in the discipline to define the meaning of humility, as well as to develop spiritually-informed applications of the virtue in psychological interventions. Trends in the psychology literature show a surge of interest in the virtues, including humility, over the last twenty years. Much of this research has been accomplished within the relatively new subdiscipline of positive psychology, a field broadly concerned with character development and the promotion of mental well-being.¹⁰ As can be expected, an important task associated with this line of research has been in defining what humility actually is. Some researchers in psychology have also argued for the value of contextual approaches to defining humility, accounting for nuances in its meaning across diverse cultures and communities.¹¹ It is along these lines that my project is poised to contribute some further definitional clarity and "thick" description of the virtue, which will come from exploring the variety of representations of humility in

¹⁰ Martin E. Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology. An Introduction," *The American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 5-14.

¹¹ Sarah H. Moon and Steven J. Sandage, "Cultural Humility for Persons of Color: Critique of Current Theory and Practice," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 47, no. 2 (2019): 76-86.

psychology relative to those culturally- and religiously-specific understandings of the virtue contained in the Benedictine tradition.

Additionally, this project attempts to inform applications of humility in spiritually-integrative psychological interventions. Rye and colleagues recently described the improved effectiveness of positive psychological interventions for religious clients and communities that integrate relevant religious teachings and spiritual practices.¹² The results of my study could along these lines be utilized to inform virtue-based interventions in monastic, Roman Catholic, or even more broadly within Christian communities. Other theorists have described applications of humility in psychotherapy as a beneficial virtue for both clients and therapists.¹³ I intend to show how Benedictine tradition can also suggest useful and important dimensions of humility for use in spiritually-integrative psychotherapy, with particular relevance for Christian clients and counselors.

Overview of Contents

While it is typically the convention to provide an overview of contents at the end of an introductory chapter, I believe that it may better serve the reader to offer a brief

¹² Mark S. Rye et al., "The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Positive Psychology Interventions." in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality (Vol 2): An Applied Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. Kenneth I. Pargament, Annette Mahoney and Edward P. Shafranske (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association), 481–508.

¹³ See for example: David R. Paine et al., "Humility as a Psychotherapeutic Virtue: Spiritual, Philosophical, and Psychological Foundations," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 17, no. 1 (2015): 3-25.

overview of my project at this point, which will subsequently make it possible to refer to different parts of the dissertation while discussing my research methodology in the following section below.

Part one of my dissertation offers a detailed presentation on humility within the two fields that this project is concerned with. Chapter two gives an overview of the understanding of humility within the Benedictine tradition. It deals quite intensively with the body of historical theological research that has been produced up to now since the latter half of the twentieth century, by commentators working after Vatican II who were concerned with uncovering the scriptural and early theological sources and meanings behind Benedict's *Rule*. Additionally, I incorporate historical writings on humility that both informed as well as followed in the Benedictine tradition, including contemporary works on humility by both monastic and non-monastic writers. Themes concerning spiritual practices as well as theological understandings of humility are especially foregrounded in this chapter.

Chapter three then explores psychological perspectives on humility. The variety of ways in which humility has been conceptualized as a virtue in psychology are described, along with key empirical findings on humility and its connection to a host of factors associated with both personal and social well-being. A second key psychological source that is explored in this chapter includes studies on humility that are based in the relational spirituality model developed by Shults and Sandage, a theory of human development that has been used effectively to describe and evaluate the psychological

implications of the virtue.¹⁴ As will be seen, the relational spirituality model offers a number of valuable social scientific perspectives for exploring the developmental and interpersonal dynamics of spiritual practices, including those associated with humility.

Part two of my dissertation entails an attempt at interdisciplinary integration involving the two fields described previously. Chapter four describes potential imports for the Benedictine tradition from psychological understandings of humility discussed in chapter three. It explores how conceptualizations of the virtue in psychology might inform the Benedictine tradition, noting points of congruity as well as tension. It also describes insights from the relational spirituality model for evaluating Benedictine conceptions and practices of humility, focusing especially on the importance of healthy human development as a foundation for a spirituality of humility. Chapter five then moves to consider important insights that the Benedictine spirituality of humility can offer to spiritually-integrative psychology and psychotherapy. It attempts to integrate understandings of the virtue from the Benedictine tradition with definitions of humility in the psychological literature, noting contributions that Benedictine understandings of the virtue can make to psychological theory and discourse. It also attempts to describe uses of the Benedictine understanding of humility for psychological applications, including practices of humility that can play a role in both therapist and client development in spiritually-integrative psychotherapy.

¹⁴ F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 13-38.

A concluding chapter wraps up this project by offering some methodological reflections for interdisciplinary work within spirituality and psychology, followed by a concise summary of what I take to be the most significant integrative points in my dissertation's findings for the theory and practice of humility in both fields.

Research Methodology

Moving on to discuss this project's research methods, here in this section I engage with three disciplines – spirituality studies, practical theology, and the psychology of religion and spirituality – that all make substantial contributions to the methods used to execute and guide my dissertation research. After locating my project with respect to important definitions and conceptual frames of reference within each of these disciplines, I then shift to discuss some of the key methodological considerations that are integral to the interdisciplinary aims of this project. Among these is the especially significant question of normativity and how it is afforded to theological and social scientific sources in my interdisciplinary research, along with the related need to consider and select criteria for both evaluating and constructing proposals for the practice of humility in spirituality and psychology.

Disciplinary Definitions & Conceptual Frames of Reference

Spirituality studies, like all three of the disciplines that inform my research, contains a number of divergent views among its key contributors regarding its scope and methods. To locate my dissertation within the contours of spirituality studies, it is

necessary to address two significant questions and issues of debate within the discipline. The first is the fundamental question of what spirituality studies ought to be studying (i.e., how “spirituality” should to be defined), while the second related issue concerns how the relationship between spirituality and theology should be construed. Below I offer some of my own argument regarding these questions, after reviewing some of the more prominent perspectives from authors in the field.

The question of the meaning of spirituality – which scripture and spirituality scholar Sandra Schneiders refers to as the “material object” of the discipline¹⁵ – has been an important matter of debate within this emerging field of study. Schneiders herself, being one of the foremost contributors to spirituality studies as a formal field of academic pursuit, has offered what I take to be a quite broad, comprehensive and effective definition, stating that spirituality concerns “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”¹⁶ This definition contains in a concise package several notable characteristics: a focus on experience; a reference to life-integration, implying that spirituality treats a process that is inclusive of all dimensions of personal existence; the use of the term self-transcendence, implying relationality in a broad sense, or a personal act of reaching out beyond oneself; and finally, the naming of an ultimate horizon of existence as the *telos* of this process, to which Schneiders doesn’t attach a necessarily Christian meaning, thus

¹⁵ Sandra Schneiders, “The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline,” in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005), 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

keeping her definition potentially open to applicability in a variety of traditions or even within a secular perspective. Furthermore, Schneiders' holistic emphasis on life-integration could also be compared with earlier definitions of spirituality provided by other eminent scholars such as Ewert Cousins, who specifies spirituality to be concerned primarily with spirit as the inner core of the human person, a person's interiority which is open to the transcendent dimension of existence.¹⁷ Schneiders in contrast recognizes spirituality to be concerned not only with interiority but with a person's entire being, incorporating all dimensions of life into an integrative process that is actualized in relationship between the human spirit and God's Spirit.¹⁸

J. Matthew Ashley, a systematic theologian who also studies spirituality, puts forward another, two-part definition of spirituality: spirituality first entails a constellation of practices that orient a person toward the experience of conversion into the life of Christ by power of the Spirit; and second, spirituality also includes the systems of expression, of language and symbols and art, that communicate about spiritual practice and experience.¹⁹ Ashley's definition is significant for two key contrasts it makes with Schneiders'. First, Ashley's definition is explicitly Christian in nature, specifying that spirituality is essentially equivalent to what could be referred to as adoption as a child of

¹⁷ Ewert Cousins, "Preface to the Series," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq (New York: Crossroad, 1985), xiii.

¹⁸ Sandra Schneiders, "A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005), 51.

¹⁹ J. Matthew Ashley, "The Turn to Spirituality? The Relationship Between Theology and Spirituality," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005), 160-163.

God, or participation in Christ, both biblical concepts indicating the presence of God in a person's heart and life which could also be considered as synonymous with salvation.

Second, Ashley's definition also broadens to include systems of reflection and expression, a component that is absent from Schneiders' definition, which Ashley also goes on to say are functionally equivalent to theology.²⁰

This latter point of contrast between Schneiders' and Ashley's definitions of spirituality leads to a second and related issue in the field that also needs to be explored in relation to my research, which is the relationship between spirituality and theology. Schneiders for one approaches this question through describing what she calls the "formal object" of the discipline, or the specific aspect under which the material object (spirituality) is to be studied, which Schneiders labels as experience.²¹ More fully stated, Schneiders argues that spirituality should be concerned with the actual experience of the process of life-integration that is referred to in her definition of spirituality. In teasing apart Schneiders' perspective here with respect to her efforts at defining the field, it is apparent that Schneiders prioritizes the definition of a field of study that is differentiated from the discipline of theology, which she tends to interpret as being prescriptive of spirituality, proceeding in a uni-directional or deductive relationship from theory to practical application. Schneiders seems quite adamant that a defining feature of

²⁰ Ibid., 162.

²¹ Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," 6. Schneiders, it should be noted, appears to be the only scholar who uses this mode of specification for demarcating the discipline of spirituality studies. Most authors, it seems, in their attempts at outlining the discipline think it sufficient to proceed directly to the question of methods after providing a satisfying definition of the field's object of study. Schneiders adds this question of the formal object as a way of further specifying the discipline, and thus can be seen as an important further consideration for sketching out the contours of the field.

spirituality studies is that it should always proceed in an inductive fashion, beginning from spiritual experience as its foundation.²² On this point, it is important to note that Schneiders has been challenged on her characterization of theology as being overly prescriptive of spirituality, including by theologian Philip Endean. Endean agrees with Schneiders that while it is true that theology's relationship with spirituality has operated in such a deductive, uni-directional or prescriptive fashion in the past, it is also an unfair assessment to see all theology as operating in this fashion still.²³ In comparison, Ashley appears to attempt to integrate experience, practice, and reflection (or theology) in his definition of spirituality. Ashley adds as well that experience and reflection ought to have a reciprocal relationship, as experience influences and becomes the ground for reflection, and reflection informs future practice and linguistic dimensions of experience.²⁴ In a way, I believe that Ashley achieves a much more harmonious relationship between spirituality and theology in his construal of the meaning of spirituality, a relationship that appears to remain more strained or at least distant in Schneiders' view.

To synthesize this brief discussion of some critical issues in the discipline of spirituality studies while also situating them in relation to my own research, first, I believe that spirituality should most certainly be defined with an emphasis on life-

²² It is relevant to point out how a similar argument has been lodged against a uni-directional, deductive relationship between theory and practice in practical theology; for this argument against the "clerical paradigm" in practical theology, see Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

²³ Philip Endean, "Christian Spirituality and the Theology of the Human Person," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 229-230.

²⁴ Ashley, "The Turn to Spirituality? The Relationship Between Theology and Spirituality," 165.

integration as was also emphasized by Schneiders, which implies accounting for all the diverse ways in which transformation does occur through processes of spiritual practice and experience of the Sacred. Construing spirituality in this way certainly appeals to Benedictine spirituality, since it is a form of spirituality that is also a form of life, a way that is “more a lifestyle than a theory” as one well-known Benedictine commentator has put it.²⁵ While interior experience and the presence of divine grace to the human spirit are most certainly foundational and critical themes for the Benedictine monastic tradition, it is also the case that Benedictine spirituality – including the spirituality of humility – is supposed to be significant and meaningful throughout all of the dimensions of a person’s life. As Benedict himself says with regard to the practice of humility towards the end of his chapter of the *Rule* devoted to this topic, “the monk, not only in his heart, but by means of his own body always indicates his humility to those who see him - that is, at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the field, or wherever he may be, whether sitting, walking, or standing...” (RB 7.62-63). In this way I believe that Schneiders’ definition of spirituality is pertinent to my own study.

I am also of the view that spirituality – dealing here especially with Christian spirituality since it is my area of concentration - ought to be conceived of as both the experience and practice of faith, as well as the systems of reflection and expression of those experiences and practices, thus forming a contrast with Schneiders in this respect and aligning more with Ashley’s two-part definition of spirituality. Certainly, as related to my own research, theological reflection on spiritual experience is a vital dimension of

²⁵ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 7.

the Benedictine tradition, a process that has been behind the formulation of some of the tradition's most important texts, including of course the *Rule of Benedict* itself. I find some strong support for this view also in Bernard McGinn's work on the history of Christian mysticism, where he advances an argument against prior conceptions of mysticism that define it only as a form of experience. Mysticism properly understood, according to McGinn, also includes the traditions that support a person and orient them to the mystical life, and which also describe the effects and transformation born out of mystical experiences of the presence of God. This integrity of experience, practice and theology is what I envision to be analogously true for constituting the full breadth of spirituality as well. It is an integrity that is also readily evident in particular spiritual traditions, Benedictine spirituality included. In sum, these important debates and perspectives from the field of spirituality studies help offer a view of spirituality for my own dissertation work as an inclusive process of life integration, which includes both systems of practice as well as theological reflection that are integral to its existence and expression.

Practical theology, like spirituality studies, has been interpreted and defined from a number of diverse perspectives. It has even earned somewhat of a notorious reputation among its own members for being a discipline that is difficult to define.²⁶ To begin to consider the location of my project in the field of practical theology, I find it useful to draw a connection to the work of Bonnie Miller-McLemore, whose definition of practical theology is one of the most effective I believe in capturing the variety of ways in which

²⁶ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16, no. 1 (2012): 5.

the field can be understood. The four-part definition of practical theology that Miller-McLemore outlines includes practical theology as a way of life, as a method for the study of practices, as an academic discipline, and as a curricular area of theological education.²⁷ As I describe further below, my work in this project connects with the first three of these four areas of the discipline.

First, practical theology can be understood as a way of life. More specifically, practical theology in this sense can be conceptualized as the way in which Christian faith becomes enacted in the ordinary and everyday circumstances of people's lives, experiences, and relationships. One area of practical theological scholarship that has perhaps been most associated with this way of understanding the field are the works of Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, who together have been instrumental to a whole series of books on practices of faith. These two scholars are also linked to the appropriation and development within practical theology of the neo-Aristotelian theory of Alasdair McIntyre, which focuses on the development of the virtues through practices that are engaged in and supported by community contexts. Bass and Dykstra frame Christian practices of faith in light of this theoretical orientation, raising up the importance of practices as the fundamental way in which members of Christian communities attempt to deepen their Christian faith and witness, and come to live in ways of "life abundant."²⁸ Regarding my own research, my work in this dissertation can certainly be seen as being

²⁷ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Introduction: The Contributions of Practical Theology," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 5.

²⁸ See Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2008).

directed toward informing practices of humility as a way of life, connecting well with this dimension of the field of practical theology overall.

Second, practical theology also constitutes methods for the study and exploration of practices of faith. Much of the growth in this dimension of practical theology can be traced to the practical theological literature of the 1980s, especially the work of Don Browning who is well known for enlisting social scientific methods in order to explore and understand contemporary contexts and the practices of religion therein.²⁹ Since then, many research techniques in the social sciences have become integral to practical theological inquiry, including quantitative and qualitative methods. Currently, there seems to be an ever-growing interest and receptivity to any theory or mode of inquiry in practical theological research that allows for gaining insight into contemporary religious experience and contexts. While I don't engage directly in empirical research in my current study, I do draw on both theological and psychological literatures and methods for exploring the practice and experience of humility within multiple contexts. My dissertation research's interdisciplinary approach to studying religious practice naturally fits I believe with this second dimension of practical theology as well.

Moving to the third part or area, practical theology is also an academic discipline. As one way of characterizing the field's diversity in this respect, Mary Elizabeth Moore's work is useful in terms of highlighting the various purposes of practical theology that can be discerned among this discipline's American authors. Moore highlights a number of different purposes in American practical theology, including guiding the life of the

²⁹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*.

church, contributing to social analysis and transformation, and informing theological wisdom and ethics.³⁰ My project concerning the virtue of humility aligns well with these objectives in practical theological research, centering on tasks of evaluating, informing, and constructing religious practices. This is certainly my intention in the second part of this dissertation where I offer constructive proposals for the practice of humility.

The final discipline that helps to inform the structure and content of my research is the psychology of religion and spirituality, which like the previous two disciplines above also contains a great variety of views concerning its methodological approaches amongst scholars in the field. As a useful typology for capturing this diversity, I believe it is informative to turn to the work of Ralph Hood who has recently explored the foundational epistemological and ontological perspectives that guide methods in the psychological study of religion and spirituality.³¹

Hood draws from prior work by the sociologist James Dittes in offering a four-part typology of methodological options within the discipline of psychology for relating to religion and spirituality. The first two of these options are located within a reductive frame where religious or spiritual phenomena are engaged solely through psychological categories. Hood uses the term “methodological atheism” to describe these approaches, since they do not allow for any accounting of religious or spiritual categories, especially

³⁰ Mary Elizabeth Moore, “Purposes of Practical Theology: A Comparative Analysis Between United States Practical Theologians and Johannes van der Ven,” in *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology*, ed. Chris A. M. Hermans and Mary E. Moore (Boston: Brill, 2004), 172-183.

³¹ Ralph W. Hood Jr., “Methodological Diversity in The Psychology of Religion and Spirituality,” in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion and Spirituality: Vol. 1. Context, Theory, and Research*, ed. Kenneth I. Pargament (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2013).

anything having to do with the transcendent, to be taken into account.³² Thus, this ontological stance concerning what exists dictates an epistemological approach to the psychological study of religion. It would seem obvious that these methodological options would not produce studies which in turn could be viable for integration with the tenets of most forms of Christian spirituality, and therefore would also not serve as good dialogue partners for the kind of interdisciplinary work I seek to engage in through this project.

The second two methodological options fall under the banner of what Hood refers to as “methodological agnosticism,” which does allow for the potential implications of the transcendent in psychological research.³³ Here again, an ontological view – characterized by the potential influence of God or the transcendent on human beings – characterizes an epistemological stance that respects the distinctiveness and potential role of religion and spirituality in human life. This overall methodological orientation appears to be what characterizes a growing body of contemporary research in the psychology of religion and spirituality, which is portrayed for instance in the American Psychological Association’s *Handbook* of the field.³⁴ Many of the studies discussed in the *Handbook*’s chapters attempt to describe and explore religious or spiritual phenomena in conversation with religious traditions, and account for their influence on diverse areas of human life (for example, in personality development and spiritual experience, or the influence of religion and spirituality on prejudice and discrimination). What is also clear, is that the

³² Ibid., 80.

³³ Ibid., 79.

³⁴ See Kenneth I. Pargament, *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2013).

epistemological and ontological principles underlying these approaches would certainly allow for greater interdisciplinary integration with the field of Christian spirituality studies. Ultimately, Hood's typology of methodological approaches in the psychology of religion and spirituality can serve as a useful tool for critically evaluating and accounting for the methodological principles used by the psychological literature to be potentially incorporated into this project. As I go into more depth in the third chapter concerning the psychological study of humility, a great amount of the literature in this area fortunately tends to fall within the second part of Hood's typology, where religious and spiritual categories are treated and assessed on their own terms. This material in turn was much more amenable to the interdisciplinary analysis presented in the second part of my dissertation below, including where I attempt to explore how psychological research can inform Benedictine spiritual practice and belief.

Normativity in Interdisciplinary Work & The Mutually Critical Correlation Method

Having considered the location of my project within the three associated academic disciplines, the next major methodological question regards the normative weight given to theological and social scientific sources in my interdisciplinary research process. All three of the disciplines that I discuss above are also capable of contributing useful perspectives for addressing this question, thus I proceed in the same fashion of considering diverse views within each field before assessing the strongest options for guiding my own work.

In formulating this research project, it seemed that its core goal of informing praxis in both Benedictine spirituality and spiritually-integrative psychology and

psychotherapy was best served by proceeding according to an interpretive method known as mutually critical correlation. David Tracy is the philosophical theologian who originally defined this method for religious hermeneutics as critical dialogue between Christian tradition and contemporary human experience.³⁵ Since the time of Tracy's formulation, use of the mutually critical correlation method in practical theology has become quite common. Donald Browning is one of the earliest figures in the field to appropriate this method for the sake of constructing what he refers to as "strategic practical theology," or the practical recommendations and engagements that emerge from the process of theological reflection.³⁶ Browning describes the steps leading up to this final phase of reflection as a process of correlation between descriptions of present experience and sources from Christian tradition. Browning at one point cites a definition of practical theology given by Tracy of practical theology in order to sum up his own preferred way of defining the field, as "mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of Christian faith with the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation."³⁷ For my research, I slightly adapt Tracy and Brownings' methodology by setting up a mutually critical correlation between the Benedictine spirituality of humility and contemporary psychological perspectives on the virtue. As I previously outlined, the first part or step of this dissertation will entail presenting thick descriptions of both of these bodies of knowledge, which will then become the basis for a

³⁵ Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, 43.

³⁶ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, 55.

³⁷ Don S. Browning, "Toward a Fundamental and Strategic Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology – International Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes A. van der Ven (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 59.

mutually critical correlation to be accomplished in the second part of the project. As another adaptation of Tracy and Brownings' method, rather than coming in the end to one unified practical strategy that combines insights from Christian tradition and contemporary contexts (which could be represented for instance by describing and evaluating imports from contemporary psychology for the Benedictine spirituality of humility alone), my intended arrival point is in describing practical strategies for both fields, which take shape when one is informed as well as critiqued by the perspective of the other. My overall approach in other words can be thought of as a conversation between two parties, or a crossing of paths, where both can walk away afterwards having hopefully been altered in some beneficial way in their encounter with the other.

It is important to acknowledge that while mutually critical correlation has become one of the core methods of practical theological research, some scholars in practical theology have taken issue with its tenets especially around the question of normativity and the relative weight given to theological sources versus those from the social sciences. On the one hand, these include the so-called "confessional" practical theologians such as Swinton and Mowat,³⁸ who argue that greater normative weight ought to be given to theological traditions over the social sciences in practical theological analyses. On the other end of the spectrum, there are those who could be considered more "skeptical" practical theologians, including for instance Tom Beaudoin³⁹ who is highly critical of

³⁸ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 83-91.

³⁹ Tom Beaudoin, "Postmodern Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 196.

theological normativity, due in part to the potential for historical theological traditions to exclude the experience of minoritized communities. In regard to this range of views among practical theologians, I do strongly believe in the importance of tending to non-dominant forms of experience in research, as the more theologically skeptical practical theologians have argued for. By attending to a range of sources on humility from both monastic and psychological sources, I intend to listen for ways in which the virtue of humility has raised problems or tensions in different communities, and to incorporate these perspectives into my proposals for practice. While admitting this important insight from researchers like Beaudoin, I do more broadly see myself as aligned with the positions of Tracy and Browning, chiefly because I see theology and social science both as valid, normative sources for informing and critiquing one another as well as for constructing practical strategies.

Another important concern that practical theologians raise when it comes to interdisciplinary engagement between theology and the social sciences is the risk of reductionism. James Fowler, who has worked prolifically at the intersection between theology and psychology, describes the potential for practical theology to become reduced down to social scientific analysis.⁴⁰ While not all practical theologians would likely agree with this assessment, especially those with a more skeptical stance towards Christian tradition, I do personally believe that his argument has relevance for keeping practical theology indeed, in some sense, theological. Even in the case of social science

⁴⁰ James W. Fowler, "Practical Theology and the Social Sciences," in *Practical Theology: International Perspectives*, ed. Freidrich Schweitzer and Johannes A. van der Ven (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

that is oriented towards social transformation or improvement – a kind of research that Fowler does consider – I do believe that he is also accurate in warning that practical theology can lose its theological nature when it ceases to be in constructive dialogue with theological tradition. On the flip side as well, a potential danger can also be considered of practical theology becoming reduced to an emphasis on theological traditions alone, without attending to relevant data concerning human experience from the social sciences. This would be a concern certainly of those skeptical practical theologians referred to above, who call attention to the potential for theological traditions to exclude or elide certain forms of experience. Obviously, either form of reductionism would violate the main purpose of the mutually critical correlation method to begin with: that both fields being taken into account are granted the authority to inform as well as critique each other. Taking stock of this risk of reductionism, I believe that the structure of my dissertation itself in fact ensures that there is opportunity to consider the imports of Benedictine spirituality for psychology and vice versa, given that the two chapters in the second part of my project are devoted to this particular task. At the same time, it was also important for me to make sure while engaging in this analysis that I give authority to both traditions when they are put into dialogue with the other. I have attempted to aim for this outcome in the analysis I present below.

Spirituality studies, though it has not engaged with Tracy's mutually critical correlation method anywhere near as explicitly or expansively as the field of practical theology has, still engages some important discussions around interdisciplinary work and

the question of normativity which are important to consider as well.⁴¹ It is useful to note at the outset that many prominent scholars in spirituality studies seem to agree, including Schneiders⁴² and Philip Sheldrake⁴³, that spirituality studies should operate according to an interdisciplinary methodological orientation. Schneiders has also called for an integration of both the “constitutive disciplines” (being scripture studies and the history of theology) that together provide the key hermeneutical principles for understanding Christian spirituality, along with the “problematic disciplines,” or those disciplines – especially the social sciences – that help give access to understandings of the experience of Christian spirituality that is under investigation.⁴⁴

Lines of divergence do seem to open up around Schneiders’ privileging of the problematic disciplines over theological and historical ones, including those which together constitute what she further characterizes as the “anthropological” or “hermeneutical” approach to the study of spirituality.⁴⁵ Schneiders articulates I believe some sound reasons why she gives priority to this approach. The crux of these appears to be that spirituality should properly be considered a human phenomenon, even before it is specifically considered as a Christian or Buddhist phenomenon or one belonging to any

⁴¹ I would simply note here that in my reading within the discipline, I noted one author who makes mention of Tracy’s mutually critical correlation method as an appropriate way for engaging Christian spiritual traditions with psychology; see Janet Ruffing, “Personality Sciences,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 309.

⁴² Schneiders, “The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline,” 7-8.

⁴³ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 22.

⁴⁴ Schneiders, “The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline,” 7-8.

⁴⁵ Schneiders, “A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality,” 26.

particular faith tradition.⁴⁶ Spirituality, in other words, is a dimension of the *humanum*, of human nature, which according to Schneiders transcends any one manifestation within a particular religious tradition. Thus, as she argues, anthropological methods for understanding human spiritual experience are able to effectively describe this essential spiritual dimension of human nature and experience, without requiring reference to explicitly religious language.

Critical responses to this view of Schneiders' come from scholars including Bernard McGinn and Mark McIntosh, who take issue with Schneiders for privileging anthropological methods in the study of Christian spirituality while downplaying the place of theology. This orientation as McIntosh argues can lead to a lack of attention, clarity and precision concerning important theological dimensions of spirituality.⁴⁷ It seems to be the case that just as Schneiders argues for the importance of including anthropological methods to round out an understanding of spirituality, so too does McIntosh argue that without enough theological specificity in spirituality studies there is risk of overlooking a key element of spirituality especially as it is lived out in the lives of persons.

In my own view, while I believe that Schneider's advocacy for the importance of social scientific analysis of spirituality does have its merits, I certainly side with McGinn and McIntosh in advocating for a more balanced approach to the study of Christian

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bernard McGinn, "The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as an Academic Discipline," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005), 33; Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 19-21.

spirituality as practice, experience, and reflection. Theology and historical studies should be just as integral as anthropological (or social scientific) methods for studying Christian spirituality, a balance that doesn't seem possible if spirituality scholars are only concerned with studying experience as in Schneiders' definition of the field described above. My own research I believe aspires to such a balance. The first task of this project will be to describe the Christian monastic spirituality of humility, which must entail a study of the actual practices of Christian humility, combined with and in relation to an exploration of the theory that underlies, supports and guides these practices (whether coming from Scripture, or monastic documents such as the *Rule of Benedict*). Obviously, a strong theological as well as historical perspective will be necessary to carry out this work. Then, later in my analysis, another key task for my project entails answering what difference it might make to the theory and practice of the monastic spirituality of humility by also looking at these through an anthropological lens, especially framed by the discipline of psychology and its empirical research and theoretical perspectives on humility and human nature. Moving through critical and constructive steps, this project takes up all three major disciplinary approaches to the study of spirituality to address what difference is made to the theory and practice of monastic spirituality. There would seem to be no need at all to consider subordinating either historical, theological, and anthropological inputs in order to engage in this study, a move which would also likely lead to the kind of reductionism that practical theologians warn of as was described above.

To consider finally the question of normativity between psychological and theological sources from the psychology of religion and spirituality, it is again the case that this discipline has not explicitly taken up the mutually critical correlation method anywhere near as much as practical theology has.⁴⁸ Looking to other sources and themes, it can be profitable to refer back to Hood’s description of the differing approaches to studying religion and spirituality operant within the field, and the epistemological and ontological assumptions that these approaches carry. Based on this it is possible to see how approaches within the psychology of religion and spirituality that exhibit a “methodological atheism” also implicitly carry a stronger claim of normativity for social scientific sources and analyses over sources from religion and spirituality, as opposed to approaches based on “methodological agnosticism” which would inherently confer greater (though not necessarily equal) normativity to religious and spiritual sources. While Hood’s description is useful for noting these differences, I believe that another typology offered by Sandage and Brown in their book on the integration of psychology and theology can offer an even more developed and nuanced perspective on the question of normativity.

Sandage and Brown describe a number of approaches or “stances” toward integration between psychology and theology that can be used to analyze the normative status given to these disciplines by interdisciplinary researchers. One of these is what Sandage and Brown refer to as an “against” perspective, which accords virtually all

⁴⁸ One explicit endorsement of Tracy’s mutually critical correlation approach was made recently by interdisciplinary scholars Sandage and Brown; see Steven J. Sandage and Jeannine K. Brown, *Relational Integration of Psychology and Christian Theology: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 38.

normative weight to one field over the other.⁴⁹ One example of such an orientation can be found among American Evangelical Christian circles and the movement known as “biblical counseling.” Psychological researcher Eric Johnson situates the perspective of biblical counseling almost as one extreme on a continuum of interdisciplinary approaches, with biblical counseling representing the most antagonistic or reductive stance. According to Johnson, this view was generated among Evangelical circles in response to what was perceived as modern scientific psychology’s overly secular perspective, one that could not be reconciled with a biblically-based view of human nature. Biblical counseling – especially in the vision of its founder, Jay Adams – therefore sought approaches to psychological understanding and interventions that were rooted solely in the authority of scripture.⁵⁰ An interesting parallel could be drawn between this Evangelical perspective and the institutional Roman Catholic response to modern science that characterized the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which included an anti-modernist oath amongst seminary faculty combined with an unwavering commitment to views of the human person advanced by neo-scholastic theology - a highly systematized Thomistic dogma. This approach to interdisciplinary integration, as is evident in both these Evangelical and Catholic perspectives, are founded on a rejection of the empirically-driven scientific paradigm out of which modern psychology was born. Authority is given only to what is considered to be revelation, taken in a very specific and highly determined sense, within these traditions.

⁴⁹ Sandage and Brown, *Relational Integration of Psychology and Christian Theology*, 25.

⁵⁰ Eric L. Johnson, “A Brief History of Christians in Psychology,” in *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and David G. Meyers (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 31-33.

Another approach to the integration of psychology and theology is what Sandage and Brown refer to as an “of” perspective, where one discipline engages in investigating and exploring another discipline through the frameworks of its own. As Sandage and Brown relate, this is the perspective within which much of the discipline of psychology of religion and spirituality has operated, where researchers in psychology have engaged in the study of religion within purely psychological categories. An example of this could be Freud’s research on religion in terms of human development, accounting for religious phenomena according to conflicts and processes that exist only within the human psyche. Here there is a clear epistemological ordering that takes place as one discipline is placed above another and becomes the sole driver of the interpretive process, hence becoming a reductive approach where theology and religion are read purely through a psychological lens.

A third approach is that of “integration.” As Stanton Jones describes, there is a distinct acknowledgement amongst proponents of this view that empirically-derived psychological data can add useful perspectives on human nature which scripture itself does not offer. Jones, writing from an Evangelical Christian perspective, lays out a rationale for incorporating insights from the modern discipline of psychology in the service of more fully exploring and knowing the work of creation accomplished by God and for improving the health and well-being of human life and all God’s creation. This view certainly moves away from the antagonistic or reductive approaches that

characterize the first two views presented above, and toward an inclusive stance that seeks to learn about human nature from both disciplines.⁵¹

Sandage and Brown cite a number of difficulties implied in this integration or “unity of truth” approach however that are typically not accounted for in the interdisciplinary literature. These are especially around what could be considered to be the different “cultures” (my term I believe) of each discipline entering into dialogue, including their separate and distinctive histories, methodological and hermeneutical approaches, and bodies of theory. This emphasis on the importance and role of alterity in interdisciplinary approaches fits with Sandage and Browns’ overall approach to interdisciplinary integration, or what they call “relational integration.”⁵² Sandage and Brown approach interdisciplinary integration through a framework of “differentiated relationality,” a perspective that is concerned not only with the differences between disciplines, but the personal capacities of researchers themselves to relate to other researchers in disciplines that they themselves do not belong to. Sandage and Browns’ approach could be thought of as a development of the integrationist approach, one that seeks to better reflect the complexities and actual dynamics of integrative work. One of the interpersonal dynamics they describe among multiple integrators is framed with the human developmental perspective of the “third space,” or the space created through conversation between collaborators where actual integration takes place. In a multiple

⁵¹ Stanton L. Jones, “An Integration View,” in *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and David G. Meyers (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 101-128.

⁵² Sandage and Brown, *Relational Integration of Psychology and Christian Theology*, 41-42, 64-69.

integrator approach, this third space is moved out from a single consciousness (as in a single integrator) into an embodied relationship between persons from multiple disciplines, who can more fully explore and attend to this generative third space from diverse perspectives and thus create greater potential for actual interdisciplinary integration to occur.

Having outlined this highly useful typology offered by Sandage and Brown concerning the methodological possibilities for relating theology and spirituality with psychology, it is clear that the priorities of my research would place me in an “integrationist” perspective. I use this term since while I do identify with the “integration” perspective presented above in many ways, I also agree with Sandage and Browns’ critiques of this stance towards interdisciplinary integration, especially around the importance of needing to take into account the cultural differences which exist between disciplines. Such differences would be readily apparent in contrasting the intellectual, epistemological, ontological, and cultural backgrounds of the Benedictine spiritual tradition and modern psychology. Sandage and Browns’ perspective helps to heighten my awareness of the importance of taking seriously the very real differences between the Benedictine spiritual tradition and modern psychology, and not slipping into a way of thinking that might obscure or hide these differences for the sake of drawing easy comparisons or connections.

Bringing this exploration of the question of normativity in interdisciplinary research to a close, I believe the preceding discussion should help clarify a number of issues and concerns around my approach to interdisciplinary integration within my

current research. All three disciplines that I've engaged with raise up important questions regarding the normative status of psychology and theology; clearly, I resonate the most with scholars who write from a strong integrationist perspective, where both fields are granted enough legitimacy and validity to produce a mutually-critical as well as a mutually-informing process of inquiry and constructive dialogue. This approach is clearly taken up among practical theologians who utilize Tracy's mutually critical methodology, as well as spirituality scholars who advocate for interdisciplinary approaches to the study of spirituality that balance historical, theological and social scientific approaches. It is also advocated for by researchers in the psychology of religion and spirituality who assert the importance of bringing disciplinary perspectives into mutually critical dialogue while also recognizing the very real and powerful differences that exist between disciplines.

Criteria for Guiding the Construction of Practical Strategies

In addition to the question of normativity between theology and the social sciences there is a final important methodological factor to consider for my dissertation, which involves the criteria I will use to help guide my analysis toward practical strategies both in Benedictine spirituality as well as in spiritually-integrative psychology and psychotherapy. As practical theologian Colleen Griffith notes, historic religious practices may not necessarily be fruitful or even healthy when enacted in new contexts.⁵³ One could argue that there is a constant need to evaluate practices for their effectiveness, and therefore certain criteria are needed to help guide the assessment of practices. In addition,

⁵³ Colleen M. Griffith, "Practice as Embodied Knowing: Epistemological and Theological Considerations," in *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Visions and Voices*, ed. Claire E. Wolfteich (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 55-56.

these criteria can also be important for helping to adjudicate to some extent any conflicting points of view that may arise between the two fields as they are put into mutually critical conversation. Furthermore, the need for a discussion of these criteria also reflects the importance of self-reflexivity in research and especially in hermeneutics, as Cahalan and Mikoski have noted in their introduction to a recent handbook of practical theology.⁵⁴ Pastoral theologian Carrie Doehring uses what I think is the helpful concept of “loyalties” to describe the values that guide a researcher’s work, which I also recognize the need to take account of and attempt to make explicit.⁵⁵ At this point I believe it is valuable for all of these reasons to name some of the guiding values or criteria that will be important for guiding my interdisciplinary efforts, especially in the second part of my dissertation where I describe potential imports and novel practices for both fields I’m engaging with.

A few of the core, value-laden criteria that I see as driving my own interpretative work and practical formulations include the following. In the realm of spirituality, I readily admit that my work in this project is oriented toward both upholding the integrity of the Benedictine spiritual tradition, as well as informing its spiritual praxis. Given my Roman Catholic religious belonging, from a broader perspective I believe it is important that any constructive proposals for a spirituality of humility that I put forward in this project adhere to certain core beliefs or principles. Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter

⁵⁴ Cahalan and Mikoski, “Introduction,” 6-7.

⁵⁵ Carrie Doehring, “A Method of Feminist Pastoral Theology,” in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 98.

has enumerated a set of criteria for guiding and evaluating the construction of local theologies that I also believe are relevant with respect to my aim of creating a constructive spirituality of humility for the Benedictine tradition. Schreiter's list includes the criteria of coherence (whether a theology or practice coheres with the Gospel message), openness (whether a practice or theology is open to wider critique, from within or outside the church), prayer (whether a practice or understanding can faithfully and authentically be brought to prayer), and strength (whether a practice or experience enlightens and emboldens others to live more committed lives of discipleship).⁵⁶ In addition to Schreiter's criteria, Catholic systematic theologian Dermot Lane asserts another set of criteria for evaluating religious experiences that I also find relevant for my work, many of which boil down to whether an experience or practice draws a person into deeper relationship and conversion to the person of Jesus Christ and his ministry for the Kingdom of God.⁵⁷ These theological criteria will be central to how I approach the constructive work of formulating a Benedictine spirituality of humility in light of insights as well as critical perspectives from psychology.

It is also the case that I will need to use certain criteria to guide my constructive proposals for the discipline of psychology in light of the Benedictine spiritual tradition. To help guide my work in this respect, I believe that positive psychology's core commitment to promoting human flourishing can also serve as a criterion for guiding my

⁵⁶ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 117-121.

⁵⁷ Dermot A. Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 41-42.

constructive proposals for the psychological understanding and applications of humility.⁵⁸

It is my intention that any constructive proposals I make for theory and practice in psychology will ultimately be toward promoting human flourishing and healthy human development.

Limitations

This final short section is concerned with naming some of the significant limitations of my work in this project. One limitation concerning my engagement with the Benedictine tradition is that I will need to limit my exploration of the literature to what is available in English, given my lack of proficiency with modern languages and Latin. Fortunately, a number of high-quality scholarly translations of the sources I need are readily available. It is also the case that I am not proposing to do a comprehensive treatment of the spirituality or theology of humility from the Benedictine tradition. While this is so, I do intend on working with a range of authors who taken together will provide a breadth of understandings and practices of humility for use in my analysis.

Another limitation to note that is also an extension of my dissertation's methodology concerns the multiple meanings of humility that I will be engaging with in this project, coming both from Benedictine spirituality as well as from psychology. Given the complex and context-specific multivalency of humility, I will be necessarily limited –

⁵⁸ Steven J. Sandage and Peter C. Hill, "The Virtues of Positive Psychology: The Rapprochement and Challenges of an Affirmative Postmodern Perspective," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 31, no. 3 (2001): 241.

and will have to make choices around – the meanings of humility that I incorporate into my analysis. I see this as likely involving a selection from among “etic” – or more universal understandings of humility that have been applied in a variety of contexts – and “emic” understandings of the virtue that have generally been limited to particular contexts. Concerning especially those emic perspectives on humility that come from non-dominant communities, another limitation is around my ability to understand and assimilate such perspectives given my own social and interpretive location as a cis-gendered, white, male, Catholic, North American individual. A frank acknowledgement of the need for humility across the research process seems both important and necessary, first as a starting place for this project in terms of recognizing my own finiteness and limited subjectivity as a researcher; as a quality to help guide my engagement with understandings of humility across cultural differences; and, for coming to terms with and taking account of the inevitably finite and limited character of the project’s results.

CHAPTER 2. THE BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY OF HUMILITY

Overview & Approach

This chapter attempts to provide a multidimensional exploration of the Benedictine spirituality of humility. To inquire into this subject is to enter a living and evolving tradition of interpretation which dates back over 1500 years to the *Rule of St. Benedict*. With regard to this long-standing tradition, it is important to name at the outset that this chapter does not attempt to provide an exhaustive study of the history of the Benedictine tradition's treatment of humility. Sandra Schneiders provides the useful disciplinary distinction that within spirituality studies, one can work as an "historical spirituality scholar" by drawing from historical works and sources in order to understand a spiritual tradition or topic within its context, without necessarily engaging in the work of a "historian of spirituality" whose task it is to systematically and exhaustively study the development of some aspect or facet of spirituality over time.⁵⁹ The former approach described by Schneiders is most certainly the one I aim to take up in this chapter, which should also I believe lead to some important outcomes for fulfilling my dissertation's interdisciplinary aims. This approach also aligns with a practical theological approach as described in the introductory chapter above of engaging historical traditions for the sake of engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue with data on contemporary contexts.

⁵⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 19-20.

Chief among these outcomes is to arrive at an adequate understanding of the spirituality of humility as it is described within the root document of Benedict's *Rule*. As a way of proceeding, in the first section below I provide a thematic exploration of humility in the *Rule*, paying special attention to its theological, ascetical, and historical-contextual dimensions. In addition, an analysis of the text will also make it possible to determine what are likely some of the special, defining characteristics of Benedict's own experience of humility, characteristics that are important touchstones for those who look to the person of Benedict as well as his *Rule* as sources of inspiration for practicing faith in the Benedictine tradition.⁶⁰ This approach, I would note, will also be in keeping with what I determined to be the optimal definition of spirituality as discussed in the introductory chapter, by encompassing both the experiential and practical dimensions of humility, along with the theological reflections that "capture" in a sense this experience and practical knowing in the *Rule* itself. As an important aid for making sense of these different aspects of the spirituality of humility, my analysis will rely heavily on a selection of interpretive works by commentators who shine light on various exegetical questions concerning Benedict's teaching in order to clarify and translate its core meaning for a modern audience. These works, as commentator Aquinata Böckmann describes her approach, seek "not to remain on the surface of the words" of the text, but

⁶⁰ An analysis of the *Rule* is likely the best available method for determining such information about Benedict, given the lack of historical resources on his life and person aside from some highly stylized and hagiographic portrayals contained within the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great; see Gregory the Great and John Zimmerman, *Dialogues* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983).

On this point as well, while the text of the *Rule* might provide some interesting insights into this question, it is nonetheless necessary to keep in mind the basic insight echoed by historian of spirituality Philip Sheldrake, that there is always a gap between an author's original experience and the text which communicates these experiences. See Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 176-177.

rather attempt to “listen closely to what the text itself has to say” to its modern readers through a close reading and careful exploration of its sources, context and semantics.⁶¹ Judging their works to be the most authoritative and scholarly rigorous resources available, all of the commentaries I utilize in this section are authored by monastic writers working after the period of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) to the present day.⁶²

The second thrust of this chapter is to also present a selection of contemporary constructive interpretations of Benedictine humility that attempt to inform spirituality as it is lived in today’s modern contexts. These works, written by both monastic as well as lay writers within the last thirty years, offer a range of attempts at letting the Benedictine tradition’s teaching on humility speak to the multiple demands and desires of contemporary Christian life. An exploration of these sources, which together offer a set of distinctive and creative approaches to understanding the meaning of Benedictine humility, make up the second section of this chapter. Altogether, both sections in this chapter provide a diversity of perspectives on humility from within the Benedictine tradition that can also serve as an essential foundation for entering into a mutually critical conversation with modern psychology in part 2 of my dissertation below. A concluding

⁶¹ Aquinata Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility : A Commentary on Chapters 4-7 of Benedict's Rule* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), vii.

⁶² The Second Vatican Council in several of its documents strongly endorsed a *ressourcement* (or “return to the sources”) movement in twentieth century Catholic theology, calling for a retrieval and serious engagement with pre-modern theological sources including scripture as well as ancient and medieval Christian sources. See Gerald O’Collins, “Resourcement and Vatican II,” in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (New York: Oxford, 2011), 372-374.

section at the end of this chapter attempts to summarize and integrate many of these multiple meanings of Benedictine humility as well.

Section I. Humility in the *Rule of Benedict*

Reading Chapter 7 in Light of the *Rule's* Spirituality

A useful guiding principle for beginning an exploration of the *Rule of Benedict's* teaching on humility I believe is that this virtue, like any portion of Benedict's text, can only be properly understood within the ambit of the *Rule's* spirituality as a whole.

Humility, a subject that Benedict clearly devotes much attention to, is nonetheless only one aspect of his spirituality, a system of practice and beliefs which is also very much rooted in the historical context of 6th century monastic culture in central Italy and even more specifically within the workings of a cenobitic (or communal) monastic house. It would seem important therefore at this early stage to consider some of the main theological and historical dimensions of the *Rule* as a way of setting the stage for a more focused look at what it has to say regarding humility.

Historian of Christian spirituality Philip Sheldrake offers a useful framework for helping organize a review of some of the foundational elements of Benedictine spirituality. As part of his recent attempt at developing a typology of different forms of Christian spirituality, Sheldrake describes a set of three domains that different spiritual traditions within Christianity attend to. These include: where spiritual transformation takes place, or the question of context; how transformation takes place, or the question of

disciplines and practices; and what is the ultimate end-point of spiritual transformation, or the question of purpose.⁶³ Working through a description of Benedictine spirituality according to these three domains will provide a solid preliminary understanding of the broader tradition, serving the ultimate purpose of gaining better insight into the virtue of Benedictine humility as well.

To begin by addressing the first of these domains, that is the location where spiritual transformation is supposed to take place, the context for this transformation within Benedict's *Rule* is quite clearly and inarguably within the daily life of the monastery. Several key excerpts from Benedict's text make this apparent, such as his reference to the monastery as a "school of the Lord's service" toward the end of the *Rule's* Prologue (RB Prol. 45), a part of the text which lays out a number of fundamental principles concerning Benedict's vision of monastic life. A few lines later at the very end of the Prologue, the *Rule* also states, "So that, never departing from his [Christ's] guidance, but persevering in his teaching in the monastery until death, we may by patience participate in the passion of Christ; that we may deserve also to be partakers of his kingdom" (RB Prol. 50). These lines show how deeply Benedict considers the communal monastic environment to be the central locus of spiritual growth and development, framed here in terms of participation in the life and paschal journey of Christ. Benedict's preference for a cenobitic or communal form of monasticism is also presented in some rather stark comparisons in chapter 1 of the *Rule*. Those living the cenobitic life, "that is, those who live in monasteries and serve under a rule and an abbot"

⁶³ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 27.

(RB 1.1) are to be considered “the strong kind of monks” (RB 1.13).⁶⁴ Benedict otherwise harshly condemns the way of the “Sarabites,” those living according to their own interpretation of monasticism whose “law consists in their own willful desires” (RB 1.6-9), as well as the “gyrovagues,” those who are not rooted in a particular place but are “always wandering and never stable; slaves of self-will and the attractions of gluttony; in all things they are worse than the Sarabites” (RB 1.10-11). These polemics certainly portray the importance Benedict ascribed to living a stable life dedicated to a particular community of others, under the authority of a rule and a spiritual leader.

As far as which disciplines and practices Benedict presents as being integral to *how* spiritual transformation takes place, there are multiple ways in which to go about framing this dimension of the *Rule*. Perhaps one of the broadest of possible options lies in the phrase that has become a Benedictine motto, “ora et labora” in Latin, or “prayer and work.” Benedict’s practical instructions for monasteries show an absolute need for diligence, order and integrity in maintaining the practice of both of these elements of monastic life.⁶⁵ Chapter 48 of the *Rule*, for example, shows Benedict’s concern for

⁶⁴ While much more prevalent during Benedict’s time, cenobitic forms of monasticism were predated by the establishment of eremitical (or hermitic) monastic settlements in Egypt during the third century, a movement initiated by St. Anthony the Great (251-356, who is also known as the “father of monks”). Among these settlements were persons living as individual hermits or in small groups, yet in time there also formed communal-style monastic settlements of several monks living in common, the first of which were founded by the soldier-turned-monk St. Pachomius (292-348). This latter form of monasticism is also the type that Benedict propagated, even though he had previously lived an eremitical existence for some years in a valley at Subiaco outside Rome. For more on the development of Christian monasticism, see Christopher Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003); Mayeul de Dreuille, *Seeking the Absolute Love: The Founders of Christian Monasticism* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1999).

⁶⁵ The synthesis of prayer and work in the spirituality that Benedict advances is a phenomenon which also dates back to the earliest examples of texts of Christian monasticism; see for example Benedicta

ordering the daily work and prayer of monks throughout the different seasons of the year, implying that these observances are absolutely essential for the spiritual health and development of monks. Another place to look to regarding the means for spiritual transformation in the *Rule's* spirituality is the dense moral teaching that Benedict prescribes for monks, which includes his doctrine on humility. Chapters 4-7 of the *Rule* present this moral instruction in its most concentrated form, including a catalogue of 72 “instruments of good works” in chapter 4, followed by specific treatments of the virtues of obedience, silence and humility in chapters 5 through 7. According to Benedict, the practice of these virtues, as will be explored in greater detail below, is oriented toward reaching “that love of God which, being perfect, casts out fear” (RB 7.67).

Concerning finally the purpose or *telos* of Benedictine spirituality, further selections from the *Rule* are helpful in framing some perspectives on this as well. As noted above, Benedict ends his Prologue with the encouragement that, by imitating Christ, aspirants within monastic life “may deserve also to be partakers of his kingdom” (RB Prol. 50). There is furthermore along these lines an excerpt from chapter 72, where Benedict is discussing the essential task of remaining open and compassionate towards one’s fellow monks, in which he remarks:

Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1975), 1-2, concerning the life of Anthony the Great:

When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert he was beset by *accidie*, and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, ‘Lord, I want to be saved but these thoughts do not leave me along, what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved? A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, ‘Do this and you will be saved.’ At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.

Let them most patiently endure one another's infirmities, whether of body or of character. Let them compete in showing obedience to one another. None should follow what he judges useful for himself, but rather what is better for another: They should practice fraternal charity with a pure love; to God offering loving reverence, loving their abbot with sincere and humble affection, preferring nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to life everlasting. (RB 72.5-12)

Both of these excerpts – which also function as bookends of the *Rule* - highlight a common theme, that salvation comes through union with the risen Christ, who brings a person into communion with God. This concise conceptualization of the soteriology of the *Rule* aligns as well with the broader theological theme of deification, which as historical theologian Scott Hahn has explained is meant to be understood not only as salvation *from* sin, but as salvation *for* participation in the divine life as made possible through the work of Christ and the Spirit.⁶⁶ Norman Russell, who authored an exhaustive historical survey of theories of deification (or “theosis”) in early Christian traditions, notes that this theological theme was probably much more widespread and assumed among early Christian writers in both Eastern and Western traditions, prior to the formulation of more defined doctrines of deification in the Christian East by medieval monastics such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor.⁶⁷ These insights from historical theology help to support the argument for the presence of a theology of deification in Benedict's *Rule*.

⁶⁶ Scott Hahn, Foreword, in *Called to Be the Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Carl E. Olson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016), 7.

⁶⁷ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-2.

In what may further characterize Benedict's framing of the *telos* of the spiritual journey even more specifically, commentator Georg Holzherr notes that at several places in the *Rule* – including its beginning and end, in addition to the final part of chapter 7 on humility – Benedict describes the end of the spiritual life as love,⁶⁸ love more precisely in the sense of God's very self (*caritas*; cf. 1 John 4:8). Furthermore, as I have argued elsewhere,⁶⁹ there are grounds in the spirituality of the *Rule* for contemplating a vision of communal deification. This is conveyed especially I believe in the excerpt from chapter 72 presented in the last paragraph above, especially at the ending where Benedict writes of Christ “bring[ing] *us all together* to life everlasting” (RB 72.12; emphasis added). Here it seems that Benedict is referring at the end of his *Rule* to a communal process of growth in Christ, occurring in the very midst of relationships among members of the community, where the community as a whole joins more fully with the life of God and sacramentally becomes a presence of Christ in and for the world. This notion of a communal form of deification will be important to hold onto while looking more deeply into Benedict's treatment of humility.

Setting Up the Ladder

With these broader themes in Benedict's *Rule* and its spirituality in mind, we can begin exploring Benedict's central treatise on humility, which is found in chapter 7 of the *Rule*. In terms of its placement within the *Rule's* overall structure, chapter 7 is the last

⁶⁸ Georg Holzherr, Mark Thamert, and Benedict, *The Rule of Benedict: An Invitation to the Christian Life* (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2016), 146.

⁶⁹ See James Tomlinson, “A Relational Human Development Perspective on Benedictine Spirituality,” *American Benedictine Review* 67, no. 1 (2006).

chapter in a grouping that covers what is considered by scholars to be the *Rule's* “spiritual foundation,” constituting chapters 4 through 7.⁷⁰ In this chapter’s short introduction, Benedict’s text does essentially three things. First, it offers a biblically-grounded description of the overall importance of humility in the spiritual life. Second, it addresses a critical barrier to attaining humility, which is pride. Finally, it proposes a solution to the problem of pride, via a path of progress in virtue that the *Rule* illustrates with the imagery of a ladder that is “lifted up by the Lord to heaven” (RB 7.8). Considering these three topics in turn can offer some vital background and orientation to Benedict’s teachings on humility.

The strong use of biblical references throughout chapter 7 to accentuate the salience of humility in the spiritual life begins with the admonishment given in this chapter’s opening line: “The Holy Scripture cries out to us, brothers, saying: *Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted* (Luke 14:11; 18:14)” (RB 7.1). The striking image of scripture “crying out”⁷¹ about the importance of humility suggests the broader question regarding the meaning and significance of humility within the Bible itself. While a comprehensive review of this topic would be beyond the scope of this chapter, a useful organizing framework can be taken from Benedictine commentator Terrence Kardong who distinguishes between two key biblical senses of humility: one associated with God’s special concern and

⁷⁰ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, vii.

⁷¹ Kardong adds the interesting comment that the personification of Scripture here shows that the author of the *Rule* asserts an identity between the Scripture and the very person of God; see Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 135.

eschatologically-oriented action for those who are humiliated by poverty or other oppressive social forces; and the other which pertains to humility as a moral virtue for growing in intimacy with God.⁷² Exploring each of these two biblical senses of the virtue can give a concise yet helpful biblical perspective for understanding Benedict's own presentation regarding humility in the *Rule*.

Concerning first the meaning of humility related to a message of hope for those who are brought down or humiliated, both Kardong and Böckmann note that this understanding is connected to the virtue's meaning in classical Greek thought, where humility (indicated especially by the word *tapeinos* and its cognates) had a pejorative definition, indicating a state of lowliness that was associated with the social status of slaves.⁷³ This negative association is reversed in the Jewish scriptures, where the Messiah is expected to be lowly (Zechariah 19:9), and show kindness to the weak (Isaiah 11:4).⁷⁴ This understanding of humility persists in the Christian scriptures, as is evident for instance in the canticle of Mary contained in the Gospel of Luke:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁷² Ibid., 169.

Kardong's analysis appears to be consistent with, though certainly a simplified characterization, of the meaning of humility and its cognates in the Judeo-Christian scriptures; see *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), s.v. "*tapeinos*."

⁷³ Ibid., 160; Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 130.

⁷⁴ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 161.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Luke 1:46-55)

As for the second biblical dimension of humility, the Christian scriptures also emphasize a moral dimension to the virtue which itself can be understood in different senses. One of these can be taken from the passage of Luke quoted by Benedict in the opening line of chapter 7, which when read in its full context accentuates a meaning of humility as recognition of one's sin before God, combined with an attitude of not regarding oneself as being above others:

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

Another important reference to humility's moral meaning can also be found in Philippians chapter 2, including the early Christ hymn on Jesus' own humility:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:1-11)

Here humility shows to be an attitude of self-giving, following Jesus' example of living for the sake of others.

Altogether, both dimensions of humility will be important for understanding the different dimensions of Benedict's spirituality of humility. Kardong makes the important observation that most often in the *Rule*, emphasis is given to the moral dimension of the virtue, yet both biblical meanings are indeed present and important for understanding Benedict's full treatment of the virtue.⁷⁵ The biblical portrayal of Jesus as the primary exemplar of humility will also be important for penetrating Benedict's teaching; as will become more clear in the remainder of the exploration of chapter 7 below, the *Rule* very much centers on a Christological foundation and perspective to express the centrality of humility for Christian life.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 168.

It is pertinent and interesting to also note some of the concerns that Kardong raises around the *Rule's* selection of scriptural references regarding humility, one being the omission of such key New Testament texts as Matthew 11:28-30 that would seem to be quite fundamental to a Christian understanding of the virtue. Kardong appears to view such omissions as perplexing, though he notes that there are potentially hundreds of scriptural references related to humility that the *Rule* could have drawn from. Another insightful comment from Kardong regards Benedict's use of scriptural references which are plainly taken out of context, for example his use of Psalm 131:2 in RB 7.4. Still, Kardong notes that this should be excused, since uses of scripture like these are more in line with practices of spiritual and ascetical forms of exegesis that were common in the early Christian era.⁷⁶ These additional points help to show how idiosyncratic in some ways the *Rule's* use of scripture is, along with how important it is to "read between the lines" in order to gain a fuller and more theologically accurate understanding of the meaning of humility being communicated in the *Rule*.

A second major component of the introductory section of chapter 7 is Benedict's succinct discussion concerning the problem of pride. This is the only place where pride is discussed in the chapter, yet nonetheless it is clearly identified as a critical problem to the spiritual life and progress in humility. As the *Rule* states:

Therefore, by saying this it shows us that all exaltation is a kind of pride, against which the prophet indicates that he guards himself, saying: *Lord, my heart is not exalted nor are my eyes lifted up; nor have I walked in great things, nor in wonders above me* (Ps 131:1). And why? *What if I did not think humbly, but instead exalted my soul? Then like a child weaned from its mother - so you would treat my soul* (Ps 131:2). (RB 7.2-4)

⁷⁶ Ibid., 167.

Given the brevity of this section and its lack of elaboration concerning the nature of pride, it is perhaps more useful to zoom out to consider the way in which this vice, and by association the theme of “exaltation,” is treated in the *Rule* overall. To explore these themes, it is helpful to turn to Böckmann’s commentary, especially concerning pride’s treatment in chapter 4 of the *Rule*. As an interesting illustration of pride to lead off with, Böckmann does a bit of word play with the Latin *superbia*, commenting that the prefix *super-*, meaning “over,” can translate into an image such as: “Somebody puts up his nose, wants to be better than others and might look down on others contemptuously, competes with others. This applies not only to the relationship to God but also to the community and the superior.”⁷⁷

Böckmann also names two particular ways in which pride is described in the *Rule*. One of these “can be strong at the beginning of the spiritual life and is expressed in resistance, rigidity, proud self-assessment, much talking, and bragging”; a second is perhaps more suited to those who have been in monastic life for some time, and have progressed further in the development of spiritual and moral virtues.⁷⁸ Benedict can be found referring to this second form in the Prologue, where he writes, “These are they who, fearing the Lord, are not elated over their own good observance; rather, knowing that the good which is in them comes not from themselves but from the Lord, they

⁷⁷ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 36.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Böckmann traces the source of these two ways of understanding pride to John Cassian’s teachings, especially in his *Institutes*, chapters 5 through 12 (which will also be discussed later as a critical source for Benedict’s chapter on humility); see *ibid.*

magnify (Ps. 15:4) the Lord who works in them, saying with the Prophet: *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give the glory* (Ps. 115:1)” (RB Prol. 29-30).

Böckmann also notes how Benedict’s *Rule* shows a special concern for the potential for pride to cause damage to the community and interpersonal relationships.⁷⁹ In chapter 65 for instance, Benedict observes that pride shown by those who are newly ordained as priests can lead to “jealousies, quarrels, detractions, competitiveness, dissensions, and depositions from office” (RB 65.7). These multiple dimensions and themes concerning pride as it is conceptualized more broadly in the *Rule* must also factor in to a proper understanding of Benedict’s teaching on humility in chapter 7; Benedict’s reflections on humility – as will be seen below - show the same concern for vigilance against conceit, arrogance and self-interest, as well as an overall sense of care for the well-being of community and the integrity of relationships amongst its members.

A final topic to consider from the introductory section of chapter 7 concerns the image of the “ladder” which Benedict uses to symbolize the path of growth in humility within the cenobitic form of monastic life. As the text reads:

Therefore, brothers, if we wish to arrive at the highest point of humility, and speedily reach that heavenly exaltation to which we can only ascend by the humility of this present life, we must by our ever-ascending actions erect a ladder like the one Jacob beheld in his dream, by which the *angels* appeared to him *descending and ascending* (Gen. 28:12). Without doubt this descent and ascent can signify nothing else than that we descend by exaltation and ascend by humility. And the ladder thus erected is our life in the world, which, if the heart is humbled, is lifted up by the Lord to heaven. The sides of the same ladder we assert to be our body and soul, in which the call of God has placed various steps of humility or discipline, which we must ascend. (RB 7.5-9)

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Once again, it is important to look to the theological background of this section of the *Rule* to gain a better impression of the significance of the ladder image for expressing Benedict's teaching on humility. Two sources in particular deserve special consideration. One is John Cassian's *Institutes*, a text that emerged out of the Egyptian desert monastic context that in turn became a foundation for much of the content in chapter 7 of the *Rule*. The second is a text known as the *Rule of the Master*, another cenobitic monastic rule that predates Benedict's own, from which almost all of Benedict's chapter on humility is taken directly.⁸⁰

Chapter 4 of Cassian's *Institutes* is widely recognized by scholars as a key original source of the material that makes up the chapters on humility in both the *Rule of the Master* as well as the *Rule of Benedict*. Cassian's text is also different from these cenobitic rules in several ways, one of the most significant being that instead of using the image of a ladder with various "steps" of humility, it uses the language of "signs" (*indices*) of the virtue. Kardong makes the important observation around this difference that while "steps" indicates there to be a progression or sequence of movements in the direction of a goal, Cassian's use of "signs" indicates more a sense of empirical representations of the virtue which can be observed in a person as their growth in virtue becomes manifest. Not a subtle difference, Kardong notes that the language of steps used in the rules of the Master and of Benedict creates some difficult semantic questions, including whether humility must indeed "progress" in a certain way, and if all the steps of

⁸⁰ John Cassian and Jean-Claude Guy, *The Institutes* (New York: Newman, 2000); The Master and Luke Eberle, *The Rule of the Master* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977).

The following discussion concerning these two sources of RB 7 comes largely from Kardong, who bases his commentary on the earlier work of Adalbert de Vogüé; see Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 160-165.

growing in the virtue must follow in the same uniform sequence.⁸¹ It should be mentioned that no contemporary commentator or interpretation of the *Rule* that I have encountered seems to espouse this perspective. Cassian's text also features language that is less colored by a sense of asceticism or labor compared to what is found in the cenobitic rules' treatises on humility, which could potentially open up these rules to the charge of pelagianism (or self-salvation).⁸² A broader perspective on Benedict's theology of grace, evident in passages such as those discussed above concerning the work of God in the life and works of a person (cf. RB Prol. 29-30), are necessary for dealing with such troublesome potential interpretations of Benedict's text.

The *Rule of the Master*, now considered by scholars to have predated Benedict's *Rule*, is an even more immediate source for Benedict's own chapter on humility. The Master's adaptation of Cassian's monastic teaching from the eremitical, desert-based monastic context of Egypt to a cenobitic monastic environment resulted in its expansion into a much broader literary work, complete with its own introduction and conclusion; this is combined as well with a much stronger sense of authority and community discipline.⁸³ The *Rule of the Master* is also the source of the imagery of Jacob's ladder (cf. Genesis 28:12-17) for depicting growth in humility, a symbol which as Kardong notes was a common and popular image in early Christian writings on spirituality.⁸⁴ The *Rule of the Master* would serve as a critical source for Benedict's own chapter on

⁸¹ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 163.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

humility; in fact, as shown in editions of Benedict's *Rule* that indicate the parts of the text where Benedict copied from the *Rule of the Master* directly, chapter 7 of Benedict's *Rule* is almost entirely taken word-for-word from chapter 10 of the *Rule of the Master*.

Some key differences do exist between these two texts' chapters on humility however, which are especially vital to consider for getting a better sense of the presence of Benedict's own voice and style in his teaching. One of the most significant of these variations perhaps is the emphasis that Benedict puts on a more realized eschatological perspective, especially shown in his omission of much of the Master's lengthy discussion of heaven which comes at the end of his chapter on humility (RM 10.92-120). Kardong notes that by doing this, Benedict is much more in line with Cassian in showing that humility leads ultimately to closeness and love of God in this life, rather than emphasizing so much an "extreme future eschatology" as the Master does in his description of the summit of humility.⁸⁵ A few other differences exist as well, including Benedict's insertion of "for the love of God" when describing the third step of humility. Kardong notes that this inclusion of a mention of the love of God is perhaps a sign that Benedict couldn't countenance there being no mention of love until the very end of the chapter, as is the case in the Master's text.⁸⁶ Kardong comments too that Benedict removes many explicit addresses to a "disciple" that begin the description of each step of humility in the Master's *Rule*, thereby also toning down its heavy authoritarian tone.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ibid., 164.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 166.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 165.

A final note concerning this introductory passage of chapter 7 regards the two sides that Benedict gives to the ladder of humility. These are body and soul, as seen in RB 7.9. Böckmann has noted in her commentary that in general, Benedict doesn't endorse any duality between body and soul, which is more noticeable at different locations in the *Rule of the Master*.⁸⁸ Kardong remarks as well that this aspect of the ladder of humility gives it a distinctive "incarnational" character: humility is not only a virtue which is found in the soul or interiority of the person, but permeates a person's entire being including the multitude of embodied and material ways in which the virtue manifests itself.⁸⁹ Kardong also regards the very last line of this excerpt's reference to "humility and discipline" to have a corresponding meaning to body and soul, where both inner and outer dimensions of the practice of virtue are given significance.⁹⁰ This holistic perspective on the human person can be seen at other times in Benedict's *Rule* as well, for instance in chapter 5 on obedience where Benedict's exhorts against murmuring and grudges within the heart when completing tasks for one's superiors (RB 5.17-19), or in chapter 19 where Benedict teaches monks to sing the Divine Office "in such a way that our mind is in harmony with our voice" (RB (trans. Kardong), 19.7).

This discussion of some of the most significant background elements of Benedict's seventh chapter provides a necessary foundation for exploring the particular

⁸⁸ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 17.

⁸⁹ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 138.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

“steps” or aspects of humility that are described in the remainder of the *Rule’s* seventh chapter. It is now possible to move on to discuss these aspects in detail.

Fear of God

To begin to look at the particular aspects of humility in Benedict’s *Rule*, rather than treating each individual step in turn, my approach will be instead to explore the different key themes pertaining to humility as are described in chapter 7.

The first theme to consider, which is located in the first step of the ladder of humility, is that of the fear of God. Modern commentators on this passage seem to universally agree that the fear referred to is not fear in the sense of an anxious emotion; rather, fear of God has a particular biblical meaning, conveying especially a sense of reverential awe.⁹¹ Featured in several places in scripture, fear of God is particularly important in the wisdom writings of the Jewish bible (e.g., Sirach 1:11; Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 19:9). Fear of God, as an awareness of the presence of God, has also a particularly important place in early monastic spirituality. Regarding this topic, the *Rule* itself states:

The first step of humility, then, is that one always keeps *the fear of God before his eyes* (Ps 36:2), fleeing every kind of forgetfulness, and that one is ever mindful of all God has commanded, unfolding within his soul that those who despise God will be consumed in hell for their sins, and that eternal life has been prepared for those who fear Him. (RB 7.10-11)

In comparison, Cassian treats fear of God as a sort of prerequisite leading to the signs of humility described in his *Institutes* (Instit. 4.39), whereas the Master – with Benedict following - incorporated it directly into the ladder of humility as its first step (RM 10.10).

⁹¹ Ibid., 139; Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 145.

Its position as a preliminary or primary step within these authors' schemas is a sign of the importance ascribed to this practice within the monastic spiritual tradition.

Kardong notes some of the indicators that further show Benedict's special emphasis on this theme, for instance with the repeated use of imperative wording such as "always." In fact, Kardong even asserts that fear of God could be considered to be the "spiritual core of the entire *Rule*," a strong claim seemingly justified by the highly charged language used to describe its importance as well as the section's overall repetitive structure.⁹² Following Kardong's analysis, it could be said that humility, as well as perhaps the entire spirituality of Benedict's *Rule*, is oriented around this basic awareness of God's presence. As Kardong remarks, "the mindfulness of the monk is primarily toward God; indeed, the entire monastic regime is calculated to combat distraction from its central focus. Hence the strictures of Benedict against drunkenness (40.5-7), gossip (43.8-9) and ribaldry (6.8)."⁹³ Böckmann makes a connected point along these lines, that in the sense of mission, Benedictine monasteries perhaps serve the world most today by striving to practice this form of attentiveness to the divine.⁹⁴

Moving to consider another set of verses pertaining to this step of humility, the *Rule* reads:

And keeping custody over himself at every hour from sin and vice of thought, tongue, eyes, hands, feet, of his own will or of fleshly desires, let this man consider that he is regarded from heaven by God at every hour, and that his

⁹² Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 139-140.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁹⁴ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 146.

actions in every place are perceived in the Divine Vision and are reported to God by His angels at every hour. (RB 7.12-13)

Here again, Benedict stresses the necessity of awareness of God, combined with an awareness of oneself, which is described as a kind of vigilance. In concert with these two types of awareness, Benedict states that God's presence is everywhere, which in this context appears to act as a further admonishment to monks to be watchful of their moral conduct. In evaluating the strong and somewhat overbearing tone of these verses, it is useful to keep in mind certain aspects of Benedict's own social context, including the likelihood that many of those who were coming to live in his monasteries were probably rather challenging prospects for becoming acclimated to a communal type of spirituality. Böckmann comments that Benedict likely had to deal with many strong characters in his monasteries, a result at least in part of the social and political tumult that followed the fall of Rome.⁹⁵

Obedience

Obedience, as another key aspect of humility, is described more broadly in the *Rule* as both a central and salvific virtue. This seems to be without doubt, as it is referred to both at the beginning of the *Rule* as the "labor" (RB Prol. 2), and at the end of the text as the "way" (RB 71.2) for a person to return to God. It is clear that obedience is also a complex and multidimensional virtue in Benedictine spirituality. Adalbert de Vogüé points out for one that Benedict uses multiple meanings of the virtue, including through his use scripture: Luke 10:16 (at RB 5.6, "Whoever listens to you, listens to me,") refers primarily to obedience *to* Christ, while John 6:38 (at RB 5.13, "I have come not to do my

⁹⁵ Ibid., 129.

own will, but the will of him who sent me,") refers to obedience *in imitation of Christ*.⁹⁶ There is also an additional tension in the *Rule's* treatment of obedience that must be held together, between the "vertical" emphasis on obedience to God and abbot, and a "horizontal" dimension which stresses mutual obedience and fraternal charity within the community. Seen in light of these multiple meanings of obedience, and with reference to its Latin roots of *ob/audire* ("to listen to"), there is a sense of a kind of universal listening or openness to God, abbot and community in the *Rule* that colors much of its communally-shaped and relationally-based spirituality. Louis (Thomas) Merton, writing on the importance of obedience for monastic renewal in the twilight of the Second Vatican Council, comments that as far as the actual monastic discipline of obedience is concerned, any of its more "external and juridical" aspects must always rest upon the foundation of the "bonum obedientiae" (cf. RB 71.1), its core meaning of drawing a person into closer union with God by participation in the obedience of Christ.⁹⁷

In chapter 7 of the *Rule*, references to obedience can be found in steps one through four. Concerning the second step, the *Rule* states,

The second step of humility is that one does not love his own will, nor delight in satisfying his own desires, but imitates in his deeds that saying of the Lord: *I did not come to do my own will, but that of him who sent me* (John 6:38). (RB 7.31-32)

Though not directly conveyed, implicitly this step is really about obedience, represented as a transformation of the human will which is in fact an important and recurring theme

⁹⁶ Benedict and Adalbert de Vogüé, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 91.

⁹⁷ Louis T. Merton, "The Place of Obedience in Monastic Renewal," *The American Benedictine Review* 16, no. 3 (1965): 360.

throughout the *Rule*. In chapter 4 for instance, Benedict admonishes to “hate your self-will” (RB 4.60), and the verses here in chapter 7 also show the fundamental Christological dimension of this: renunciation is a way of imitating Christ, more specifically by participating in Christ’s own obedience and humility. A critical exegetical question however is what Benedict intends to mean when referring to one’s own will. Many contemporary commentators would seem to stress that what is ultimately being referenced is not the complete annihilation of a sense of self and agency in the person, but rather, a kind of grace-inspired asceticism whereby one is helped to slowly reduce and diminish the internal movements and exterior actions that are based primarily on individualism and self-interest. As Böckmann puts it, what is really being referred to here is “willfulness, self-will, a kind of will that is aimed against God and neighbor.”⁹⁸

As the antithesis to self-will, Böckmann shows how obedience connotes rather the imitation of Christ demonstrated by the performance of corporeal and spiritual works of mercy, or what in general can also be considered as the concrete ways of following Christ within the material environment of the monastery.⁹⁹ This connection between obedience and loving acts towards others connects also with the concept of horizontal obedience named above, in which obedience can be understood as a way of seeking God while living in interdependent relationships in community. Terrence Kardong also picks up on the relational dimensions of obedience, describing it as an eminently cenobitic virtue, one

⁹⁸ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 59.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

that indicates an “openness and receptivity to the other, rather than self-sufficient reliance on one’s own vision, plans and insights.”¹⁰⁰

It is important to note as well that there are alternative, historical understandings of the status of the human will within the Benedictine literature. As Ephrem Hollerman has shown, views of Benedictine humility and obedience that emerged during the late nineteenth century tended to stress an inherent kind of dysfunction in the will, which must be completely done away with and replaced with divine will.¹⁰¹ Rather than a transformation of the human will, these interpretations would seem to indicate more of a transplantation of wills, accomplished through the dual action of self-denial and God’s intervention. Such views communicate a rather negative theological anthropology, which forms a contrast when compared with more recent interpretations by Böckmann and others. One general observation that can be made based on this discrepancy is that the interpretation of Benedictine humility and obedience likely has a great deal to do with the theological horizon that one brings to viewing and understanding these virtues. As seen in Hollerman’s analysis, several monastic commentaries during the late nineteenth century demonstrate a rather harsh view of human life focused on sin and the need for penance.¹⁰²

Moving on, steps three and four of Benedict’s ladder address more specific aspects of obedience within a cenobitic monastic environment. Benedict writes:

¹⁰⁰ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 29.

¹⁰¹ Ephrem Hollerman, “Humility in the Rule of Benedict: A Theological and Historical Analysis of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Interpretations,” *The American Benedictine Review* 51, no. 3 (2000): 256-268.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 256-261.

The third step of humility is that for the love of God one submits himself in all obedience to his superior, imitating the Lord of whom the apostle says: *He was made obedient even unto death* (Phil 2:8). (RB 7.34)

It is interesting to note that the same progression from renunciation of self-will (step two) to obedience to an abbot (step three) is also given in chapter 4 of the *Rule*, at verses 60 to 61. Kardong makes plain the reason for this linkage, noting that, “The monastic solution to the trap of self-will is obedience to a divinely authorized human agent, namely, the abbot.”¹⁰³ Chapter 5 in the *Rule*, which is specifically concerned with obedience, also stresses this connection:

The first step of humility is obedience without hesitation. This comes naturally to those who esteem nothing as more beloved to them than Christ. Whether on account of the holy service they have professed or because of the fear of hell and the glory of eternal life, as soon as anything is ordered by the superior it is as if it had been commanded by God himself; and they cannot bear any hesitation in doing it. Of these men the Lord says: *on hearing with his ear he has obeyed me* (Ps 18:44). And again he says to teachers: *he who hears you hears me* (Luke 10:16). (RB 5.1-6)

While obedience to an abbot or spiritual “parent,” who holds “Christ’s place” in the monastery (as Benedict notes in RB 2.1), clearly adds a strong dimension of authority to the *Rule*, it can also be inferred from the passage above that human authority for Benedict is only ever at the service and ends of divine authority. This is evident even in the very opening lines of the *Rule*, where the obedience that is first asked of the person towards the community’s superior (or “master”) is ultimately turned over to the person of Christ:

Listen, O my son to the precepts of the master, and incline the ear of your heart: willingly receive and faithfully fulfill the admonition of your loving father; (cf. Prov. 1:8, 4:20, 6:20) that you may return by the labor of obedience to him from whom you had departed through the laziness of disobedience. To you therefore,

¹⁰³ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 142.

my words are now addressed, whoever you are, that through renouncing your own will you may fight for the Lord Christ, the true king, by taking up the strong and bright weapons of obedience. (RB Prol. 1-3)

These observations concerning authority and the “vertical” dimension of obedience in the *Rule* would seem to lend themselves again to Merton’s argument concerning the meaning of obedience, that at its core monastic obedience has to do with a person’s motivation to follow Christ, as lived out through the practical realities of a highly regulated and communal form of religious life.

Step four delves into the topic of monastic obedience further by focusing on the meaning of obedience under harsh or challenging conditions. As Benedict describes:

The fourth step of humility is that if in the exercise this very obedience hard and contrary things, even injustices, are done to one, he embraces patience silently in his conscience, and in enduring does not grow weak or give up, as Scripture says: *He who perseveres to the end will be saved* (Matt 10:22); and again, *Let your heart take comfort, and rely on the Lord* (Ps 27:14).

Benedict’s insistence upon the value of obedience under difficult conditions again accentuates the high degree of importance that he ascribes to this virtue. Interestingly, Kardong notes that this step of the ladder is the only step that evokes the biblical dimension of humility discussed above having to do with God’s friendship, steadfastness and mercy toward those who are oppressed or brought low, those in effect who have been humiliated by others.¹⁰⁴ Böckmann adds that Benedict is not indicating here that such trials ought to be inflicted upon those persons who reside in his monasteries, but rather that he seems to acknowledge that such situations do have the potential arise, and is

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 168.

addressing here how a person ought to approach them.¹⁰⁵ The Christological focus of Benedict's presentation of humility is again evident at the end of this step's treatment, which reads:

Indeed, they are fulfilling the precept of the Lord by patience in adversities and injuries who, *when struck on one cheek offer the other; to him who takes away their tunic they give their cloak; and when required to go one mile, they go two* (Matt 5:39-41): with Paul the Apostle they bear *false brothers, bear persecutions, and bless those who curse them* (2 Cor 11:26; I Cor 4:12). (RB 7.42-43)

Manifestation of Thoughts

Manifestation or disclosure of thoughts to a spiritual elder is another early monastic practice taken up in the seventh chapter of Benedict's *Rule*, which pertains especially to the development of self-awareness and the discernment of different interior movements going on within the heart – themes that have already been encountered in the previously discussed aspects of Benedictine humility. Donald Corcoran, in her research into practices of spiritual guidance in the early monastic tradition, writes of the practice of disclosing thoughts (known in Greek as *exagoreusis*), “It had a much broader meaning than sacramental confession. The aim was not absolution from guilt but rather an increase in discernment about the propensities of the deep will in one's personality. *Exagoreusis* brought true self-knowledge and gave the opportunity for the charismatically endowed elder to be a physician for one's soul.”¹⁰⁶ Benedict's own treatment of this subject in the seventh chapter of the *Rule* reads:

¹⁰⁵ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Donald Corcoran, “Spiritual Guidance,” in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1992): 448.

The fifth step of humility is when through humble confession one does not hide from one's abbot the evil thoughts that enter one's heart, nor the evils committed in secret. Exhorting us in this regard Scripture says, *Make known to the Lord your way and hope in Him* (Ps 37:5). And again it says: *Confess to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy is for all ages* (Ps 106:1; Ps 118:1). (RB 7.44-46)

Benedict discusses the importance of revealing thoughts to a trusted spiritual elder in chapter 4 of his *Rule* as well, where he admonishes, "When evil thoughts come to our hearts, dash them immediately against Christ and reveal them to your spiritual elder" (RB (Böckmann trans.) 4.50). It is also worth noting here the significance of the last line in the selection from chapter 7 above regarding this step, where Benedict quotes from the Psalms to remind the reader of God's mercy; a focus on the revelation of personal sin is not meant to result only in shame, confusion, or scrupulosity, but rather occurs in and through relationship with a loving and forgiving God. Kardong also notes that the cleansing of the heart is seen within the monastic spiritual tradition as an important aspect of preparation for contemplative prayer.¹⁰⁷ Such an insight further accentuates how the manifestation and revealing of thoughts is aimed at a deepening intimacy with God.

Humility & Brokenness

The seventh step of humility moves to consider another aspect of humility, one that again touches on the important and recurring theme of the development of self-knowledge as a practice of humility. Benedict describes it in the following way in RB 7:

The seventh step of humility is that he should not only pronounce with his tongue that he is inferior to and more common than all, but also believe it in the intimate sensibility of his heart, humbling himself and saying with the prophet: *As for me, I am a worm and no man, shameful among men and an outcast of the people* (Ps 22:7). *I have been exalted, and cast down and confounded* (Ps 88:16). And again:

¹⁰⁷ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 152.

It is good for me that you have humbled me, that I may learn your commandments
(Ps 119:71,73). (RB 7.51-54)

Obvious in this passage are the themes of self-abasement and becoming humbled or brought low. With the line from Psalm 22, there is also almost certainly a reference to Christ's passion given here as well, as Böckmann concurs.¹⁰⁸ Consultation with monastic commentaries can help in drawing further meaning from this text.

Monastic tradition has long associated humility with self-knowledge, especially with regard to one's trespasses against God and others and the non-life giving habits that sustain such actions – that is, through knowledge of one's sinful tendencies. Trappist writer André Louf's examination of monastic humility focuses on the attitude of contrition of heart (*contritio cordis*), or a breaking or shattering of the heart, which is engendered through honest self-scrutiny and a deepening degree of insight into the motivations (or what he most often refers to as “temptations”) that typically lie buried in the deepest parts of the self.¹⁰⁹ This self-knowledge, often described as bringing about a painful experience of abasement, is at the same time recognized in monastic spirituality as a place - indeed, a privileged place - from which a person can become more fully open to God's grace, mercy and healing. Thus, humility follows the familiar movement in the New Testament of descent to elevation, or humility to exaltation, what Louf refers to as the “double dynamic” that can be found for instance in the Philippians 2 text cited earlier in this chapter.¹¹⁰ Commentators including Michael Casey as well as Böckmann both see

¹⁰⁸ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 193.

¹⁰⁹ André Louf, *The Way of Humility* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007), 13-16.

in step seven of Benedict's chapter on humility an indication of this intensive journey toward gaining better insight into oneself, including the places where one falls short in their relationships to God, self, and others.¹¹¹ Furthermore, in a symbolic way, Christ's broken body on the Cross – again alluded to here by Benedict in the reference he gives to Psalm 22 - can also serve as an archetype for the brokenness of spirit that may come about through this process. It is in the acts of encountering, and accepting, one's brokenness however that one also develops the capacity to be open to meeting God as one truly is, a grace which appears to be alluded to in the final reference given by Benedict in the passage above. Due to the psychological challenges of this process however, monastic commentators offer special considerations concerning this step of humility. Böckmann for instance warns that a person who enters into this process too quickly, or without sufficient spiritual maturity, might be liable to inflict psychic wounds upon themselves.¹¹² A deep and personal knowledge of God's loving care would seem to be an essential dimension of this aspect of Benedictine humility. Casey notes too the risk of reinforcing an unhealthy sense of low self-esteem or poor self-image that may come about in persons who already possess this psychological tendency.¹¹³

Silence & Restraint of Speech

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 10, 12.

This same "double dynamic," Louf also notes, occurs at points in the synoptic gospels including Mt 23:12, Lk 14:11, and Lk 18:14.

¹¹¹ Michael Casey, *Truthful Living: Saint Benedict's Teaching on Humility* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001), 149; Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 192-193.

¹¹² Ibid., 193.

¹¹³ Casey, *Truthful Living*, 141-143.

The subject of speech – especially its regulation - is covered in steps nine through eleven of the ladder of humility. Speech and silence are both significant topics in the *Rule*, highlighted for instance in the Prologue (v. 17), among the catalogue of good works listed in Chapter 4 (vv. 51-54), in addition to Chapter 6 which is exclusively devoted to the subject. Chapter 6, which is quite brief, opens with the lines:

Let us do as the prophet says: *I said, I will keep custody over my ways so I do not sin with my tongue: I have kept custody over my mouth. I became speechless, and was humbled, and kept silent concerning good things* (Ps 39:1-3). Here the prophet shows that if we ought to refrain even from good words for the sake of restraining speech, how much more ought we to abstain from evil words, on account of the punishment due to sin! (RB 6.1-2)

Kardong remarks that readers who may have been expecting or hoping in this chapter for a treatise on the relationship between silence and prayer or mysticism will be disappointed to learn that its primary focus is on what could be called “bad speech.”¹¹⁴ In a way, this can also be considered the theme of the three short steps on speech in Benedict’s seventh chapter, which reads:

The ninth step of humility is that a monk *prohibit* his *tongue* from speaking (Ps 34:14), having restraint of speech unless asked a question, for Scripture makes clear that *In speaking much you cannot avoid sin* (Prov 10:19) and, *The talkative man is without direction on earth* (Ps 140:12).

The tenth step of humility is that one is not easily or promptly moved to laughter, for it is written: *The fool raises his voice in laughter* (Sir 21:23).

The eleventh step of humility is that when speaking the monk does so gently and without laughter, humbly and with gravity, speaking few but reasonable words, and that his voice is not clamorous: as it is written, *A wise man is known by his few words.* (RB 7.56-61)

One way to understand Benedict’s teachings on the regulation of speech is by noting a correspondence with his admonitions in earlier passages of chapter 7 around the

¹¹⁴ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 124.

problems of self-will, arrogance, haughtiness and individualism, all of which violate the spirit of humility among community relations. One difference however is that here, Benedict's teaching is primarily focused on behavior, as opposed to an inner attitude or disposition of thought which were more the emphasis in the preceding steps. Still, as Böckmann notes, for Benedict speech and heart are inseparably linked.¹¹⁵ Böckmann also parses some differences between kinds of laughter, and asserts – seemingly here based on her own extensive experience of monastic life - that Benedict intends not on admonishing against all forms of laughter, but rather the kind of laughter that is at another's expense, or which may in the end incite a person to negative thoughts, emotions or behaviors.¹¹⁶ Kardong concurs in commenting regarding the tenth step that, "It is frivolity that is condemned, and not good humor."¹¹⁷

Humility Expressed in Daily Life

Approaching the ladder's summit, the final step of humility in the *Rule* could perhaps be summed up as the integration of the interior and exterior dimensions of humility that have thus far been the focus of chapter 7. To turn once again to the text of the *Rule* concerning this integrative emphasis:

The twelfth step of humility is that the monk, not only in his heart, but by means of his own body always indicates his humility to those who see him - that is, at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the

¹¹⁵ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 51.

Böckmann on this page also paraphrases some of Jesus's words from Mark 7:18-23 as a way of illustrating Benedict's view on speech: "As Jesus said, what comes out of a person's mouth comes from the depth of the heart."

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹¹⁷ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 156.

field, or wherever he may be, whether sitting, walking, or standing - with head always inclined and gaze fixed on the ground, estimating at every hour his sins, he should estimate himself as present at the terrible judgment, saying always in his heart what the publican in the Gospel said with eyes fixed on the earth: *Lord, I am not worthy, sinner that I am, to lift my eyes up to heaven* (Luke 18:13); and again, with the prophet: *I am bent down and humbled in every way* (Ps 38:7-9; Ps 119:107). (RB 7.62-66)

Kardong makes note that this step resonates with the notion of an “incarnational” spirituality: in other words, Benedict’s spirituality concerns an inner formation that is also meant to be fully embodied, affecting the material and relational dimensions of communal life.¹¹⁸ Perhaps the phrase often associated with desert monastic spirituality, that of “contemplation in action,” can also be evoked here as fitting with the overall spirit of this culminating step of the *Rule*’s ladder of humility. Meanwhile, the latter half of the excerpt given above shows how honest self-awareness and contrition before God continue to be operative in this step as well. The placement of these qualities at the top of the ladder of humility would seem to indicate that in Benedict’s view, the need for these practices never goes away.

The Life of Charity

Arriving at the summit of humility, which could also be taken as the fullest experience and expression of the virtue, Benedict concludes chapter 7 with the following concise yet highly meaningful lines:

Having therefore ascended all these steps of humility, the monk will soon arrive *at that love of God which, being perfect, casts out fear* (1 John 4:18): whereby all that he formerly observed not without dread, he will begin to keep without effort, as if naturally, out of habit; no longer from fear of hell but for the love of Christ, from good habit and delight in virtue. This God through the Holy Spirit will now grant his laborer to manifest, cleansed from vices and sins. (RB 7.67-70)

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 138.

Among the different facets of this passage, the first and most clear perhaps is that humility, for Benedict, is essentially a way to the love of God (*caritas*), as well as the expanding capacity to openly receive, realize and trust in that love. Cassian and the *Rule of the Master* both describe the same end of humility; the Master (RM 10.88) quotes 1 John 4:18 directly as does Benedict, whereas Cassian uses a paraphrase of the verse (Instit. 4.39). One key difference according to some commentators however is in Benedict's omission of the Master's lengthy discourse on heaven at the end of this chapter (RM 10.92-123).¹¹⁹ As previously discussed, this difference can be taken as a sign of Benedict's greater focus on a realized eschatological perspective, as opposed to the Master's more future-oriented eschatology and envisioning of the goal of Christian life. For Benedict, love of God as the fullness of Christian life can be experienced in the midst of the ordinary and everyday.

Some commentators also assert an important connection between humility's *telos* or end in *caritas*, and an association that chapter 7 can be seen to have with chapter 72, the penultimate chapter in Benedict's *Rule* concerning what is referred to as the "good zeal" of monks.¹²⁰ This zeal, as can easily be ascertained by reading through the short chapter, has entirely to do with love:

Just as there is an evil zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell, so there is a good zeal which separates from vices and leads to God and to life everlasting. This zeal then, should be practiced by monks with the most fervent love. That is: *they should outdo one another in showing honor* (Rom 12:10). Let them most patiently endure one another's infirmities, whether of body

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 166.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 600.

or of character. Let them compete in showing obedience to one another. None should follow what he judges useful for himself, but rather what is better for another: They should practice fraternal charity with a pure love; to God offering loving reverence, loving their abbot with sincere and humble affection, preferring nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to life everlasting. Amen. (RB 72.1-12)¹²¹

Kardong provides a helpful maxim for tying together the perfect love of God – a love he notes that is *received* by us - mentioned at the end of chapter 7 with the engaged forms of charity listed in chapter 72, commenting that, “When we put it [the perfect love of God] into practice through love for neighbor, we ‘perfect’ it.”¹²²

One question commonly raised by commentators around the ending of chapter 7 is the use of the word “fear” by Benedict. As was discussed regarding the first step of humility, there is clearly a strong spiritual value placed on the fear of God as a first step towards growth in humility. While some seem to question whether it is this type of fear that Benedict intends to say is extinguished in the fully mature experience of humility, or whether Benedict meant that this fear is to be “replaced” by the love of God,¹²³

Böckmann suggests rather that the fear that Benedict is referencing at the end of chapter 7 has more to do with existential anxiety, or more precisely the “fear of hell.”¹²⁴ Fear of God then, according to this view of Benedict’s chapter, would continue to endure as an important and foundational spiritual experience and practice of humility.

¹²¹ Scholars consider this chapter to be authored by Benedict himself, as opposed to being derived from an earlier source.

¹²² Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 158-159.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹²⁴ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 46.

Another key facet of this final section of chapter 7 of the *Rule* concerns the way in which Benedict describes the transformation which occurs in a person as one is gradually formed through practices of the virtue, presumably being the practices described along the steps of the ladder. It could be interpreted that Benedict is indicating this transformation should lead a person to internalize humility to the point where prescribed observances are no longer necessary, insofar as such practices represent a kind of scaffolding to support a person's spiritual development. Furthermore regarding this transformation, commentators such as Kardong note the rather perplexing fact of how the Holy Spirit is not mentioned until this point in Benedict's entire chapter on humility. Kardong comments that this may be grounds for concern, especially concerning the notion of self-salvation, where all of the steps of humility could be seen as the result of human asceticism and devoid of the underlying help and ordering of divine grace.¹²⁵ As previously discussed, there is a need here to admit into consideration other parts of the *Rule* which can provide some counter-balance to this concern, and help to assert a more theologically consistent perspective on God's action throughout a person's life. As an additional theological point, Benedict also in this section provides a reference to the love of "Christ," which is an alteration from the texts of both Cassian and the Master who write of a love for the "good" (Instit. 4.39; RM 10.90). This, as Kardong highlights, has

¹²⁵ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 160.

the welcome effect of “sealing the entire chapter on humility with [Christ’s] name,”¹²⁶ further accentuating the Christocentric nature of the chapter as a whole.

Section II. Contemporary Constructive Interpretations of Benedictine Humility

In the history of Christian spirituality, the *Rule of Benedict* is often ascribed the status of a spiritual classic. Classic texts are those which are attended to and interpreted repeatedly in different cultural and historical contexts over time, in a process that gives rise to forms of spiritual practice and reflection that are rooted in the original texts yet which are not likely to have been envisioned by the authors of the texts themselves. Philip Sheldrake uses the metaphor of a musical composition and its performance to explain this, citing how each musician in reading a classic piece of music inevitably offers a unique performance based on their own interpretation of the original composition, with the score still providing the performance with an underlying identity and sense of meaning.¹²⁷

This pattern of continual reinterpretation of spiritual texts certainly applies not only to the *Rule of Benedict* as a whole, but to its specific teaching on humility as well. Historical theologian Hollerman, who authored an excellent study of the evolution of the interpretations of humility among Benedictines in North America and Europe during the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 159.

Kardong remarks that this final section on humility is also the only place where all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned together in the *Rule*.

¹²⁷ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 179-180.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sees shifting understandings of humility during this time period to be driven by a movement from what she refers to as a classical mode of interpretation, to an empirical or existential approach. Hollerman refers to the classical mode, which was active from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, as being strongly rooted in a sense of the authority of the historic institution of monasticism:

Monastic authors of these centuries endorsed, for the most part, a classical view of culture. They used what some have called an ‘aesthetic apologetic’ in their writings, an apologetic that tended to glorify Christianity on the basis of the beauty and splendor of its tradition. They clearly identified with the medieval ‘Golden Age’ of monasticism, and articulated monastic piety in an exhortatory style.¹²⁸

This classical mode of interpretation, which Hollerman finds present in the tradition into the 1960s, began to give way to a more existentially-based method rooted in several historical and cultural factors:

The World Wars and a pending technological revolution had shattered the euphoria and complacency of the Enlightenment, and attention was being paid to the “here and now,” the new human sciences, and a rapidly developing pluralism. Benedictine writers may have been consciously or unconsciously aware of the winds of change.¹²⁹

Hollerman’s insights into the changing modes of interpretation among writers in the Benedictine tradition over the last 150 years provides an important contextual perspective for beginning to consider the diversity of perspectives on humility that can be found in today’s monastic literature.

¹²⁸ Hollerman, “Humility in the Rule of Benedict: A Theological and Historical Analysis of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Interpretations,” 263.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

With these historical and cultural insights in mind, in this section I survey some of the main contemporary interpretations of Benedictine humility that have emerged within the last thirty years. While most of the categories of interpretation I engage with below only contain a few published works to date, I believe that taking a number of diverse perspectives into account is important for appreciating the multiple ways in which Benedictine humility has been articulated, which will also be valuable material to bring to the interdisciplinary dialogue with psychology later in my dissertation.

Feminist

One area of contemporary discussion around Benedictine humility is in regards to the experience of women. Clear connections exist between this discourse within the monastic literature, and the broader feminist method in theology which critiques dynamics in religion and society that perpetuate oppressive structures, and offers alternative theologies and modes of practice that advance justice and the full integrity of women's roles and voices. Among the small collection of feminist theological works on Benedictine humility, commentator Shawn Carruth provides a cogent discussion of the gendered nature of all virtues, noting research by feminist scholars regarding how, in patriarchal cultures, standards of holiness and sanctity are usually different for women than they are for men.¹³⁰ Carruth also explores patriarchal formulations of humility which relegate women to passive, private roles in religious life, which as Carruth notes "is the kind of humility encouraged in women who are currently speaking out, challenging the justification for the way things are and the way things are done in both society and

¹³⁰ Shawn Carruth, "The Monastic Virtues of Obedience, Silence and Humility: A Feminist Perspective," *The American Benedictine Review* 51, no. 2 (2000): 124-125.

church.”¹³¹ When prescribed in this way, humility leads to the stifling of women’s voices and charisms in the church, along with a greater burden of personal suffering and relational isolation.¹³²

Carruth also gives insights for how humility can be recovered in a way that fully supports the subjectivity and social agency of women. She opens her discussion on this theme by noting that in Benedict’s *Rule* – which was originally written for men – pride and will to power are seen as the primary obstacles to spiritual growth towards closer union with God. Women, as Carruth argues, struggle instead with temptations to neglect responsibility, to not take an active role in public life, and to not fully develop their own sense of self.¹³³ Carruth proceeds from this premise to advance three different dimensions of the practice of Benedictine humility for women. One is the development of self-identity, aided through reflection as well as the development of a critical consciousness to detect and resist social expectations and motivations that inhibit personal authenticity and its expression. Second, Carruth sees in humility a call for women to cultivate a relationality and ethics of care for others, as well as for the broader world of creation, as opposed to living from an autonomous and isolated place of existence. Third, Carruth takes a feminist notion of Benedictine humility to also imply a movement towards mystical communion with a transcendent God.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ibid.,143.

¹³² Ibid., 142-143.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.,144-146.

Joan Chittister has also written about how the *Rule of Benedict* can offer modern church and society a “feminist spirituality,” one that offers a solution to the problem of pride for men, as well as a balm for the effects of “patriarchal humility” on women “that distorts their full spiritual development and justifies their social limitations.”¹³⁵ As

Chittister asserts,

Humility, in the *Rule of Benedict*, is not subservience. It is openness to the totality of life, both within the soul and within the human community. From a Benedictine perspective, humility does not diminish a person; it provides a basis for realistic evaluation for accepting who and what I am, for being willing to grow beyond my demanding self, and so for allowing other people to be who and what they are. This kind of humility requires a new kind of self-acceptance.¹³⁶

Rather than seeing Benedict’s *Rule* as inherently addressed only men’s concerns regarding the attenuation of pride and individualism, Chittister considers the formulation of humility in the *Rule* to be applicable to both men and women. Recognizing the gendered nature of the virtues, Chittister takes up a different strategy than Carruth, considering both universal as well as gender-specific meanings of each step of Benedict’s ladder of humility.

Regarding the first step of humility for example, which Chittister refers to as “awareness of God,” a key lesson to be taken from the spirituality of the *Rule* is that

¹³⁵ Joan Chittister, “Pride and Humility: A New Self-Acceptance,” *Benedictines* 51, no. 2 (1998): 26.

For a review of Chittister’s key themes on humility, see also Dongsheng John Wu, “Humility, Maturity, and Transformation: Theological, Feminist and Psychological Dialogue on RB 7,” *The American Benedictine Review* 58, no. 2 (2007): 182-208.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

“God... is not a goal to be reached, God is a presence to be recognized.”¹³⁷ Rather than falling prey to the goal-driven behaviors and attitudes of patriarchal society that turn the self and its achievements into a personal form of deity, Benedictine humility invites a person to turn to the divine presence within, to “find the God of the universe who waits quietly within for us to exhaust our compulsive race to nowhere.”¹³⁸ Reflecting further upon the potential gender-specific meanings of this dimension of Benedictine humility, Chittister remarks that, “Men need the first degree of humility to curb the delusions of grandeur inherent for them in the system; women need it to realize that the presence of God is as strong in them as it is in any man.”¹³⁹

Likewise, concerning the fifth step of humility, which she labels as “self-revelation,”¹⁴⁰ Chittister sees in Benedict’s *Rule* an invitation to engage in a courageous initiative of developing self-knowledge, which can also lead to an inner sense of freedom and compassion for others:

Once we ourselves have admitted who we are in the secret places of our hearts, who is it that can diminish us? Self-righteousness dies and simplicity and equality rise to take its place. For men, the call of the fifth degree of humility is to honesty, with themselves and with others. Bragging can stop; self-sufficiency can stop; entitlement can stop. Men can learn to accept the human condition-and admit it. They can simply put the universe down and relax. For women, the fifth degree of humility is also a call to honesty. They can admit their gifts and come to see them as a piece of God's will for them; they can stop waiting to be called on and begin to volunteer the answers they feel inside of them.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 31-32.

Unlike Carruth in some respects, Chittister connects these constructive understandings of humility more directly with Benedict's *Rule*, adding additional nuance to prominent themes from Benedict's seventh chapter including self-knowledge, relationality, and communion with God.

Ecological

An ecological approach to the interpretation of Benedictine humility can also be discerned among some contemporary scholars, although it is important to note at the outset that no such label exists explicitly within the monastic literature. Rather, an understanding of humility as it pertains to the human relationship with the rest of creation can be drawn implicitly from the same feminist commentators on the *Rule* just discussed. Given the broader connection and overlap between feminist and ecological theological discourses, it is unsurprising to find this same association here in relation to Benedictine humility.¹⁴² While some of these authors' reflections on an ecological form of humility might be brief and seemingly insubstantial, I believe, especially given the salience of this issue in contemporary society as well as contemporary spirituality, that such a dimension of humility is certainly worth considering. It is also true that the subject of ecological virtues – as characterological traits which orient persons to act not only towards human flourishing, but the flourishing of the entire natural world– has become an increasingly important area of thought among ethicists, theologians, and environmental educators.

¹⁴² See for example Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

This gives consideration of a Benedictine version of ecological humility some additional contemporary significance as well.¹⁴³

Shawn Carruth contributes a brief discussion of humility in relation to ecology in her discussion of a recovered meaning of humility as “to be in connection.”¹⁴⁴ On the theme of relationship, Carruth cites the derivation of the English word humility from the Latin *humus*, meaning ground or earth. In line with an understanding of humility as an invitation to live into deeper relationality, Carruth suggests that, “The practice of humility encourages us to cultivate an ethic of care for all that is.”¹⁴⁵ With self-knowledge (itself a dimension of humility), comes awareness of oneself as living in profound interconnection “with others, with the community and the world.”¹⁴⁶ Humility, in this light, seems to connect with a relational anthropology that incorporates human connectedness and interdependence with all of creation.

Chittister also suggests an ecological dimension of humility, calling it “a proper sense of self in a universe of wonders.”¹⁴⁷ Chittister continues that, “Humility, in order words, is the basis for right relationships in life,” adding as well that humility is “the foundation for our relationship with God, our connectedness to others, our acceptance of ourselves, our way of using the goods of the earth and even our way of walking through

¹⁴³ For some review on this area, see James Tomlinson, “Ecological Religious Education: New Possibilities for Educational Practice,” *Journal of Religious Education* 67, no. 3 (2019): 185-202.

¹⁴⁴ Carruth, “The Monastic Virtues of Obedience, Silence and Humility: A Feminist Perspective,” 144.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁴⁷ Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1993): 62.

the world without arrogance, without domination, without scorn, without put downs, without disdain, without self-centeredness.”¹⁴⁸ The ecological implications of Chittister’s conceptualization of humility seem clear enough. It is worth considering how these senses of humility as offered by contemporary Benedictine commentators, in conjunction with scientific perspectives on the profoundly interconnected nature of the cosmos, together could offer a Benedictine resonance to what theologian Roger Haight has recently suggested as the virtue of “cosmic humility,”¹⁴⁹ based on the knowledge of oneself as existing as part of an interconnected and interdependent world.

Interfaith

The interpretation of Benedictine humility from an interfaith perspective is another important realm to consider, though like in the previous topic of ecological humility there is not currently a wealth of examples from the monastic literature to work with. Still, similar to the ecological category, an interfaith perspective on Benedictine humility in light of other religious and spiritual traditions is an important contemporary topic considering the tremendous amount of contact that religious traditions inevitably have with each other in today’s highly pluralistic and connected cultural environments. As I explore in this section, monastic spirituality is certainly not cut-off from today’s pluralistic setting. In fact, several initiatives have been developed for the sake of fostering

¹⁴⁸ Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*, 62, 74.

¹⁴⁹ Roger Haight, *Spirituality Seeking Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 20.

better forms of dialogue among monastics from different faith traditions,¹⁵⁰ which has led to reflections on humility in interfaith perspective as well.

One of the most involved and prolific Benedictine voices to be engaged with monastic interfaith dialogue is Mayeul de Dreuille, a French monk who has been engaged in monastic formation and dialogue for extended lengths of time in central and southeast Asia. Dreuille's encounters with different faiths, and especially the ascetical traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism, led him to publish a trilogy of books on Benedictine and Christian monasticism in conversation with these other traditions. Dreuille's commentary on the *Rule of Benedict*, subtitled *A Commentary in Light of World Ascetic Traditions*, presents many fruitful insights into Benedictine spirituality based on his extensive experience of engaging with other monastic traditions. Regarding chapter 7 of the *Rule* in particular, Dreuille immediately notes how humility constitutes what is essentially the Benedictine tradition's "programme for the spiritual life," noting that its stages are all associated at their deepest level with a person's progress towards God, or ultimate reality.¹⁵¹ Dreuille's commentary also discusses how the different steps of Benedictine humility correspond with similar teachings from other traditions, such as the first step of the fear of God, on which he comments that, "Here again, in the concern to centre all our attention on God to flee forgetfulness, we see the concentration that we found among the Hindu and Buddhist ascetics. They tried to focus the soul on one point only: in order to

¹⁵⁰ For more detail on prior instances of monastic interfaith initiatives, see for example Donald W. Mitchell and James A. Wiseman, *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

¹⁵¹ Mayeul De Dreuille and Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict : A Commentary in Light of World Ascetic Traditions* (New York: Newman Press, 2002), 154.

distinguish the real from the unreal, the permanent from the transitory.”¹⁵² Also regarding the renunciation of self-will contained in Benedict’s second step - which “does not refer to the personality of each monk, but rather to whatever in him is in opposition to God”¹⁵³ - Dreuille notes further comparisons with “the Hindus’ detachment from selfish action, and the Buddhists’ renunciation of desires. This means a detachment from anything that, insofar as it is transitory, keeps us away from the Permanent.”¹⁵⁴ While noting these correspondences among key teachings in the different traditions, Dreuille is also careful to cite the differences as well, relative especially to the topic of grace as well as the *telos* of spiritual practice among these different traditions. Dreuille does point out that for Benedictine humility, Christ “is both the model and the way,”¹⁵⁵ citing a path towards closer union with God which can also be referred to as “the gift of sharing in God’s own life, the essential point of Christian humility.”¹⁵⁶ As an interesting conclusion to his commentary on chapter 7 of the *Rule*, Dreuille offers a “rapid comparison” between Benedictine humility and these other monastic traditions’ programs of spiritual development:

There is unanimous agreement on the need for concentration on the divine, of a kind that allows a person to distinguish correctly things that are passing from things which endure. To fix the attention on the latter, there must be an effort to master the senses and the passions. Then, passing through the midst of painful

¹⁵² Ibid., 165.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 166.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 171.

trials, the disciple moves beyond the realm of the senses and mental concepts. Lastly, coming face to face with the Supreme Reality, he is led to realize that his being derives entirely from it, and that he is nothing in himself. Moments of illumination transform his view of things, and give an interior calm, which allows him to continue his path in peace, judging every matter in the light of its eternal value.¹⁵⁷

Donald Corcoran, another Benedictine commentator, has also written on the parallels that exist between Benedict's virtue of humility and the Confucian virtue of *ch'eng*, or "sincerity." Corcoran notes that both of these virtues exist as examples of a "meta-virtue" within their respective traditions, serving as the foundation for the development of other virtues.¹⁵⁸ Both are also, according to Corcoran, not just moral virtues in a practical sense, but are in fact ontological qualities: as humility is the way of encountering and drawing closer to God, so is *ch'eng* or sincerity in the Confucian tradition a way of relating to ultimate reality, or *chung* – meaning the "Center," which is everywhere.¹⁵⁹ Corcoran quotes from the central Confucian text, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, to explicate the meaning of *ch'eng* further:

Sincerity is the Way of Heaven. To think how to be sincere is the way of man. He who is sincere is one who hits upon what is right without effort and apprehends without thinking. He is naturally and easily in harmony with the Way. Such a man is a sage. He who tries to be sincere is one who choose the good and holds fast to it.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 176.

¹⁵⁸ Donald Corcoran, "Benedictine Humility and Confucian 'Sincerity,'" in *Purity of Heart and Contemplation : A Monastic Dialogue between Christian and Asian Traditions*, ed. Bruno Barnhart and Yuese Huang (New York: Continuum, 2001): 223.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 233.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Corcoran draws further comparisons between Benedictine humility and *ch'eng*, especially around how Confucian sincerity leads to *jen*, or “human heartedness, love, compassion.”¹⁶¹ Corcoran thus sees in Confucianism a powerful parallel tradition that can offer important insights into the ontological dimensions of Benedictine humility, which can become understood in this light as “paradigmatic of the whole Christian spiritual journey,” an “opening of the heart” that “brings illumination and harmony with all of creation.”¹⁶²

Psychological Interpretations

The last category of contemporary interpretation of humility to be considered here is done from the vantage point of modern psychology. The primary work to date which falls into this category is Antoine Vergote’s article, “A Psychological Approach to Humility in the Rule of St. Benedict,” which was originally presented as a paper to a conference of Dutch and Flemish abbots and abbesses in 1976.¹⁶³ Two articles have since been published in response to Vergote’s, which though approving of Vergote’s analysis in some ways are overall quite critical of its findings. My objective here will be to review some of the key points in Vergote’s analysis, before surveying the critical responses that have been lodged as well.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁶² Ibid., 240-241.

¹⁶³ Vergote, “A Psychological Approach to Humility in the Rule of St. Benedict,” 404-429.

Two other works within the Benedictine literature also briefly discuss the psychological implications of Benedict’s teachings on humility, however the analyses in these do not contain enough substantial engagement between psychological theory and particular aspects of Benedict’s teaching on the virtue to benefit discussion in this project. See Wu, “Humility, Maturity and Transformation: Theological, Feminist, and Psychological Dialogue on RB 7,” 196-206; and Francis S. Seeburger, “Humility, Maturity, and the Fear of God: Reflections on RB 7,” *The American Benedictine Review* 46, no. 2 (1995): 149-168.

An important introductory point for reviewing Vergote's work, which is one that the author makes at the opening of his paper, is that he himself is not a Benedictine monastic nor claims any special kind of authority or expertise in the subject area. (All the same, Vergote did hold impressive credentials as a widely published theologian, philosopher, and psychoanalyst, in addition to being a Catholic priest.) Moving on from this, many of the key points in Vergote's paper concerning the Benedictine virtue of humility are in fact quite interrelated. The first concerns Vergote's interpretation that Benedict held a starkly pessimistic view of the human person, constituting essentially a negative anthropology. According to Vergote, the second degree of Benedict's ladder of humility concerning obedience shows that Benedict considered the human will to be essentially flawed by sin, with the only solution becoming a complete abnegation of one's own will and the adoption of the will of God. This process, as Vergote sees it, happens through the hard "labor" of humility, as is well summarized in Vergote's remark that, "Ascesis, which is the work of faith, becomes at the same time the work of liberation from sin."¹⁶⁴ For Vergote, Benedict offers nothing of a "theology of creation," by which he means a vision of God's immanence in creation, including at work in the human will. Rather, the guiding notion for Benedict around humility is in what Vergote calls a "theology of liberation," to which Vergote ascribes a particular (and seemingly idiosyncratic) meaning as redemption from the innate dysfunction of human nature.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 419.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

This first theological point from Vergote's analysis leads to another which can be considered as the crux of his psychological analysis. Because Benedictine humility is so focused on an individualized asceticism of recovery from one's sinful nature through self-denial and negation, Benedictine humility also produces a focus on the "self," which if taken to its extreme could lead to the narcissistic pursuit of an ideal self.¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, the focus on human sinfulness and weakness in Benedict's *Rule* could also, as Vergote observes, potentially lead to a kind of infantilism, an enervated sense of selfhood manifesting as low self-agency and efficacy combined with a lack of social responsibility.¹⁶⁷ Regarding his points on asceticism however, it would have been welcome to see Vergote actually engage more directly with psychological theorists or researchers, which sadly is lacking in his paper.¹⁶⁸

It is finally also worth noting Vergote's suggestion for a revised way of understanding humility, as "authenticity." On this he remarks,

To be authentic is to be true to oneself, and that means, for the young, not to think oneself better than another and, as a consequence, to have respect and patience for others. This is a humanistic and ethical value, and it could also become a true "face of God." To keep to one's true place, neither more nor less, before God. We find ourselves back at an ancient saying "Know thou thyself": know that you are a responsible person; you are not God. Authenticity bases itself on a totally human simplicity in order to become religious humility.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 421-422.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 423-426.

¹⁶⁸ Note that I return to discuss Vergote's analysis, in conjunction with a broader exploration of the potential connections between the Benedictine virtue of humility and forms of psychological narcissism, in chapter three of this dissertation below.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 427.

Humility as authenticity, as Vergote sees it, in the end means an awareness of oneself before God, though not in a way that leads to a narcissistic distortion of one's self-image and the social consequences that this entails. Rather, humility should minimally include an awareness of oneself, including a definite awareness of oneself in responsible relationship with others.

To turn attention to the responses that have been given to Vergote's original paper, two articles have been generated by Benedictine monastic authors who largely took issue with Vergote's key points. On the theological dimensions of Vergote's analysis of humility that were described above, Emmanuel Latteur counters that a better option is in seeing in Benedictine humility a transformation of the human will, specifically as it becomes separated from all that keeps a person from union with God. Latteur points out that this alternative way of understanding the God-human relationship leads to a revised understanding of the nature of the asceticism of humility: rather than an individualized labor, as Vergote emphasizes, humility should instead be understood as the work of God in the human person. Along these lines, Benedict's steps of humility should be understood not as tasks to be accomplished by a person wishing to grow in humility, but rather as signs of God's grace working within the person to transform him or her into a participant in the life of Christ. Latteur clearly finds support for this theological perspective by looking toward the writings of John Cassian:

Moreover, the degrees of humility were for Cassian, St. Benedict's source, signs of the invasion of the monk's heart by "Him, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20). If one really sees this, the degrees of humility of the Benedictine Rule will have nothing of an individualistic or voluntaristic process about them; still less will they be reducible to pessimism or some sort of Manichaeism. If they are a descent into the center of the mystery

of Christ, they will also be a penetration into the heart of the church and the world, an opening, a passage “through the narrow gate,” making universal community accessible through the “law of inclusion.”¹⁷⁰

Benedict Guevin, writing after Latteur, further suggests that God’s grace can be understood as working not just *in*, but *with* the person, in a cooperative sense.¹⁷¹ In this way of understanding Benedictine humility, divine and human action work synergistically so that a person might be led into deeper union with God in Christ.

Turning to the psychological dimensions of Vergote’s argument, both of the respondents agree with the potential dangers of either an idealized or infantilized sense of self that can come about through spiritual practice and forms of asceticism.¹⁷² However, both also emphasize that the practice of humility, when properly understood and engaged in, should not lead to either of these problematic ends, but rather is a means of coming to know oneself in the depths of one’s being, which ultimately is for the sake of living in right and compassionate relationships with others. This journey of at-times painful self-knowledge – which as Latteur emphasizes, always takes place in the light of God’s mercy and knowledge of God’s love for the person – is meant to uncover those dimensions of the self which prevent a deeper flourishing of charity in the life of an individual.¹⁷³ Far from removing a person from relationships with community, this process – which Latteur

¹⁷⁰ Emmanuel Latteur, “The Twelve Degrees of Humility in St. Benedict’s Rule: Still Timely?” *The American Benedictine Review* 40, no. 1 (1989): 35.

¹⁷¹ Benedict Guevin, “Authenticity: Is This the Meaning of Benedictine Humility? A Response to Antoine Vergote,” *The American Benedictine Review* 47, no. 3 (1996): 228.

¹⁷² Latteur, “The Twelve Degrees of Humility in St. Benedict’s Rule: Still Timely?” 33; Guevin, “Authenticity: Is This the Meaning of Benedictine Humility? A Response to Antoine Vergote,” 226.

¹⁷³ Latteur, “The Twelve Degrees of Humility in St. Benedict’s Rule: Still Timely?” 35-36.

identifies with the beatitude of poverty of spirit rooted in the life and passion of Christ – ultimately leads to a deeper understanding and compassion for others, founded on the self-knowledge that one gains by humility.¹⁷⁴ It is because of this that Guevin sees Vergote’s proposal of humility as authenticity to be lacking an essential Christological foundation that would make it truly Benedictine in spirit.¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed a good number of both classical and contemporary understandings of the Benedictine spirituality of humility. While by no means claiming to be either perfectly universal or comprehensive in scope, based on the sources reviewed above the following could be considered a working list of key properties or aspects of humility within the Benedictine tradition:

1. Benedictine humility is multidimensional. This is perhaps the most straightforward principle that could be named. Clearly, there are a number of different facets of humility weaving throughout the twelve steps of chapter 7 in Benedict’s *Rule*.

2. Benedictine humility is foundational to the entire spirituality of the *Rule*.

This is to restate a view shared by several prominent monastic commentators, including Kardong who sees in the first step of humility (fear of God) the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 43.

¹⁷⁵ Guevin, “Authenticity: Is This the Meaning of Benedictine Humility? A Response to Antoine Vergote,” 238.

“spiritual core” of the entire *Rule*,¹⁷⁶ as well as Adalbert de Vogüé, who refers to the chapter as the Rule’s *summa*.¹⁷⁷

- 3. Benedictine humility is Christological.** This is certainly the case for the *Rule* itself. Dreuille in reference to Benedictine humility calls Christ “both the model and the way,” guiding a person to “the gift of sharing in God’s own life, the essential point of Christian humility.”¹⁷⁸ There is strong evidence that Benedict’s whole spirituality is one built on the foundation of the imitation of Christ, including the language around participating in Christ found at the end of the Prologue (v. 50), as well as his way of framing the goal of the spiritual life as being brought together as a community by Christ to everlasting life (RB 72.12). The theme of the paschal journey was also noticeable in the material under the section on humility and brokenness, where connections were discussed between the practice of monastic humility and the symbolic meaning of the Cross.¹⁷⁹ This aspect is less prominent however in the writings discussed under the feminist and ecological approaches to humility in section two of this chapter.
- 4. Benedictine humility is oriented towards contemplation.** Rooted in the fear of God – that is, in the biblical sense of reverential awareness, or even awe – Benedictine humility is grounded in the conscious realization of what it is to be in relationship with God as a human person. Building on this aspect of humility

¹⁷⁶ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 139-140.

¹⁷⁷ Vogüé, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary*, 117.

¹⁷⁸ Dreuille, “A Commentary in Light of World Ascetic Traditions,” 171.

¹⁷⁹ Louf, *The Way of Humility*, 11.

which is so central in early monastic treatments of the virtue, the fifth step of Benedict's ladder concerning the manifestation of thoughts can also be seen such as in in the commentary of Kardong discussed above to be oriented toward growth in the capacity to be more fully attentive to and oriented toward the will and presence of God in one's life. Thomas Merton also sees the contemplative element of humility implied by Benedict in his noting the summit of the virtue to entail the experience of the love and life of God (cf. RB 7.67).¹⁸⁰

5. Benedictine humility is oriented towards charity. While the first several steps of Benedict's ladder are especially focused on an inner conversion of the person, it is also clear – as shown for instance in the closer look on obedience as a renunciation of selfish desires – that there is a relational dimension permeating all aspects of Benedictine humility. Benedict's description of the summit of humility, as becoming fully caught up in “that love of God which, being perfect, casts out fear” (RB 7.67), is where the element of charity is perhaps most explicit in the whole chapter. There is also the connection that several commentators have made between chapters 7 and 72, the latter of which is focused entirely on the building up of the bonds of love within the community. Among the material presented in this chapter are resources for understanding humility as “the basis for right

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Merton and Patrick F. O'Connell, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009): 153.

relationships” in all areas of life, including in one’s relationship with the broader natural world.¹⁸¹

- 6. Benedictine humility is grace-inspired.** This point connects with the last two, with the Holy Spirit being understood by Benedict as enabling a person to grow and reach a mature state of this virtue. The work of Latteur discussed above also helped to highlight this dimension of Benedictine humility, especially through his historical references to the work of Cassian. Discussion of Benedict’s own views concerning the relationship of grace and nature would indicate this as well. Guevin adds the helpful comment that grace can be understood in Benedict not only as working *in* a person, but *with* them.
- 7. Benedictine humility is hermeneutically-determined.** As the range of views in this chapter would also seem to obviously suggest, Benedictine humility must be interpreted while taking several factors into account. One clear priority for interpretive work on humility is in locating chapter 7 within the overall context and framework of the spirituality of the *Rule*. This includes consideration of what the *Rule* holds to be the *telos* of human life, which was identified above as communal deification, or growth in a communion of love rooted in the life of God. Another key dimension that needs to be accounted for is the *Rule’s* anthropology, including for instance how the role of grace is understood in relationship to human nature, with a particular eye toward how this relationship plays out in terms of spiritual and personal development. Relatedly, it is also

¹⁸¹ Chittister, “Pride and Humility: A New Self-Acceptance,” 62.

important that Benedict's spirituality be understood within the wider monastic tradition, with awareness of the sources of the *Rule* and how these can be used to help inform an understanding of Benedictine humility. Finally, for understanding Benedict's text and teaching on humility it is also critical to take account of the theological horizon that one brings to the interpretive process. Given some of the ambiguities that exist around key theological themes in the *Rule*, awareness of how one is interacting with different parts of the text seems especially important. As an example, I may personally be more drawn to contemporary interpretations of obedience that were described above, given my own theological convictions concerning the in-dwelling of and openness to grace in human nature, in comparison to some of the nineteenth and early twentieth century monastic perspectives which appear carry a more negative view concerning theological anthropology. Evoking Sheldrake's metaphor of interpretation of spiritual texts as a musical performance, there clearly are a number of possible renditions that could be made of Benedict's rather wide-ranging teaching on humility.

CHAPTER 3. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMILITY

Overview

Having explored the many dimensions of Benedictine humility in the previous chapter, I now turn to how the virtue of humility has been treated within the field of modern psychology.¹⁸² Moving from a religious discussion of humility to one rooted in the social sciences means a shift away from predominantly theological and spirituality categories, to secular, oftentimes more generalized conceptions of humility that are designed for use in empirical research. This chapter attempts to survey the fast-growing field of research on humility within contemporary psychology, which will provide material for engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue with Benedictine conceptions of the virtue in the second part of this dissertation.

In this chapter, section one presents some early conceptualizations of humility within the subfield of positive psychology, followed by a review of definitions used in more recent empirical research on the virtue. It also explores two recently articulated subdomains of humility that offer even more nuanced and diverse perspectives on humility for applications in psychological research and interventions. The second section will then take up research on humility done through the perspective of a modern theory of human development known as the relational spirituality model, which offers unique perspectives for how psychology and spirituality interact in the practice of humility.

¹⁸² It seems important to note here at the beginning of this chapter that all discussion of humility herein, except where explicitly indicated, is rooted solely in psychological conceptions of the virtue.

Section 1. Humility as a Psychological Virtue: General Definitions and Subdomains

Early Definitions of Humility in Positive Psychology

As the editors of a recent psychological handbook on humility have documented, the last ten years have seen a new and rather towering wave of empirical research on humility wash over the field of psychology.¹⁸³ Predating this trend are a small number of works in the field of positive psychology, which provided important early definitions and conceptual explorations of humility for later empirical research to interact with.¹⁸⁴ Here I begin by exploring these earlier works, in part to examine how contemporary psychological definitions of humility began to take shape.

As a short introduction to the psychological subfield of positive psychology, Martin Seligman has traced its origins to a series of meetings he had with fellow psychologists shortly after beginning his term as president of the American Psychological

¹⁸³ Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Don E. Davis, and Joshua N. Hook, "Introduction: Context, Overview, and Guiding Questions," in *Handbook of Humility: Theory, Research, and Applications*, ed. Everett L. Worthington (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2017), 2.

¹⁸⁴ Another line of inquiry into the virtue of humility within the discipline of psychology, that ran roughly parallel with the development of the early literature on the virtue within positive psychology, can be found within the psychological literature on alcoholism and treatment. See Kenneth E. Hart and Cherry Huggett, "Narcissism: A Barrier to Personal Acceptance of the Spiritual Aspect of Alcoholics Anonymous," *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2005): 85-100; Stephen F. Post et al., "Humility and 12-Step Recovery: A Prolegomenon for the Empirical Investigation of a Cardinal Virtue in Alcoholics Anonymous," *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 34, no. 3: 263-273. Hart and Huggett don't develop the concept of humility much more in their article beyond referring to it as a lack of narcissism. Unlike in positive psychology, the same degree of robust theoretical and empirical investigation surrounding the virtue has yet to develop in this area of psychology.

Association in 1997.¹⁸⁵ In 2000 he along with colleague Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi published an article arguing for the need for a positive psychology.¹⁸⁶ Two organizing principles for this new field can be discerned in Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's paper, including first the need for a scientific approach to understanding personal and societal forms of human flourishing, along with a critique of modern psychology's sole focus on the medical model which focuses the field's attention on the alleviation of symptoms and the buttressing of normal levels of functioning.¹⁸⁷ Seligman was adamant in his early writings on positive psychology, and continues to be to this day, that this new science must also be empirically grounded, thus being able to support its claims and provide further insight into the dynamics of flourishing.¹⁸⁸ Since its inception, positive psychological research has diversified into several areas of engagement, including the naming and elucidation of character strengths and virtues,¹⁸⁹ further definitional work around what is meant by human well-being,¹⁹⁰ and forms of positive psychology

¹⁸⁵ Martin E. P. Seligman, "Positive Psychology: A Personal History," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 15, no. 1 (2019): 3-4.

¹⁸⁶ Martin E. P. Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology: An Introduction," *The American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 5-14.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5; Seligman, "Positive Psychology: A Personal History," 18-19.

¹⁸⁹ Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, eds., *Character Strengths and Virtues a Handbook and Classification* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004).

¹⁹⁰ Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (New York: Free Press, 2011).

interventions including positive psychotherapy.¹⁹¹ It is the early work on humility within the first of these domains that will be the focus of the remainder of this section.¹⁹²

June Price Tangney is one author whose explorations of humility are especially significant, given that several subsequent researchers of humility have referred to her conceptual work to provide working definitions of humility for empirical projects.¹⁹³ As Tangney noted at the time of her writing at the turn of the century, only a handful of empirical studies had engaged the topic of humility, and all of them in a mostly indirect fashion. She speculates the reasons for this dearth of humility research were two-fold, including a reluctance among psychologists to engage with value-laden topics (including those tied to religion), combined with a lack of reliable measures for assessing humility.¹⁹⁴ Most of these prior researchers, furthermore, she found to equate humility with low self-esteem.¹⁹⁵ Tangney's efforts did much to open up psychological

¹⁹¹ Tayyab Rashid and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Positive Psychotherapy: Clinician Manual* (New York: Oxford, 2018).

¹⁹² I will also be revisiting positive psychological interventions pertaining to humility later in the second part of this dissertation

¹⁹³ June P. Tangney, "Humility: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Findings and Directions for Future Research," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2000) ; June P. Tangney, "Humility," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. Charles Snyder and Shane Lopez (New York: Oxford, 2005).

It should be noted that Tangney's 2000 article is not explicitly labeled as positive psychology research, which is to be expected given that the field of positive psychology was only beginning to be publicly formed at that time. Tangney's 2005 article however, which is largely a rehashing of her 2000 paper, does in fact appear in a handbook of positive psychology. For this reason I am choosing to label her work overall within the domain of positive psychology.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 411.

¹⁹⁵ A short yet intriguing piece from 1990 by counseling psychologists John Means and Gregory Wilson offers an alternative formulation of humility that is also much more aligned with later positive psychological conceptions of the virtue. These authors refer to humility as constituting: a willingness to

perspectives on humility beyond what she refers to a dictionary-based definition (as low-esteem), toward multiple aspects of the virtue drawn from philosophical, theological, and psychological literatures. Presented together in the form of a condensed list at the end of her analysis of these diverse sources, Tangney lists the following conceptual aspects of humility:

- an accurate assessment of one's abilities and achievements (not low self-esteem, self-deprecation)
- an ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge, and limitations (often vis-a-vis a "higher power")
- openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- keeping one's abilities and accomplishments - one's place in the world - in perspective (e.g., seeing oneself as just one person in the larger scheme of things)
- a relatively low self-focus, a "forgetting of the self," while recognizing that one is but part of the larger universe

admit one's inadequacies; a recognition that one cannot be in control of interpersonal relationships and exchanges; an attitude of patience and gentleness toward others; an empathy-cultivating approach to relationships. See John R. Means and Gregory L. Wilson, "Humility as a Psychotherapeutic Formulation," *Counseling Psychology Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1990): 211-215.

Psychologist Steven Sandage also contributed an early scientific formulation of humility around the turn of the century as well, who conceptualized "ego-humility" that includes a realistic, differentiated perspective on oneself including one's strengths and limitations, the ability to empathize with others, and the ability to respond to one's own relational failures as well as to experience gratitude for forgiveness received. See Steven J. Sandage, "An Ego-Humility Model of Forgiveness: Implications for Couple and Family Dynamics and Therapy," *Marriage & Family: A Christian Journal* 2, no. 3 (1999): 277-292.

- an appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world.¹⁹⁶

With regards to the second concept on this list and in connection to this dissertation's interdisciplinary interests, regarding the religious dimension of humility Tangney observes that the virtue's "emphasis is not on human sinfulness, unworthiness, and inadequacy, but rather on the notion of a higher, greater power and the implication that, although we may have considerable wisdom and knowledge, there always are limits to our perspective."¹⁹⁷ In addition to this religious dimension of humility, Tangney expands her analysis concerning the relational and communal implications of the virtue, noting with respect to the second-to-last point in the list above that, "With relinquishing an ego-centric focus, we become more open to recognizing the abilities, potential, worth, and importance of others.... Attention shifts outward, and eyes are opened to the beauty and potential in those around us."¹⁹⁸ Tangney writes along the lines of this "forgetting of the self" that it "goes hand in hand with the recognition of one's place in the world. We are each just one person in a much larger state of affairs. A person who has gained a sense of humility is no longer phenomenologically at the center of his or her world. His or her focus is on the larger community, of which he or she is a part."¹⁹⁹ These dimensions of humility reflected on by Tangney – especially from the religious and

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 413.

¹⁹⁷ Tangney, "Humility: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Findings and Directions for Future Research," 72.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 72.

relational points of view just described - will be important to track while reviewing more recent conceptualizations of the virtue in the field of psychology.

More Recent Definitions of Humility in Empirical Research

As empirical psychological research on humility has continued to develop over the last fifteen years, many researchers' definitions of humility have tended to include aspects of the virtue that were also highlighted by Tangney in her earlier writings. However, the particular combinations of aspects inside these working definitions do show some variation, leading many researchers to conclude that no common definition of "general" humility (as opposed to the subdomains) yet exists within the discipline. To explore some of these varied definitions being used in today's empirical research, a distinction commonly made between the intrapersonal (affecting a person's inner, psychic life) and interpersonal (or relational) dimensions of the virtue can also be a helpful organizing framework, while recognizing too that most researchers include aspects from both of these categories in their definitions.

Don Davis and colleagues recently remarked in a theoretical review paper that while variation does exist in both definitional categories of humility, generally there is stronger agreement in researchers' definitions of the intrapersonal dimensions of humility.²⁰⁰ Davis and colleagues identify this common thread as an accurate view of oneself, particularly with regards to one's limitations.²⁰¹ Indeed, this quality does appear in many researchers' definitions of humility. Paine and colleagues include in their

²⁰⁰ Don E. Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 9, no. 3 (2017): 243.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

definition “a willingness to perceive the self accurately,” as well as “the ability to acknowledge one’s limitations and mistakes.”²⁰² Exline and colleagues have referred to humility as “a nondefensive willingness to see the self accurately, including both strengths and limitations.”²⁰³ Jennifer Cole Wright and others also recently described the intrapersonal aspect of humility as being “epistemically aligned,” that is, the “understanding and experience of oneself as one, in fact, is – namely, as a finite and fallible being that is but an infinitesimal part of a vast universe, and so has a necessarily limited and incomplete perspective or grasp on the ‘whole,’ which is infinitely larger and greater than oneself.”²⁰⁴ Wright and colleagues go on further to introduce some religious language, noting that epistemic alignment “is often experienced spiritually, as a connection to God or some higher power, though it can also be experienced through an awareness of one’s place in, and connection to, the natural world and/or cosmos (a state of ‘existential awareness’).”²⁰⁵ These examples, which are just a few of the many that are available, show a common emphasis on humility as including an accurate perception of oneself, perhaps in relation to a broader whole of some kind, while also in many instances implying some acknowledgement of one’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as

²⁰² Paine et al., "Humility as a Psychotherapeutic Virtue: Spiritual, Philosophical, and Psychological Foundations," 5.

²⁰³ Julie J. Exline et al., “Humility and Modesty,” in *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, ed. C. Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman (New York: Oxford, 2004), 463.

²⁰⁴ Jennifer Cole Wright et al., "The Psychological Significance of Humility," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* (2016): 4.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

perhaps too the recognition of oneself as being a finite, and/or in some sense fallible, human being.

Turning to consider the interpersonal dimensions of humility, a common thread is apparent especially with regards to a concern for or orientation toward other persons, in contrast to an attitude of selfishness or arrogance. Davis and colleagues assert that “humility involves being other-oriented rather than self-focused, marked by behaviors that indicate a lack of superiority within a relational and cultural context.”²⁰⁶ Paine and others include in their definition of humility “other-orientedness and avoidance of self-enhancement,” as well as “openness.”²⁰⁷ Jennifer Cole Wright and colleagues also include this orientation toward others, referring to a capacity to be “ethically aligned,” or an “understanding and experience of oneself as only one among a host of other morally relevant beings, whose interests are foundationally as legitimate, and as worthy of attention and concern, as one’s own.”²⁰⁸ Ruffing and colleagues describe yet another rather unique shade of meaning, drawing on studies in biblical research that suggest humility can be understood as a stance of solidarity with the oppressed.²⁰⁹ Altogether, definitions of humility in psychological research commonly include both intrapersonal as well as interpersonal dimensions, often combining a form of self-awareness and

²⁰⁶ Davis et al., “Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature,” 243.

²⁰⁷ Paine et al., “Humility as a Psychotherapeutic Virtue: Spiritual, Philosophical, and Psychological Foundations,” 5.

²⁰⁸ Wright et al., “The Psychological Significance of Humility,” 5.

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth G. Ruffing et al., “Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework,” *Pastoral Psychology* 67, no. 5 (2018): 528.

knowledge of oneself as one really is – including one’s innate strengths and limitations – with the capacity to turn towards and demonstrate concern for the well-being of others.

There are also other perspectives on humility within the field of psychology which connect to both the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of the virtue, and add some nuances to the definitions named above. One of these is offered by Sandage, Paine and Hill as “the capacity for regulating self-focused emotions,”²¹⁰ referring to humility’s connection with processes of emotional modulation, which will be taken up below in connection with the relational spirituality model of human development. An additional perspective on humility is given by Pelin Kesebir, who in a 2014 study showed how humility – as a virtue centering on acceptance of one’s life and its nature “within the grand scheme of things” – can be found to buffer against death anxiety.²¹¹ Kesebir draws connections between humility and the psychological concept of a “quiet ego,” which has been taken to include the qualities of detached (or non-defensive) self-awareness, interdependence, compassion, and growth (offering an interesting parallel to Tangney’s earlier characterization of humility as a virtue of “forgetting the self,” or becoming “unserved”).²¹² These additional reflections on humility demonstrate even further the diversity of conceptualizations of the virtue that have been generated in the field.

²¹⁰ Steven J. Sandage, David Paine, and Peter Hill, "Spiritual Barriers to Humility: A Multidimensional Study," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 18, no. 3 (2015): 207.

²¹¹ Pelin Kesebir, "A Quiet Ego Quiets Death Anxiety: Humility as an Existential Anxiety Buffer," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106, no. 4 (2014): 610.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 611. See also Julie J. Exline, “Taming the Wild Ego: The Challenge of Humility,” in *Transcending Self-Interest: Psychological Explorations of the Quiet Ego*, ed. Heidi A. Wayment and Jack J. Bauer (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008).

Closely related to the task of defining humility is the question of how definitions of the virtue become operationalized in measurements used in empirical studies. Regarding this broad topic, one area of concern for some time in the field has been over whether self-report measures of humility were susceptible to particular problems, including if persons with higher humility might succumb to a “modesty effect” and subsequently rate themselves lower in the virtue. Likewise, it was speculated that those with lower actual humility might be more likely to enact a form of “self-enhancement” by over-rating themselves in the virtue.²¹³ However, more recent research has borne out the view that self-report measures are in fact more reliable than previously thought for assessing humility.²¹⁴

While there exist a variety of validated self-report and informant-based measures of the virtue,²¹⁵ lingering questions persist as well regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of generalized measures of humility being applied universally, especially without regard to important contextual factors related to culture, gender, and religious and spiritual diversity. As Hill and Sandage have recently pointed out for instance from a critical psychology perspective, forms of discrimination such as racism and sexism might affect how humility is perceived among some groups who are in fact practicing forms of

²¹³ Don E. Davis, Everett L. Worthington and Joshua N. Hook, "Humility: Review of Measurement Strategies and Conceptualization as Personality Judgment," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no. 4 (2010): 244.

²¹⁴ Peter C. Hill et al., “A Few Good Measures: Colonel Jessup and Humility,” in *Handbook of Humility: Theory, Research, and Applications*, ed. Everett L. Worthington (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2017), 121.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120-130.

healthy self-assertiveness, and it is also true that different aspects of humility may also be more significant for distinct cultural groups depending on baseline levels of factors such as socio-economic power as well as personality issues such as narcissism.²¹⁶ Davis and colleagues have also recently called for greater specificity around constructs of humility depending on religious and spiritual traditions, which the more general definitions of humility discussed above tend not to enter into in a robust way.²¹⁷ Differences among research initiatives that utilize more contextualized measures, versus those that draw on a more generic or universal understanding of humility that then analyze for group-level differences for instance among religious, racial, or other types of groups, create diverse perspectives and results among psychology's body of empirical literature on humility. Furthermore, even identifying what the particular characteristics are that define humility, as previously explored in this chapter, naturally is an important question that directly influences the construction of measures of humility. Brad Owens, for instance, had led the development of an expressed humility scale, which takes elements of humility into account including a willingness to see the self accurately, an appreciation for others' strengths, and contributions, as well as a quality of teachability, or an "openness to learning, feedback, and new ideas from others."²¹⁸ This measure differs somewhat in comparison with the content of other measures currently in use, including for example the

²¹⁶ Peter C. Hill and Steven J. Sandage, "The Promising but Challenging Case of Humility as a Positive Psychology Virtue," *Journal of Moral Education* 45, no. 2 (2016): 138.

²¹⁷ Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," 248-249.

²¹⁸ Bradley P. Owens, Michael D. Johnson and Terrence R. Mitchell, "Expressed Humility in Organizations: Implications for Performance, Teams, and Leadership," *Organization Science* 24, no. 5 (2013): 1519-1520.

General Humility Scale which assesses around low concern for status, other-orientation, and accurate assessment of self.²¹⁹ These differences reveal the complexity as well as room for future developments that exist in regards to the empirical measurement of humility.

Findings from empirical research in psychology to date regarding humility reveal its association with a number of qualities of positive psychological health. In a recent review of evidence by Worthington and Allison, the authors note that humility has been associated with intrapersonal indicators of well-being including reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, and greater psychological well-being. Interpersonally, humility has also been shown to support social bonds, and increase levels forgiveness and gratitude in relationships.²²⁰

Subdomains of Humility

Another significant development in the scientific study of humility has been the articulation of different subdomains of the virtue. Davis and colleagues use the terminology of subdomains to indicate those “contexts that tend to evoke egotism and make humility more difficult to display, which makes these contexts key ‘markers’ to evaluate whether someone is truly humble.”²²¹ As empirical research has begun to show, these subdomains represent specific areas or aspects of humility that have important

²¹⁹ Hill et al., “A Few Good Measures: Colonel Jessup and Humility,” 123.

²²⁰ Everett L. Worthington and Scott T. Allison, *Heroic Humility: What the Science of Humility Can Say to People Raised on Self-focus* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2018), 59-73, 91-103.

²²¹ Davis et al., “Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature,” 243.

psychological as well as social implications. Intellectual humility and cultural humility, being the two humility subdomains with the most research attention to date, are especially important to discuss.

Intellectual humility as a construct emerged in the psychological literature within the last decade, spurred in part by a major funding project for research provided by the John Templeton Foundation in 2011. Intellectual humility has attracted attention not only from psychologists, but philosophers²²² and educators²²³ as well, who as a multidisciplinary group have signaled the potential importance of intellectual humility both as a quality that can help make a person a good “knower,”²²⁴ as well as a promoter of healthy social relations in an increasingly globalized, varied, and interconnected society.²²⁵

Similar to general humility, no consensus definition has yet been reached for intellectual humility among researchers studying this virtue. It also appears that, much like general humility, the dimensions of intellectual humility that have been articulated to date can be organized in the same intra- and interpersonal categories as used above. In terms of its intrapersonal aspects, intellectual humility has been described as “having an

²²² See for example Ian M. Church and Peter L. Samuelson, *Intellectual Humility: An Introduction to the Philosophy and Science* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

²²³ See for example James S. Spiegel, "Open-mindedness and Intellectual Humility" *Theory and Research in Education* 10, no. 1 (2012): 27-38.

²²⁴ Samantha A. Deffler, Mark R. Leary, and Rick H. Hoyle, "Knowing What You Know: Intellectual Humility and Judgments of Recognition Memory," *Personality and Individual Differences* 96, no. C (2016): 255.

²²⁵ Matthew J. Jarvinen and Thomas B. Paulus, "Attachment and Cognitive Openness: Emotional Underpinnings of Intellectual Humility," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2017): 74; Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," 244.

accurate view of and ownership of one's intellectual limits,"²²⁶ as a "non-defensive stance toward one's beliefs,"²²⁷ with another author explaining that, "If you have a particular intellectual weakness or a position you hold is evidentially weak in some way, as an intellectually humble person you should accurately recognize those limitations and act accordingly."²²⁸ Interpersonally, it has been described as "the ability to fairly negotiate ideas with others (e.g., appropriately adjusting one's ideas when presented with new evidence, not using coercive tactics to influence others' ideas),"²²⁹ and by another researcher as "not [being] concerned with how one's intellect and intellectual products (such as ideas and insights) bear upon one's social status."²³⁰ Again like in the case of general humility, empirical researchers exploring intellectual humility tend to combine both intra- and interpersonal dimensions of the virtue in their functional definitions. An example of such a complete definition is given by the psychological researchers Hook and Davis, who describe the virtue as "having an accurate view of the self regarding the strengths and limits of one's ideas, as well as the ability to exchange and negotiate ideas in an interpersonally respectful manner."²³¹

²²⁶ Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," 244.

²²⁷ Elizabeth J. Krumrei-Mancuso, "Intellectual Humility and Prosocial Values: Direct and Mediated Effects," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2017): 13.

²²⁸ Justin L. Barrett, "Intellectual Humility," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2017): 1.

²²⁹ Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," 244.

²³⁰ Barrett, "Intellectual Humility," 1.

²³¹ Ian M. Church, "Intellectual Humility and Religious Belief," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 46, no. 4 (2018): 220.

Interesting to note is how Hook and Davis add an awareness of the strengths of one's intellectual position in addition to awareness of its limitations, emphasizing a more balanced view concerning one's ideas.²³² Furthermore, Hook and Davis have argued that intellectual humility also ought to include an ability to learn, or a kind of "teachableness," noting that the intellectually humble person is "able to regulate one's concern for being 'right' and is open to new information and pursuing and incorporating knowledge and trust from other sources, even when it is discrepant from one's original position."²³³ Altogether then, intellectual humility, as is apparent from the sample of definitions just reviewed, appears to indicate both a reasonable awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of one's intellectual positions, as well as the ability to dialogue with and learn from the perspective of others, including when such perspectives vary from one's own. So far, empirical research on intellectual humility has shown its association with a number of prosocial values, including empathy, altruism, gratitude and benevolence, along with lower levels of power seeking.²³⁴ It's also been shown to be connected to important capacities related to learning, including reflective thinking, curiosity, intrinsic motivation to learn, and intellectual openness.²³⁵

²³² It is worth noting that in the wider scholarly conversations concerning intellectual humility, some see intellectual humility as indicating an awareness only of the limitations and liabilities of one's intellectual positions, versus also including this emphasis on strengths. See for example Dennis Whitcomb et al., "Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44, no. 3 (2017): 516.

²³³ Church, "Intellectual Humility and Religious Belief," 220.

²³⁴ Krumrei-Mancuso, "Intellectual Humility and Prosocial Values: Direct and Mediated Effects," 13.

²³⁵ Elizabeth J. Krumrei-Mancuso et al., "Links between Intellectual Humility and Acquiring Knowledge," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2019): 155.

Another line of research on intellectual humility being pursued by researchers is its relationship to matters of spirituality and religion. One question under consideration is whether intellectual humility may attenuate aspects of religion or spirituality that promote ideological conflict. As Davis and others identified in a recent review paper on this subject, involvement in religion and spirituality has the potential to stoke egotism and defensiveness, as seen for instance in the actions of outgroup derogation, prejudice, and interpersonal conflict.²³⁶ Based upon intellectual humility's promoting of greater self-awareness including around the potential weaknesses of personal beliefs, combined with an intellectual openness toward others, Davis and colleagues speculate that intellectual humility could contribute to a "softening" of religion-related ideological conflict.²³⁷ Initial empirical evidence suggests, including a 2017 study of Christian pastors done by Hook and colleagues, that intellectual humility indeed predicts religious tolerance, even when accounting for the effects of religious conservatism and level of religious commitment.²³⁸ These initial findings strengthen the plausibility of Davis and colleagues' hypothesis, giving reason to suspect that intellectual humility may serve as an important quality for helping to promote and sustain healthy social relations across differing religious groups.

Another tie-in between intellectual humility and religion and spirituality concerns intellectual humility's relationship with another subtype of humility on which very little

²³⁶ Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," 244.

²³⁷ Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," 244.

²³⁸ Joshua N. Hook et al., "Intellectual Humility and Religious Tolerance," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2017): 29.

has been written about thus far, which is spiritual humility. Aside from a 2011 study that developed a scale of spiritual humility to assess how victims' perceptions of their offenders' relationship with God might (via spiritual humility) influence the process of forgiveness, the only other extant reference to spiritual humility is in a 2018 theoretical paper by Everett Worthington.²³⁹ Worthington makes the interesting argument that spiritual humility, which can succinctly be defined as "seeing oneself in proper relationship to the sacred," may potentially interact in different ways with intellectual humility when applied to religious beliefs, especially when intellectual humility implies the calling into question of central religious convictions.²⁴⁰ Worthington speculates that spiritual humility may have a more dominant value in a person's life – for instance, by preserving belief in God – over an intellectually humble position that might entail a greater openness to arguments against belief.²⁴¹ At least one empirical study led by Peter Jankowski also attempted to ascertain whether intellectual humility could counter potential negative effects of espousing overly-rigid religious beliefs, with results unexpectedly revealing that greater intellectual humility around religious beliefs was associated with increased insecure attachment to God, which then corresponded with higher levels of mental health problems and lower positive mental health.²⁴² At the same

²³⁹ Don E. Davis et al., "Relational Spirituality and Forgiveness: Development of the Spiritual Humility Scale (SHS)," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 2 (2010): 91-100; Everett L. Worthington, "Fine-Tuning the Relationship between Religion and Intellectual Humility," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 46, no. 4 (2018): 305–314.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

time, these researchers also note from the study findings that intellectual humility had positive effects related to religion, such as leading to lower levels of pathological factors such as grandiose narcissism and spiritual grandiosity when religious exploration or seeking was at a higher level.²⁴³ These authors altogether raise interesting conceptual questions regarding the different subtypes of humility and their implications in relation to religious belief and values. They also contribute some discussion as well regarding the concept of spiritual humility, which seems important to note within this interdisciplinary project.

A second major subdomain of humility that's become increasingly utilized in psychological research is cultural humility. Historically, cultural humility was originally developed as a construct to inform the training of physicians in the provision of culturally-appropriate healthcare.²⁴⁴ Interest in this construal of humility has since spread into a variety of disciplines especially within the helping professions, including not only medicine and clinical psychology but social work²⁴⁵ and nursing²⁴⁶ as well. Some have

²⁴² Peter J. Jankowski et al., "Humility, Relational Spirituality, and Well-being among Religious Leaders: A Moderated Mediation Model," *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no. 1 (2019): 132-3; 144-145.

It is also worth noting that these authors utilized a scale of intellectual humility that emphasized the ambiguity of religious beliefs; in other words, intellectual humility was construed in such a way that the intellectually humble person would be considered to be more open to and accepting of uncertainty concerning religious beliefs. This construal of intellectual humility can be contrasted with Worthington's approach to understanding intellectual humility vis-à-vis religious beliefs.

²⁴³ Ibid., 145.

²⁴⁴ Ransford Danso, "Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility: A Critical Reflection on Key Cultural Diversity Concepts," *Journal of Social Work* 18, no. 4 (2018): 421.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Cynthia Foronda et al., "Cultural Humility: A Concept Analysis," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 27, no. 3 (2016): 210-17.

suggested cultural humility may represent an improvement upon earlier theories of cultural development, for instance that of cultural competence.²⁴⁷ An early piece for instance by the physicians Tervalon and Murray-Garcia argues that there is a potential danger associable with “cultural competence” if taken to mean “an easily demonstrable mastery of a finite body of knowledge,” whereas cultural humility connotes a preferable perspective of “a commitment and active engagement in a lifelong process that individuals enter into on an ongoing basis with patients, communities, colleagues, and with themselves.”²⁴⁸ Others have indicated that cultural humility is best described as a repackaging of earlier theories of anti-oppressive cultural practices in healthcare.²⁴⁹ Regardless, cultural humility now has a substantial and growing basis in the research literatures of several disciplines as a quality that can enhance cross-cultural care, communication, and relationships.

In keeping with the different types of humility discussed above, authors writing on cultural humility have also noted a lack of agreed-upon meaning for the term, and it is also the case that extant definitions of the virtue can generally be sorted into both intra- and interpersonal categories.²⁵⁰ In general as well, much of the literature on cultural

²⁴⁷ Marcie Fisher-Borne, Jessie Montana Cain, and Suzanne L. Martin, "From Mastery to Accountability: Cultural Humility as an Alternative to Cultural Competence," *Social Work Education* 34, no. 2 (2015): 165.

²⁴⁸ Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-Garcia, "Cultural Humility versus Cultural Competence: A Critical Distinction in Defining Physician Training Outcomes in Multicultural Education," *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 9, no. 2 (1998): 118.

²⁴⁹ Danso, "Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility: A Critical Reflection on Key Cultural Diversity Concepts," 423.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 424.

humility in the discipline of psychology has been devoted to exploring the meaning and value of the virtue for the professional practice of psychotherapists.²⁵¹ Psychologist Joshua Hook, who is one of the most prolific authors on the subject of cultural humility to date, defines the intrapersonal dimension of the virtue with respect to psychotherapists as “an awareness of the limitations in our ability to understand the worldview and cultural background of our client.”²⁵² Interpersonally, Hook goes on to describe cultural humility as also including “a stance toward the client that is other-oriented, marked by respect and openness to the client’s worldview.”²⁵³ In a more recent and expanded treatment of the topic, Hook and colleagues went on to describe cultural humility for psychotherapists as the capacity “to have an accurate perception of their own cultural values as well as maintain an other-oriented perspective that involves respect, lack of superiority, and attunement regarding their own cultural beliefs and values.”²⁵⁴ Much like the two other forms of humility discussed previously, it is clear how much cultural humility entails similar foundational emphases on an accurate viewing of oneself, combined with an openness and attunement to others. Hook and colleagues do add some additional nuance to their view of the interpersonal dimension of cultural humility, noting that openness to

²⁵¹ As an important piece of background concerning the field of psychology, cultural humility is one component of the multicultural orientation framework, a construct originally proposed by Jesse Owen and colleagues that seeks to integrate multicultural competency into psychotherapeutic work and research. For a review of this framework and its application in psychotherapy research, see Don E. Davis et al., "The Multicultural Orientation Framework: A Narrative Review," *Psychotherapy* 55, no. 1 (2018): 89-100.

²⁵² Joshua Hook, "Engaging Clients with Cultural Humility," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 33, no. 3 (2014): 278.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Joshua N. Hook et al., *Cultural Humility: Engaging Diverse Identities in Therapy* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2017), 29.

others' views does not necessarily include unconditional acceptance, and that as a professional community, psychologists view some beliefs – such as forms of discrimination and prejudice – as being “morally inferior.”²⁵⁵

In the empirical psychology literature, it is unsurprising given the focus on professional psychotherapy practice in cultural humility's conceptualization that most assessments of the virtue have been geared to studying its effects on the psychotherapy relationship and process. In an early study of the construct, Hook and colleagues found that clients' perceptions of therapist levels of cultural humility were associated with developing a stronger working alliance, as well as improved therapy outcomes overall.²⁵⁶ In a more recent study, Hook and others found that client-perceived cultural humility of the therapist was positively associated with fewer racial microaggressions (or discriminatory exchanges towards people of color) experienced during counseling.²⁵⁷ From a more theoretical perspective, Hook and colleagues have described the potential benefits of cultural humility for improving the psychotherapy supervision relationship, both as a quality for supervisors to bring to their work with supervisees, as well as a quality to be promoted in supervisees through their supervisors' example.²⁵⁸ Moon and

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁵⁶ Joshua N. Hook et al., "Cultural Humility: Measuring Openness to Culturally Diverse Clients," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 60, no. 3 (2013): 353.

²⁵⁷ Joshua N. Hook et al., "Cultural Humility and Racial Microaggressions in Counseling," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 63, no. 3 (2016): 269. See also Don E. Davis et al., "Microaggressions and Perceptions of Cultural Humility in Counseling," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 94, no. 4 (2016): 483-93.

²⁵⁸ Joshua N. Hook et al., "Cultural Humility in Psychotherapy Supervision," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 70, no. 2 (2016): 149.

Sandage have also recently offered some commentary on the concept of cultural humility, advancing perspectives around how the meaning and practice of cultural humility needs to be re-interpreted for therapists of color.²⁵⁹ As they note

For a TOC [Therapist of Color], relative to a White therapist, the demands of expressing cultural humility in psychotherapy are entirely different (e.g., becoming aware of ethnocentrism versus perhaps regulating countertransference related to racial trauma) and have been underdeveloped in existing theorizing on the multicultural orientation framework.²⁶⁰

Among some of the more significant dimensions of cultural humility that must be thrown into question, Moon and Sandage make a strong argument that the “other-orientedness” of the cultural humility concept must be re-thought in light of the experiences of therapists of color, who themselves fill the role of the “other” in therapeutic relationships with white clients, and who also are already burdened with the ongoing effects of racism that undermine their own sense of trust and confidence toward themselves.²⁶¹ Moon and Sandage also point out some of the important institutional dimensions of cultural humility, including how the processing of culturally-relevant aspects of therapy as part of therapist formation must also be seen in light of the broader cultural context of psychotherapy organizations themselves. Therapists of color, as they note, can end up experiencing additional stress and even psychic harm from needing to process cultural

²⁵⁹ Sarah Moon and Steven J. Sandage, “Cultural Humility for Persons of Color: Critique of Current Theory and Practice,” 76.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

content in organizations where the majority of therapists espouse ethnocentric ideas.²⁶² Points such as these from Moon and Sandage help highlight some vital nuances to the concept and application of cultural humility within psychotherapeutic contexts.

Section 2. Humility, Spirituality, and Relational Human Development: Humility & the Relational Spirituality Model

This second section of the chapter is concerned with reviewing psychological research on humility that has been conducted through the framework of the relational spirituality model, a human development theory that strives to integrate dynamics of both psychology and spirituality. Below I offer a general introduction to the theory, before turning to explore research on humility in relation to the relational spirituality model's major theoretical dimensions. Discussion of these theoretical components will also help further flesh out key aspects of the model along the way.

Origins & Overview of the Relational Spirituality Model

Early formulations of the relational spirituality model trace back to the 2006 volume *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*, co-authored by theologian F. LeRon Shults and psychologist Steven Sandage.²⁶³ Shults and Sandage in this work develop the relational spirituality framework as a way of modeling the dynamics of human spiritual practice and transformation through a relational lens,

²⁶² Ibid., 81.

²⁶³ Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology & Psychology*.

combining theological and psychological perspectives on the human person to highlight the interconnectedness of relationality with self, other persons, and the Sacred. As one succinct definition, relational spirituality means “ways of relating to the Sacred.”²⁶⁴ Four key assumptions of the construct include that relational spirituality is: embodied, since all human spirituality is mediated neurobiologically; developmental, since spirituality emerges and develops through relationships across the lifespan; hermeneutical, since all spiritual experience is interpreted through a culturally- and religiously-derived worldview; and intercultural, since interacting across forms of difference is a key capacity for relational health and spiritual maturity.²⁶⁵

The relational spirituality model is based in part on a dialectical formulation of sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow’s description of dwelling and seeking as two ways of characterizing orientations to religion in modern American society. Wuthnow argued that since the 1950’s, American spirituality has shifted from a dwelling orientation, based predominantly on stability of religious identity within a well-defined tradition, to one of seeking, oriented towards searching after new forms of religious experience and expression along with a lack of rootedness in any one religious tradition. As Shults and Sandage remark,

Spiritual dwelling is oriented toward habitation in the known territories of sacred space whose boundaries are sharply outlined by religious traditions and reinforced by priestly leaders.... Spiritual seeking is oriented toward the freedom of

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 61.

²⁶⁵ Steven J. Sandage, Mary L. Jensen and Daniel Jass, “Relational Spirituality and Transformation: Risking Intimacy and Alterity,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 2 (2008): 188-190.

exploring new uncharted territory described or dreamed by prophets, mystics, and healers.... Spiritual dwelling offers security whereas spiritual seeking offers freedom from constraint.²⁶⁶

Shults and Sandage emphasize a dialectical understanding of spiritual dwelling and seeking, implying that human and spiritual development should entail a holding together or integration of these functions to be healthy. They postulate that the ability to effectively navigate the demands as well as the opportunities of both constitutes a healthy developmental capacity for practicing spirituality.²⁶⁷

The relational spirituality model's theoretical foundation also builds centrally on the differentiation-based theory of David Schnarch, a prominent theorist who specializes in working with couples around sexual intimacy. Schnarch developed what he refers to as the crucible model to describe the process of growth that members of relationships undergo to develop a more differentiated, non-reactive, solid sense of self (differentiation is introduced further in its own subsection below).²⁶⁸ Schnarch theorized that couples naturally undergo cycles of stability and growth in the face of inevitable conflicts in relationships, and that effective growth through conflict is in fact a key source of personal development.²⁶⁹ Applying the differentiation construct and Schnarch's crucible model to spirituality, Shults and Sandage map spiritual dwelling and seeking onto Schnarch's theoretical framework to propose a model of spiritual transformation. Just as in

²⁶⁶ Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology & Psychology*, 185.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 262-265.

²⁶⁸ David M. Schnarch, *Intimacy & Desire: Awaken the Passion in Your Relationship* (New York: Beaufort Books, 2009), 34.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

Schnarch's idea of the couple crucible wherein persons inevitably face difficulties in their ability to relate to one another that challenge them to grow, Shults and Sandage propose the concept of a crucible of spiritual growth whereby individuals develop differentiation in the context of their spirituality via entering the crucible process. A challenge may lead a person out of a place of relative stability (dwelling), into a period of change where older forms of meaning are questioned and possibly deconstructed, which can lead to further intensification (seeking).²⁷⁰ Central to these authors' conception of the crucible is that it is resilient and nonreactive enough to contain the "heat" and pressure generated in the seeking process.²⁷¹ This is especially where the aspect of differentiation having to do with the regulation of emotions and endurance of stress for the sake of growth is extremely important. Relatedly, Shults and Sandage describe a potential process in the early stages of seeking that leads back into dwelling, which indicates that a person lacked sufficient differentiation to effectively navigate the distress and uncertainty inherent in cycles of serious growth. Shults and Sandage also describe a phenomenon of spiritual wandering, when a person leaves the system entirely.²⁷²

Another fundamental point concerning the structure of the relational spirituality model is the concept of spiritual maturity, which constitutes the *telos* of this model of spiritual transformation and development. Spiritual maturity, in line with the relational spirituality model's seeking function, includes the ability to endure spiritual struggles for

²⁷⁰ Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology & Psychology*, 31-33.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31; Schnarch, *Intimacy & Desire*, 35.

²⁷² Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology & Psychology*, 33-35.

the sake of growth.²⁷³ It also entails the capacity for differentiated relationality, that is for self- and other-relating founded upon a grounded, solid sense of self. Sandage, Jensen and Jass in an early article on the relational spirituality model drew a connection between this concept and the Trinity, where God can be understood as three persons relating in unity and love.²⁷⁴ Differentiated relationality, and its connections to the virtue of humility, will be explored in more depth below.

A final piece of orientation to the relational spirituality model regards how authors writing from this perspective have defined the virtue of humility. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, a novel contribution that theorists working from a relational spirituality model-based perspective make to conceptualizations of the virtue is the inclusion of “the capacity for regulating self-focused emotions.”²⁷⁵ Self-regulation, or the ability to modulate anxiety and other emotions for the sake of well-being, is an important concept to several theories of human development that the relational spirituality model draws upon, and as will be seen is quite important to research on humility within this framework as well.

With this general overview of the relational spirituality model in mind, it is now possible to move into discussion of the model’s major theoretical components, as well as research that has been done to date on their relationship with the virtue of humility.

²⁷³ Ibid., 196-197.

²⁷⁴ Sandage, Jensen and Jass, “Relational Spirituality and Transformation: Risking Intimacy and Alterity,” 192.

²⁷⁵ Steven J. Sandage, David Paine, and Peter Hill, "Spiritual Barriers to Humility: A Multidimensional Study," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 18, no. 3 (2015): 207.

Attachment & Humility

The first of four key theoretical components of the relational spirituality model that I will be exploring in this chapter is attachment theory, a now widely tested and utilized theory of human development founded by the British psychiatrist John Bowlby and his American collaborator, Mary Ainsworth. Bowlby's professional formation in the early part of the twentieth century exposed him to classical psychoanalysis, yet in his own theorizing he came to prioritize the radical significance of real-life relationships and early relational experiences in psychological development over early psychoanalysis's emphases on sexual drives and fantasies.²⁷⁶ Theory surrounding the attachment behavioral system, as it has come to be identified, centers on the principle that an emotionally safe, secure and attuned relationship with a primary caregiver is a critical foundation for healthy personal development, and furthermore that persons' early attachment experiences with primary caregivers help shape their ability to self-regulate especially in times of need, pain, and threat.²⁷⁷

Researchers in describing the developmental dynamics of attachment commonly recognize four different, broad types of attachment patterns that persons fall into depending on the quality of their early relational experiences.²⁷⁸ Those who possess a secure attachment style generally are considered to have had dependable, sensitive and responsive attachment bonds early in life. These relational experiences impart a learned

²⁷⁶ Mario Mikulincer and Philip R. Shaver, *Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics, and Change* (New York: Guilford Press, 2016), 6.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-25.

sense of felt security, “a sense that the world is generally safe, that attachment figures are helpful when called upon, and that it is possible to explore the environment curiously and confidently and to engage rewardingly with other people.”²⁷⁹ In order to fulfill this need of the attachment behavioral system, it is considered necessary that an attachment figure fulfill the dual roles of providing a *safe haven* for an infant in times of distress, in addition to serving as a *secure base* by providing reassurance and encouragement during times of non-distress and exploration.²⁸⁰

Persons with insecure attachment styles – of which there are three types – are thought to not have had an adequate history of secure attachment experiences. The avoidant or dismissive insecure attachment style indicates a lack of overall responsiveness or availability from attachment figures early in life, which can lead to the development a highly self-reliant approach to dealing with anxieties and difficulties. An anxious or preoccupied attachment style on the other hand results from an early attachment relationship that was sometimes responsive and sometimes not, where increasingly energetic and labor-intensive attachment-seeking behaviors were necessary to elicit a response from one’s caregiver. This pattern can also endure in the form desperate and insecure neediness for support in relationships. In the last type of insecure attachment, a disorganized or fearful style is thought to form due to a breakdown of both

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

secure and insecure attachment strategies, leading to an enduring disorganized template for seeking relational support or help.²⁸¹

In connection to the relational spirituality model, Sandage and Shults have mapped some of attachment theory's core principles onto their model of spirituality. For one, they see an alignment between dwelling-based forms of spirituality as discussed previously and the attachment function of the safe haven and its provision of a felt sense of security, safety, and attunement, including in times of distress. Aspects of spirituality – including a rooted community of practice, and the possibility of relationship with the Sacred – can work to provide forms of safe space, presence and intersubjective resonance for persons to enter into. As Sandage and Shults have expressed, “At its best, spiritual dwelling provides a secure attachment to a loving Deity, a supportive communal home, and an anchor in a meaningful tradition.... Dwelling and redwelling in healthy spiritual holding environments offer the sense of community and rootedness that can enhance or even promote well-being.”²⁸² Forms of spirituality that provide this felt experience of secure attachment can thus serve as an important resource for well-being. As a corollary to this, when persons lack resources for dwelling in their spirituality such that they may not be able to turn to relationship with the Sacred or a spiritual community for providing security, safety, and rootedness especially during times of distress, the result can become a significant source of suffering and lack of spiritual groundedness in a person's life.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 19-20, 23-24.

²⁸² Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology & Psychology*, 186.

Such a deficit could also lead to impairment in one's ability to engage in seeking behavior, since that person would be lacking a secure base to extend a sense of reassurance and comfort in the midst of exploration.

Shults and Sandage have also pointed out with respect to the relational spirituality model how attachment style, as an internal working model of what it is like to be in relationships especially in the midst of life's challenges and anxieties, can also either help or hinder a person's spirituality in terms of both relationship to God and to others. They point for one to the well-established conceptual and empirical literature in the psychology of religion, which articulates how attachment styles can map onto persons' relationship with the Divine.²⁸³ According to this literature, it is possible that persons' attachment styles from early life could translate onto one's relationship with God, in a pattern known as correspondence; for instance, those with a secure attachment style learned from their early attachment history would also be likely to have sufficient confidence and self-regulation while seeking safety and security from God in times of necessity, and could also draw comfort from believing that God is a reliable and dependable source of solace when trouble arises. For those with an insecure attachment style however, persons may tend either toward a hyper-active form of seeking security from the Sacred with corresponding anxiety that God may not be available (an anxious or preoccupied style), or diminishment in proximity-seeking behavior toward God (reflecting an avoidant or dismissive style). Researchers in this area also acknowledge the possibility for compensation in a person's relationship with God, where a person's secure attachment to

²⁸³ Ibid., 182-194

God marks a shift from an earlier learned insecure style.²⁸⁴ Along with affecting persons' relationship with God, attachment style can also of course affect a person's capacity to engage with human others within a spiritual community, including during times of distress when spiritual dwelling could be an especially important source of relief and subsequent recovery and well-being.

To date, research on attachment's relationship with humility has begun to show that secure attachment is an important and perhaps underlying personal capacity for self-regulation that supports the expression of this virtue. In one 2014 study by Jankowski and Sandage that found insecure attachment to God and others was negatively associated with dispositional humility, the authors note the results seem to suggest that "it is difficult to exhibit humility when one is not experiencing felt security in one's relationship with God and in one's interpersonal relationships."²⁸⁵ Related results from a 2015 study by Sandage and others also found insecure attachment to God to be a significant "spiritual barrier" to the development of humility.²⁸⁶ In another more recent study, Jankowski and colleagues found that attachment security mediated the relationship between dispositional humility and eudaimonic well-being among a sample of religious leaders.²⁸⁷ Aiming to account for

²⁸⁴ Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Attachment and Religious Representations and Behavior," in *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, ed. Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver (New York: Guilford, 2008), 915.

²⁸⁵ Peter Jankowski and Steven Sandage, "Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 42, no. 1 (2014): 76. Similar findings can also be found in Carissa Dwiwardani et al., "Virtues Develop From a Secure Base: Attachment and Resilience as Predictors of Humility, Gratitude, and Forgiveness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 42, no. 1 (2014): 87-88.

²⁸⁶ Sandage, Paine, and Hill, "Spiritual Barriers to Humility: A Multidimensional Study," 207.

the relationship between attachment style and humility that has been taken stock of to date, Ruffing and colleagues in a recent theoretical paper advance the argument that individuals with secure attachment are more likely to be able to have an accurate assessment of themselves, and an ability to acknowledge their limitations without succumbing to overwhelming shame, whereas those with insecure attachment are more likely to function from a self-protective posture.²⁸⁸ Insecure attachment, in other words, promotes forms of internal and relational dysregulation that conflict with the expression of humility.

Differentiation of Self & Humility

Schnarch's crucible model, on which the relational spirituality model is heavily based, is founded on the work of psychologist Murray Bowen who formulated the concept of differentiation of self in the 1970s based on his research of systemic dynamics in families.²⁸⁹ Differentiation of self, as described by Bowen and subsequent theorists, refers to the abilities to self-regulate emotions and hold onto oneself in different relational contexts. These situations may include relating in intimate emotional exchanges with a romantic partner, relating across differences, while being in solitude, or while undergoing a painful change or process for the sake of growth. Sandage and colleagues have recently proposed that these varied contexts of differentiation of self can

²⁸⁷ Jankowski et al., "Humility, Relational Spirituality, and Well-being among Religious Leaders: A Moderated Mediation Model," 144.

²⁸⁸ Ruffing et al., "Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework," 536.

²⁸⁹ Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory* (Falls Church, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 1.

fit into intrapersonal, interpersonal, or intercultural categories.²⁹⁰ For a number of reasons that Bowen himself as well as subsequent theoretical articulations have taken into account, the developmental task of achieving a “solid sense of self” is central to being able to enter into healthy relationships in a variety of contexts while still maintaining an independent sense of selfhood (thus striking a balance between togetherness and separateness).²⁹¹

Much like in the case of attachment theory, Shults and Sandage connect differentiation of self with both the dwelling and seeking functions of the relational spirituality model. For one, differentiation of self overlaps with secure attachment insofar as it centers on the ability to self-regulate while relating closely with others, a context especially associated with spiritual dwelling. It is also a critically important capacity in the midst of spiritual exploration, transition, or even upheaval – that is, during times of spiritual seeking. As Shults and Sandage describe,

Periodically, developmental transitions and transformative opportunities converge to promote leaving familiar dwellings and seeking to explore new spiritual terrain. This could literally involve the geographical change of leaving home as a missionary, a prodigal, or some other type of spiritual sojourner. Or it could mean spiritual seeking or questing that is more purely internal, perhaps without actually leaving one’s dwelling place. This might entail spiritual wondering, questioning, doubting, rethinking, or groping through a dark night of suffering.... The courage to tolerate ambiguity, responsibility, and differentiation of spiritual seeking is necessary to move spiritual formation and transformation toward maturity.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Steven J. Sandage et al., *Relational Spirituality in Psychotherapy: Healing Suffering and Promoting Growth* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2020), 131.

²⁹¹ Schnarch, *Intimacy & Desire*, 86-89; Sandage, Jensen and Jass, “Relational Spirituality and Transformation: Risking Intimacy and Alterity,” 192-193.

²⁹² Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology & Psychology*, 186.

Differentiation of self, as the capacity to function as a solid, independent self while undergoing experiences of questing, change, and attendant ambiguity, is thus taken to be a critical factor for promoting healthy spirituality within the relational spirituality model.

With respect to humility, research is also beginning to reveal how, much like in the case of attachment, differentiation of self is an important capacity for self regulation that supports the expression of this virtue. In their 2014 study, Jankowski and Sandage found that lower differentiation of self was associated with lower levels of humility.²⁹³ Differentiation, as these authors suggest, corresponds to a secure sense of self that facilitates realistic awareness and acceptance of one's identity and perspective, while also implying a respect for the identities of others and a lack of need to change or relate to others in a one-up position. Based on this analysis, Sandage and Jankowski went on to speculate in their paper that differentiation may in fact link quite directly with the core dimensions of humility, such that humility can even be taken to represent "the developmental capacity for differentiated self-other relating."²⁹⁴ Support for this view of humility as a virtue of intra- and interpersonal self-regulation can also be found in results from an earlier 2013 where humility, along with differentiation of self, were found to mediate the relationship between forgiveness and mental health as well as social justice commitment.²⁹⁵ In a 2018 study, researchers found that differentiation mediated the

²⁹³ Jankowski and Sandage, "Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models," 78.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

relationship between dispositional humility and well-being in their study of religious leaders, suggesting once again that differentiation of self likely has an important effect on the expression and effects of humility, including in the ways that this virtue contributes to eudaimonic well-being or flourishing.²⁹⁶

Narcissism & Humility

Narcissism has also received attention in the relational spirituality model as another key factor affecting human relationality with self, others, and God. Surveying the works of different authors on the subject generally shows narcissism to be a complex, multidimensional personality trait that manifests in both pathological and healthy forms. Ruffing and colleagues describe how pathological narcissism can generally be characterized as an impairment in one's ability to manage and satisfy needs for admiration and validation, which can lead to maladaptive strategies for fulfilling these needs along with resultant challenges in self-esteem and self-regulation in relationships.²⁹⁷ Pathological narcissism itself is also typically divided into two different subtypes, known as grandiose and vulnerable. The grandiose type of narcissism involves an over-inflated self-image, sense of entitlement and superiority, relational manipulation and domineering, and fantasies of limitless power.²⁹⁸ Grandiose narcissism has also been

²⁹⁵ Peter J. Jankowski, Steven J. Sandage, and Peter C. Hill, "Differentiation-based Models of Forgiveness, Mental Health and Social Justice Commitment: Mediator Effects for Differentiation of Self and Humility," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 8, no. 5 (2013): 420.

²⁹⁶ Jankowski et al., "Humility, Relational Spirituality, and Well-being among Religious Leaders: A Moderated Mediation Model," 146.

²⁹⁷ Ruffing et al., "Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework," 527.

mapped onto spirituality by some researchers who have articulated a form of “spiritual grandiosity” that can function as a means of self-enhancement and/or form of narcissistic defense against psychological problems, represented by a belief that one may enjoy a unique, privileged and more powerful or spiritually competent relationship with God.²⁹⁹

Vulnerable narcissism on the other hand, while still containing a sense of entitlement as well as a need for admiration, manifests in shame, low self-esteem, and helplessness.³⁰⁰ Sandage and colleagues discuss one sophisticated conceptualization of vulnerable narcissism’s etiology, drawing from Kohut’s self psychology theory which suggests that deficits in idealization (that is the psychic need to idealize and internalize a competent and powerful self-object, usually represented by a primary caregiver) during one’s early development leads to enduring problems with the formation of an empowered, cohesive sense of self that can manifest as vulnerable narcissism.³⁰¹ Sandage and others highlight the components of idealization neediness or hunger (an unconscious longing to fulfill unmet idealization needs during earlier development), goal instability (resulting from disappointment in and failure to internalize an idealized figure), and hiding of the self (due to abiding felt insecurity around one’s sense of selfhood and identity), to characterize the manifestation of vulnerable narcissism.³⁰² Both grandiose

²⁹⁸ Steven J. Sandage et al., "Vulnerable Narcissism, Forgiveness, Humility, and Depression: Mediator Effects for Differentiation of Self," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 34, no. 3 (2017): 300.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 300.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 301-302.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 300-301.

and vulnerable forms of narcissism have been tied to various kinds of psychological and interpersonal problems, including impulsivity and aggression for the grandiose subtype, and depression, stress, and low self-esteem for the vulnerable subtype.³⁰³ Spiritual narcissism has also been negatively associated with intercultural competence, as well as positively with egocentricity and interpersonal alienation.³⁰⁴ It is also important to note that researchers on narcissism sometimes have recognized another form of “healthy narcissism,” again related to Kohut’s self psychology, wherein a person’s developmental needs for idealization, mirroring (a felt experience of being accepted and approved of), and twinship (a perceived sense of similarity to one’s primary caregivers) are sufficiently met, which leads to the development of a healthy selfhood or healthy narcissism characterized by assertiveness, a positive self-image, commitment, empathy, and a sense of belonging.³⁰⁵

Among the small collection of studies that have tested the relationships of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism to humility, both types of pathological narcissism have been found to essentially serve as barriers to the development and expression of the virtue. In a 2015 study done by Sandage and colleagues, spiritual grandiosity and idealization hunger were found to be negatively associated with humility in the study sample.³⁰⁶ The results concerning spiritual grandiosity would seem to merit a rather

³⁰³ Ibid., 300.

³⁰⁴ Sandage, Paine, and Hill, "Spiritual Barriers to Humility: A Multidimensional Study," 209.

³⁰⁵ Sandage et al., "Vulnerable Narcissism, Forgiveness, Humility, and Depression: Mediator Effects for Differentiation of Self," 300-301.

straightforward interpretation, given that a defensive, over-inflated sense of self combined with manipulative conduct toward others - both associated with the grandiose sub-type - would not be compatible with humility's emphases on accurate self-assessment and openness to others. In their discussion, Sandage and colleagues also consider why idealization hunger might be negatively associated with humility, and remark that idealization hunger "can contribute to a desperate or dependent style of relating and self-assessment that is inconsistent with humility."³⁰⁷ They continue by noting that, when this hunger becomes applied to God in the realm of one's spiritual life, it can lead to a situation where "Perfection is experienced vicariously [in God] and fosters relational pride by defending against awareness of limitations. Theologically, God or the sacred may be understood as unlimited while human relational spirituality will always have some degree of limitation."³⁰⁸ The authors make the more overarching point that the results of this study help show that forms of grandiosity aren't the only barrier to humility as perhaps often taken to be the case, but rather that insecure attachment to God as well as idealization hunger both have their own identifiable and independent effects on inhibiting expression of the virtue.³⁰⁹

Mature Alterity & Humility

³⁰⁶ Sandage, Paine, and Hill, "Spiritual Barriers to Humility: A Multidimensional Study," 207.

See also the results of a 2017 study done by Sandage and colleagues which showed that vulnerable narcissism was negatively associated with humility, mediated by differentiation of self; see Sandage et al., "Vulnerable Narcissism, Forgiveness, Humility, and Depression: Mediator Effects for Differentiation of Self," 300.

³⁰⁷ Sandage, Paine, and Hill, "Spiritual Barriers to Humility: A Multidimensional Study," 210.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 215.

The final component of the relational spirituality model to be explored in relation to humility is that of mature alterity. Mature alterity refers to the developmental capacity to relate well across differences, which is also a core dimension of the differentiation of self construct as well as the relational spirituality model's conception of spiritual maturity as previously described.³¹⁰ Two particular aspects of mature alterity that are often operationalized in empirical research include intercultural competence, or the ability to think and act in culturally appropriate ways with attention to cultural differences, as well as social justice commitment. Regarding intercultural competence, Bell and colleagues noted in a recent study that there is some overlap with the concept of cultural humility, as both indicate an awareness of one's cultural location as well as an openness to other cultures. However, these authors remark that intercultural competence also goes beyond the focus on counselor cultural humility that has been emphasized in the empirical psychological literature to date on this topic.³¹¹ As Bell and colleagues also recently pointed out, both intercultural competence and social justice commitment have been adopted into many guidelines of professional practice within the mental health professions.³¹²

Theoretically, it has been argued that both intercultural competence and social justice commitment align well with the predominant psychological definitions of

³¹⁰ Sandage, Jensen and Jass, "Relational Spirituality and Transformation: Risking Intimacy and Alterity," 183.

³¹¹ Chance Bell et al., "Relational Spirituality, Humility, and Commitments to Social Justice and Intercultural Competence," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 36, no. 3 (2017): 212.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 210.

humility. Intercultural competence, as just noted, overlaps with the intrapersonal emphasis of humility on realistic self-awareness, as well as interpersonally with regards to an openness to new learning and differences.³¹³ Social justice commitment also overlaps with humility's "other orientation,"³¹⁴ along with the value of solidarity with the oppressed as suggested by Ruffing and colleagues. Among the empirical studies to date, Bell and colleagues found humility to be associated with both intercultural competence as well as social justice commitment.³¹⁵ Paine and others also found a connection between humility and intercultural competence, mediated by differentiation of self.³¹⁶ In one other empirical study conducted by Jankowski and colleagues, humility was found to serve as a mediator in the association between forgiveness and increased social justice commitment. Interpreting humility to entail the capacity for self-regulation, the authors of the study suggest that "the capacity for intra- and interpersonal self-regulation is tied to concern and active advocacy for the needs of others."³¹⁷

Conclusion

³¹³ Ibid., 212.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 210.

³¹⁶ David R. Paine, Peter J. Jankowski, and Steven J. Sandage, "Humility as a Predictor of Intercultural Competence: Mediator Effects for Differentiation-of-Self," *The Family Journal* 24, no. 1 (2016): 15.

³¹⁷ Jankowski, Sandage, and Hill, "Differentiation-based Models of Forgiveness, Mental Health and Social Justice Commitment: Mediator Effects for Differentiation of Self and Humility," 421.

This chapter has explored the study of humility within the field of psychology, focusing especially on how the virtue has been conceptualized as well as how humility has been studied so far through the perspective of the relational spirituality model.

A number of observations emerge from this examination around the continuities and discontinuities that are apparent among definitions of the virtue within the field of psychology over time. As a review, June Price Tangney, who was one of the earliest positive psychology researchers to write about humility, includes these elements in her definition of the virtue (which I have incorporated here into a numerical list):

1. an accurate assessment of one's abilities and achievements (not low self-esteem, self-deprecation)
2. an ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge, and limitations (often vis-a`-vis a "higher power")
3. openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
4. keeping one's abilities and accomplishments - one's place in the world - in perspective (e.g., seeing oneself as just one person in the larger scheme of things)
5. a relatively low self-focus, a "forgetting of the self," while recognizing that one is but part of the larger universe
6. an appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ Tangney, "Humility," 413.

Juxtaposing Tangney's rather expansive definition with more recent ones from empirical studies can lead to some interesting observations. For one, it would seem that the more recent definitions of psychological humility show continuity with many aspects of all six elements in Tangney's definition. The intrapersonal dimension of humility as balanced assessment of one's strengths and limitations, combined with the interpersonal dimension of an openness towards others along with a relatively low self-focus in relationships, seem to together constitute the "core" elements of humility in most contemporary psychological definitions. It is also true that the two subtypes of humility discussed in this chapter overlap substantially with aspects of Tangney's definition. Intellectual humility maps particularly well onto the second, third, and sixth elements in Tangney's definition, since intellectual humility implies an awareness of the fallibility of one's intellectual positions, an openness to new ideas, and a valuing of others' perspectives. Formulations of cultural humility, while building on Tangney's definition, connects strongly with these three elements as well, applied especially to matters of cultural worldview and intercultural relationships.

A number of discontinuities within psychology's evolving set of definitions of the virtue are apparent as well. For one, absent from most of the more recent definitions is the short yet meaningful part of the second element of the virtue listed by Tangney, which is an awareness of one's limitations vis-à-vis a "higher power." Speculation as to why references to a higher power are missing from many contemporary definitions could perhaps include the simple answer that empirical researchers are more trying to articulate generalized understandings of humility for application in empirical work with broader

populations, including persons who do not necessarily endorse belief in a higher power. Another possible reason for this could be that the field of psychology continues, as Tangney had originally suggested, to avoid the more religiously-based and value-laden aspects of humility that are operant and especially well-known from historical religious understandings.³¹⁹ Furthermore, as some researchers including Wright and colleagues have observed, the sense of humility as an acknowledgement of one's limitations before the divine has also tended to connote a sense of shame, self-abasement and low self-esteem, all of which are not looked upon with favor in modern Western psychology.³²⁰ Wright and colleagues, while noting this psychologically-problematic historical understanding of humility, also offer a way of framing humility (as "epistemic alignment") that still preserves a sense of understanding and experiencing oneself as one really is, including as a finite and fallible being, within the context of relationship with a greater reality that could include God, and/or the entire cosmos. This particular type of self-awareness in its fully expressed form seems missing or at least not as explicit in most contemporary psychological definitions of humility.

In a sense too, Wright and colleagues' definition of humility as epistemic alignment also touches on another aspect of humility which Tangney names that is also less emphasized in contemporary definitions, which is the sense of seeing oneself as part of a much larger universe (or as the complete fifth element of her definition reads: "a relatively low self-focus, a 'forgetting of the self,' while recognizing that one is but part

³¹⁹ Ibid., 411.

³²⁰ Wright et al., "The Psychological Significance of Humility," 3.

of the larger universe”³²¹). Contemporary definitions of humility from empirical research also emphasize a sense of low self-focus and accompanying lack of self-aggrandizement or superiority, yet these could be taken as corresponding mainly to a lack of narcissistic personality. What is lacking in these definitions is an experience of interconnectedness that the complete form of Tangney’s definition would seem to imply. An exception to this among contemporary definitions is from the work of Kesebir, who draws connections between humility and psychological definitions of the quiet ego to highlight a recognition of one’s interrelatedness with the cosmos, along with a corresponding sense of “forgetting the self.” When juxtaposed next to each other, these less common ways of conceptualizing humility do appear to start showing some definite semantic contrasts with those more “core definitions” highlighted above.

Tangney’s definition would also seem to offer another aspect of humility that is not often included in the more common recent conceptualizations of the virtue, which is that of “an appreciation of the value of things,”³²² contained in the sixth and final element of her definition. An interesting question comes into view when this aspect of humility is applied to a question raised by Exline, of whether humility should be considered to be a “master virtue,” that is a virtue that underlies or acts as a precursor to the development and expression of other virtues.³²³ Exline argues against such a view of humility, primarily due to the lack of prosocial motivation that is readily apparent in its common

³²¹ Tangney, “Humility,” 413.

³²² Ibid., 413.

³²³ Exline, “Taming the Wild Ego: The Challenge of Humility,” 57-58.

definitions. The quality of appreciation that Tangney refers to in her definition however, combined with the recognition of one's interconnection with other persons and with the whole of reality itself as described under the fifth element of her definition just discussed, do indeed seem to suggest that humility contains a prosocial or even benevolent personal quality as well. It is also interesting to consider whether the previously-discussed notion surrounding why psychologists historically have avoided the topic of humility due to its value-laden meaning may also have led to an underappreciation for and failure to articulate some of the virtue's value-laden characteristics within contemporary psychological definitions, subsequently making it possible for researchers such as Exline to question whether humility ever contained such elements in the first place.

Finally, the work of theorists who have applied a relational spirituality-based framework to conceptualizing and exploring humility contribute a set of additional perspectives on the virtue not previously considered by other researchers. In particular, the work of Steve Sandage, Peter Jankowski, and their colleagues have probed the connections and interactions humility has with the personal capacity for self-regulation, framed through the theories of attachment and differentiation of self, and have found that the commonly-held and accepted aspects of the virtue – including realistic self-acceptance and self-awareness, along with an openness to and respect for the identities of others – hinges on the capacity to maintain a grounded, solid sense of self. Sandage and others, in describing humility as “the developmental capacity for differentiated self-other relating,” appear to equate humility with the developmental *telos* of mature relationality. These researchers thus shine more light on the affective, relational and developmental

underpinnings of the virtue, including with respect to persons' spiritualities and ways of relating with the Sacred. These insights into the dynamics of humility are certainly valuable for entering into interdisciplinary dialogue on the virtue with the Benedictine spirituality of humility, which will constitute the next part of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4. MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY SYNTHESIS

Overview & A Process of Interpretation

This second part of my dissertation takes up the task of creating a mutually critical correlation between Benedictine spirituality and modern psychological science, centered on the topic of humility. Accompanying my analysis throughout this as well as the following chapter will be recommendations for the theory and practice of humility within both fields. In the current chapter, I begin this interdisciplinary conversation with exploring how psychological findings can potentially inform, critique, and question the Benedictine spirituality of humility.

As a prelude to my analysis, I find it helpful to consider and review some of the primary theoretical underpinnings of my interdisciplinary research. As was discussed at more length in chapter one of this dissertation, the interpretive method of mutually critical correlation constitutes the backbone, or primary organizing structure, of this project. To recap, the mutually critical correlation approach has been developed the most out of the three contributing academic disciplines informing my work by researchers and theoreticians within the discipline of practical theology. Based on work in the field of religious hermeneutics by David Tracy, practical theologian Donald Browning came to describe the mutually critical approach as “mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of Christian faith with the interpreted theory and praxis of the

contemporary situation.”³²⁴ In this project, I make a slight adaptation of Tracy and Brownings’ methodological approach by initiating a mutually critical correlation between contemporary psychological perspectives on humility and the Benedictine spiritual tradition. This method assumes that both traditions entering into dialogue possess a standard of epistemological validity and credibility, and thus are able to inform, question, and critique each other, ideally for the sake of producing new knowledge within both fields.

As I also described in chapter one, the mutually critical correlation method is not as explicitly established in the field of spirituality studies. Historian of spirituality Philip Sheldrake does however offer an in-depth analysis of hermeneutical principles that parallel in many ways the kind of dialogical movement that is also featured in the mutually critical correlation approach, thus some review of his work in this chapter on monastic spirituality seems especially appropriate. To begin with a rather broad point concerning the rationale of my work in this chapter, Sheldrake recounts in the opening of his volume on the history of Christian spirituality that spirituality itself is a constantly evolving phenomenon.³²⁵ Such being the case, contemporary spiritualities are naturally different than those existing fifty years ago, or during the middle ages, or in the time of Benedict. As was seen in the second section of chapter two above, the spirituality of Benedictine humility has evolved tremendously from Benedict’s *Rule* in the form of contemporary constructive proposals that build on key themes and practical applications

³²⁴ Browning, “Toward a Fundamental and Strategic Practical Theology,” 59.

³²⁵ Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 24-25.

of classical formulations. This preliminary consideration is useful to take into account simply to say that systems of spirituality can be recognized as developing over time, with interdisciplinary conversations such as the one taken up in this current chapter providing just one of many potential sources of input for stimulating these evolutions of understanding to occur.

To look a little more deeply into this evolutionary process of spiritual traditions over time, Sheldrake draws upon existing literature in religious hermeneutics including the approaches of scholars including Gadamer, Ricoeur and others to provide a description of the hermeneutic process specifically geared for work in spirituality studies and with historical spiritual traditions. Sheldrake starts from the rather common understanding of religious hermeneutics as a meeting and dialogue between two horizons, that of the text being studied and that of the interpreter's personal and social worldview.³²⁶ To make a clear connection between this approach and the structure of this dissertation, the first section of chapter two sought to provide the essential background for understanding the theological, practical, and historical horizon of Benedict's text. This section explored some of the essential dimensions of the text, including its purpose, along with several structural and linguistic elements that are quite particular to its nature as a sixth century Christian monastic document. It also attempted to place Benedict's chapter on humility within the overall ambit of the *Rule's* spirituality, and to place the *Rule* itself within its own historical and theological setting within the wider tradition of monastic spirituality. Furthermore, this chapter also introduced a variety of the extant

³²⁶ Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 175.

contemporary interpretations of Benedict's chapter on humility, which as Sheldrake points out can function as nodes connecting the present situation to historical texts as well.³²⁷ This overall understanding of Benedict's text on humility constitutes one part of the necessary background for initiating a process of interpretation. Chapter two then sought to explore another, more contemporary horizon, that of the psychological approach to understanding humility. It is from the basis of this contemporary understanding, including the several insights that psychology provides around human nature, experience and behavior, that the horizon of Benedict's text on humility can be engaged with.

Another principle of hermeneutic work in spirituality studies that can also help in orienting to the aims of this chapter is Sheldrake's observation that historical texts are able to disclose new forms of meaning that were never intended by their original author.³²⁸ This points back to Sheldrake's metaphor, also described in chapter two, of the interpretive process resembling the performance of a classical piece of music, wherein the performer takes inspiration from the original composition (the text) yet creates something new in the particularity of their own reading and performance (the interpretation). This "creative" approach to hermeneutics as Sheldrake calls it differs from that of a "classical" approach, where what is generally considered to be pertinent is only the original intention of the author, which often becomes boiled down by spiritual or

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid., 179-180.

religious traditions to a set of “essentials” that the tradition must adhere to.³²⁹ Rather than following in this approach, the creative approach represents what Sheldrake refers to as “an imaginative use of tradition,” arrived at through dialogue between the horizons of the text and its contemporary interpreters’.³³⁰ The different contextual understandings of Benedictine humility given in the second section of chapter two represent different instances of such new readings or performances of Benedictine humility. In this current chapter, I continue in this spirit by offering another kind of constructive analysis and exploration of the meaning of Benedictine humility, where the horizon of Benedict’s *Rule* is engaged from the horizon of contemporary psychological science.³³¹

At the beginning of this chapter on the possible resonances, resources, critiques, and questions that modern psychology can offer to the Benedictine spirituality of humility, it is worthwhile to again note the historical precedent of this work, revealed in the monastic tradition’s prior expressions of openness to engaging in various forms of psychological reflection. As recounted in the introduction, there are a number of examples, both ancient and modern, of engagement by monastic authors on psychological topics and themes. In a way, these examples can be taken to reflect an overall commitment within monastic spirituality to engage in a search for wisdom that contributes to the fruitfulness of the tradition and its ways of life – aimed as they are especially toward a living process of spiritual development in personal relationships with

³²⁹ Ibid., 176.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ For a review of different psychological theories from within the discipline of spirituality studies, see Ruffing, “Personality Sciences.”

God, self, and others. Relatedly, it also seems true that Benedictine spirituality possesses what can be referred to as important “interdisciplinary virtues” for engaging successfully and effectively in this sort of dialogue.³³² These include hospitality, a spirit of welcome and openness towards the other that is so vital to the *Rule* and the enduring charism of the Benedictine monastic tradition. There are also the *Rule’s* other central spiritual virtues, including obedience, silence, and humility, which as seen in chapter two can all have strong meaning around a spirit of openness to the other, including in the fundamental sense of listening “with the ear of your heart” (RB 1.1). This chapter’s ultimate goal could perhaps be described as such a process of deep listening, that is for how modern psychology, with its valuable insights into a scientific anthropology, might be able to inform, inspire, and challenge aspects of Benedictine wisdom concerning humility.

Below, the first section of this chapter will consider how psychological conceptualizations of humility, outlined in chapter three above, might be put into constructive and critical dialogue with Benedictine understandings of the virtue. In the second section I then turn attention to imports of theory and empirical findings from the relational spirituality model and how these might inform Benedictine spirituality and practices of spiritual formation connected to humility.

Section 1. Benedictine Humility in Light of Psychological Conceptions of the Virtue

³³² On the term “interdisciplinary virtues,” see Steven J. Sandage and Jeannine K. Brown, *Relational Integration of Psychology and Christian Theology: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 191.

In this first section I consider how psychological perspectives on humility might resonate with, add perspective to, or raise questions around both classical and constructive understandings of Benedictine humility as were presented in chapter two. As a way of proceeding, I will go through the three different types of psychological humility discussed in the first section of chapter three – including general humility, intellectual humility, and cultural humility – to explore how both the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of each might enter into dialogue with Benedictine spirituality. Exploring correspondences and tensions between the two fields will also be important for setting up the exploration of Benedictine humility in light of the relational spirituality model in the second part of this chapter.

General Humility

Interestingly, there appear to be several clear correspondences between the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of general humility from psychology, and aspects of humility from within Benedictine spirituality. On the intrapersonal level, one of the core dimensions of humility from a psychological perspective is a realistic awareness and acceptance of oneself. Such self-awareness is also a definite component of humility within the *Rule of Benedict*, especially in the material discussed under the first step of the fear of God. As commentator Terrance Kardong notes, fear of God can also be understood as a sense of “mindfulness,” of both God as well as oneself.³³³ The aspect of Benedictine humility having to do with the manifestation of thoughts to a spiritual elder could also be seen as relating to this aspect of psychological humility, since greater self-

³³³ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 140.

awareness would seem to be integral to both the process as well as the anticipated fruits of this spiritual practice. Another intrapersonal component of psychological understandings of humility is the ability to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses, via what Exline and colleagues have referred to as a "nondefensive willingness to see the self accurately,"³³⁴ and Tangney adds that this recognition can occur vis-à-vis a higher power.³³⁵ Benedictine humility connects with these intrapersonal senses of humility as well, as seen again in its emphasis on mindfulness of oneself – including of oneself before God – as a part of the fear of God that Benedict prescribes.

Less common within Benedictine humility is a focus on recognizing one's strengths. One reason for this could be the clear emphasis in the *Rule's* seventh chapter on the stamping out of pride, which is seen by Benedict as the primary barrier to humility. As discussed in chapter two, Benedict is certainly quite careful to identify the dangers of pride that may come about due to progress in the spiritual life, or from serving in positions of authority within the community. However, from a psychological perspective, researchers such as Wright and colleagues have also pointed out that understandings of humility which go too far in emphasizing personal faults can lead to an exaggerated sense of low self-esteem, the results of which potentially becoming both psychologically as well as spiritually pathological.³³⁶ Also from a psychological point of view, it can be imagined how a person with grandiose personality tendencies could also

³³⁴ Exline et al., "Humility and Modesty," 463.

³³⁵ Tangney, "Humility," 413.

³³⁶ Wright et al., "The Psychological Significance of Humility," 1.

engage in practices of personal reflection and examination to such an exaggerated extent so as to satisfy their ambition of proving themselves superior in this particular form of spiritual asceticism. It is possible in seeing these different perspectives on humility juxtaposed to identify some points of complexity around assessing personal strengths in relation to humility, and the dual risks of pride and shame that can result from either over- or underemphasizing one's gifts, accomplishments, and contributions. With regard to the broader Benedictine tradition, it is also pertinent to note how constructive interpretations of humility from feminist commentators do advocate a stronger attention to and acceptance of one's complete selfhood, including the strengths and resources one possesses, to be an important dimension of the virtue. This they also note is particularly important for women, who generally have lower baseline levels of grandiosity compared to men, and who may also struggle as a result of systemic social forces in areas of self-development and personal expression.

Moving to consider another aspect of humility present in both psychological and Benedictine perspectives, it is interesting to consider how both fields include in their conceptions of humility a sense or experience of interconnectedness, of being a part of a greater and interrelated whole. From the field of psychology, this has been named by Tangney as a sense of low self-focus, even a "forgetting of the self," while recognizing oneself to be part of a much larger universe. As noted in chapter three, Tangney remarks that "forgetting of the self ... goes hand in hand with the recognition of one's place in the world. We are each just one person in a much larger state of affairs. A person who has gained a sense of humility is no longer phenomenologically at the center of his or her

world. His or her focus is on the larger community, of which he or she is a part.”³³⁷ Wright and colleagues also seem to endorse this way of understanding humility, especially in their construct of “epistemic alignment,” or an “understanding and experience of oneself as one, in fact, is – namely, as a finite and fallible being that is but an infinitesimal part of a vast universe,”³³⁸ which furthermore “is often experienced spiritually, as a connection to God or some higher power, though it can also be experienced through an awareness of one’s place in, and connection to, the natural world.”³³⁹ These psychological perspectives, which touch on both intrapersonal (in terms of low self-focus) and interpersonal (recognizing one’s connections to something greater than the self) dimensions of humility, help to draw out and add further definitional clarity around similar meanings of the virtue within the Benedictine tradition. From the *Rule* itself, an emphasis on low self-focus can be found for instance in the practice of obedience – or an “openness and receptivity to the other, rather than self-sufficient reliance on one’s own vision, plans and insights,”³⁴⁰ combined with the admonishments against self-will and individualism that also fall under the meaning of obedience in the *Rule*. Likewise, the “summit” of humility as described by Benedict also seems to have a strong connection with the sense of being a part of a larger whole, which is identified by Benedict as an experience of loving union with a transcendent God, described by

³³⁷ Tangney, "Humility: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Findings and Directions for Future Research," 72.

³³⁸ Wright et al., “The Psychological Significance of Humility,” 4.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³⁴⁰ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 29.

Benedict in quoting 1 John as “*that love of God which, being perfect, casts out fear*” (RB 7.67). Also relevant here are the connections that commentators assert between chapters 7 and 72 of the *Rule*, the latter describing an experience of communion with a community of human others. Altogether, psychological perspectives can help raise up this meaning of humility in Benedictine spirituality as an experience of relational selfhood, incorporating a sense of low self-focus combined with the sense of existing in relationship with human others and with the Sacred.

Another interpersonal dimension of humility, described as “other-orientedness” within the field of psychology, resonates strongly with aspects of Benedictine humility. In one psychological definition, Wright and colleagues refer to humility as the capacity for “ethical alignment,” which constitutes “understanding and experience of oneself as only one among a host of other morally relevant beings, whose interests are foundationally as legitimate, and as worthy of attention and concern, as one’s own.”³⁴¹ This sense of the virtue connects of course with the sense of relational selfhood in both psychological and Benedictine understandings of humility just discussed, which would also seem to function as a precursor to the ethical commitment that Wright and colleagues describe. This psychological aspect of humility connects also with the Benedictine emphasis on mutual concern found especially in chapter 72 of the *Rule*, which as discussed in chapter two of this dissertation is seen by commentators as a natural outgrowth of the practices of humility described in the *Rule*’s seventh chapter. Closely related to this theme too is the psychological perspective that humility also

³⁴¹ Wright et al., “The Psychological Significance of Humility,” 5.

implies a lack of seeking superiority in relationships. Certainly, again, Benedict's teachings on obedience and the definite emphasis on other-orientedness they contain, combined with his admonishments against forms of pride that can lead to power-mongering and divisiveness within the community, are highlighted by and resonate with these aspects of psychological definitions of general humility.

Intellectual Humility

In addition to psychology's definitions and findings concerning the quality of general humility, its body of literature concerning intellectual humility can also offer useful perspectives for Benedictine spirituality. To review, while there is no standard definition of intellectual humility in psychology, typically intellectual humility is described – in an intrapersonal sense - as containing an awareness of the limitations, as well as the strengths, of one's intellectual positions or beliefs. Definitions from the psychological literature that capture this include “having an accurate view of and ownership of one's intellectual limits,”³⁴² as well as a “non-defensive stance toward one's beliefs.”³⁴³ Another intrapersonal dimension of intellectual humility is described by psychologists Hook and Davis, who argue that intellectual humility ought to also imply an ability to learn, or a kind of “teachableness,” since the intellectually humble person is “able to regulate one's concern for being ‘right’ and is open to new information and pursuing and incorporating knowledge and trust from other sources, even when it is

³⁴² Davis et al., “Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature,” 244.

³⁴³ Krumrei-Mancuso, “Intellectual Humility and Prosocial Values: Direct and Mediated Effects,” 13.

discrepant from one's original position."³⁴⁴ These qualities of intellectual humility definitely would seem to be quite relevant to Benedictine practices of humility. This is certainly true in the case of the "vertical" obedience described in chapter two, where willingness to listen to and follow the teachings and directions of a spiritual elder or abbot would require the sense of teachableness described by psychology. An awareness of the limitations of one's own views and perspectives also appears to be a rather fundamental attitude required for practices such as spiritual direction and mutual discernment to function effectively, which are featured in the fifth step of Benedict's ladder of humility.³⁴⁵ The intrapersonal meanings of intellectual humility can in these ways be seen to have important connections to the functioning and efficacy of spiritual formation within Benedictine communities, specifying some of the personal qualities that can lead to greater awareness of one's subjective positioning along with an openness to learn from different – and perhaps wiser - perspectives. The interpersonal dimensions of intellectual humility, which have been described in psychology as "the ability to fairly negotiate ideas with others (e.g., appropriately adjusting one's ideas when presented with new evidence, not using coercive tactics to influence others' ideas),"³⁴⁶ and by another researcher as "not [being] concerned with how one's intellect and intellectual products

³⁴⁴ Church, "Intellectual Humility and Religious Belief," 220.

³⁴⁵ It is also interesting to note how intellectual humility might inform Benedictine spirituality more broadly. For instance, it could be argued that intellectual humility ought to be an important quality of the abbot or superior of the community, since the *Rule* advises persons in these positions to be open to and learn from the perspectives of others the community (cf. RB 3).

³⁴⁶ Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," 244.

(such as ideas and insights) bear upon one's social status,"³⁴⁷ also appear relevant to Benedictine spirituality as important qualities for defending against pride, and the deleterious impacts that this vice can have upon community relationships.

Cultural Humility

Along with intellectual humility, psychology's conceptual work around the subdomain of cultural humility can also offer valuable perspectives to explore in relation to Benedictine spirituality. Most conceptions of cultural humility in psychology to date, however, are focused rather exclusively on its applicability and relevance for the practice of psychotherapy. Hook and colleagues have defined the intrapersonal dimension of cultural humility for instance as meaning "an accurate perception of [one's] own cultural values,"³⁴⁸ while in another venue referring to it as "an awareness of the limitations in our ability to understand the worldview and cultural background of our client."³⁴⁹ On the interpersonal level, Hook and others have also referred to cultural humility as constituting "an other-oriented perspective that involves respect, lack of superiority, and attunement regarding [clients'] own cultural beliefs and values."³⁵⁰ Altogether, except for the few of these definitions' references to the counselor-counselee relationship, it would seem that both a realistic perception of one's cultural values, combined with an openness, respect, and attunement to the cultural values and beliefs of others, could function as a viable

³⁴⁷ Barrett, "Intellectual Humility," 1.

³⁴⁸ Hook et al., *Cultural Humility: Engaging Diverse Identities in Therapy*, 29.

³⁴⁹ Joshua Hook, "Engaging Clients with Cultural Humility," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 33, no. 3 (2014): 278.

³⁵⁰ Hook et al., *Cultural Humility: Engaging Diverse Identities in Therapy*, 29.

definition of cultural humility that could be applied to persons in general, not only psychotherapists. This broader way of construing cultural humility could also be contemplated in relation to Benedictine humility.

While my research into the English-language monastic literature did not uncover any engagements of the virtue of humility with the topic of intercultural relationships, it would also seem, much like in the cases of both general humility and intellectual humility, that cultural humility could serve as an important quality towards the overall diminishment of forms of pride, superiority and individualism, and the promotion of realistic forms of self-awareness and acceptance along with openness towards others' perspectives and views – all of which, as seen above, are quite integral to the Benedictine practice of humility. Given the reality of today's plural, highly interconnected societies, the capacity to effectively relate across cultural differences is a critical component to be integrated into contemporary understandings of Benedictine humility. Additionally, the capacity for cultural humility would also appear to be important for Benedictine theologians pursuing comparative theological work with other religious or spiritual traditions. Such engagements, as seen in the examples discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, necessitate a genuine, open, reflective and appreciative approach to interacting with other traditions and their cultural contexts. Also relevant to this, I return to a discussion of Benedictine spirituality's broader concerns for community, and potential connections with cultural humility, at a later point in this chapter.

Section 2. Benedictine Humility in Light of a Relational Spirituality Perspective

In this second section I turn to explore how the relational spiritual model, detailed in the third chapter of this dissertation, might also enter into interdisciplinary conversation with the Benedictine spirituality of humility. To review, relational spirituality is defined within this model as “ways of relating to the Sacred,”³⁵¹ and its theory advances the central idea that healthy human relational development is a fundamental basis for the development and expression of a healthy, mature spirituality. The relational spirituality model, with its different associated theoretical components including attachment theory, differentiation of self, and theories of intercultural development, provides resources for assessing different traditions and systems of spirituality, and in particular how themes and teachings from traditions might influence and interact with dynamics of human development. In this way, it is possible to utilize the theoretical perspectives and empirical findings of the relational spirituality model in order to explore Benedictine humility, and how it might – in its varied articulations and practices - potentially interact with dynamics of human psychological development.

Especially relevant to this line of inquiry, and the rationale for the following analysis, are the potential imports of the relational spirituality model for informing a perspective on how humility changes – and ideally develops and flourishes – in the practitioner of Benedictine spirituality over time. Benedict’s own teaching on humility contained in the *Rule* certainly does, as discussed in much greater detail in chapter two above, have a strong dynamic orientation to it, evidenced for instance in its use of the

³⁵¹ Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology & Psychology*, 61.

image of a ladder to describe how a person ascends the steps of humility to arrive at the virtue's summit. Despite some of the ambiguities that this image raises when it comes to understanding the exact progression of steps involved in growth and change in humility over time, it nonetheless can still be grasped that there is a fundamental dynamism to how Benedict frames and understands the function of humility in a person's life. The *telos* of the virtue, furthermore, can be understood in strongly relational categories, which begins to open up a distinct correspondence between Benedictine spirituality and the relational spirituality concept within psychology. As discussed in chapter two for instance, contemporary commentators see in Benedict's *Rule* a strong and important connection between the summit of humility described in chapter 7, and Benedict's succinct yet powerful teaching on interpersonal charity and mutual concern given in chapter 72. This connection is apparent as well in the contemporary interpretation given by André Louf for instance, who in interpreting Benedict's summit of humility sees "*perfect love of God which casts out fear* (1 Jn. 4.18)" (RB 7.69) to indicate a kind of personal integration which can be understood in distinctly relational terms, as the birth of a "universal self," an experience of freedom, in communion with the whole cosmos.³⁵² Louf's perspective helps to conceptualize the dynamic of Benedictine humility as a spiritual journey that leads to a new experience and orientation to being in relationship with self, the cosmos, and God. Importantly for Louf as well, such interior transformation and integration is necessarily reflected in action, as it is the sign that such integration has been fulfilled.³⁵³

³⁵² André Louf, *Grace Can Do More: Spiritual Accompaniment & Spiritual Growth* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2002), 39-40.

Also worth exploring here are some further grounds for contemplating the distinctly relational character of Benedictine spirituality, for the sake of drawing further connections with the relational spirituality model. One could argue that Benedictine spirituality is essentially relational, based for one on an examination of Benedict's description of the monastery as *cenobium*.³⁵⁴ This term, formed from the Greek roots *koinos bios* or "common life," historically was used to describe communities founded by the monk Pachomius in mid-4th century Egypt. As the first communal Christian monasteries, these communities lived in a "circle of *koinonia*," modeled after the Jerusalem community described in Acts 4.32.³⁵⁵ The early desert monastic tradition would also have found the symbol of the circle to describe well the character of communal monastic spirituality, for example in the saying from Abba Matoes, "He who dwells with brethren must not be square, but round, so as to turn himself towards all."³⁵⁶

Another particularly relational concept within Benedictine spirituality, which was also discussed at length in chapter two of this dissertation, is the communal form of deification that can be said to make up the soteriology of the *Rule*. This, again, points to a relational reality as being the ideal and ultimate end of the spiritual life. Meanwhile on a more pragmatic level, Kardong notes that no doubt Benedict was familiar with the problems that arose in early monastic history, full of heroic and misguided ascetical

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ This argument is based on my previous analysis in Tomlinson, "A Relational Human Development Perspective on Benedictine Spirituality."

³⁵⁵ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 35-36.

³⁵⁶ Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, 145.

efforts, often requiring the intervention and wisdom of spiritual elders as so many stories of the desert tradition reveal.³⁵⁷ Thus, the relational dimension of Benedictine spirituality can also be understood in a rather pragmatic sense too, following the idea that having in the vicinity spiritual elders and those more developed in a particular form of spirituality could have the effect of protecting neophytes from being misled into unhealthy, ineffective, or unsustainable forms of spiritual asceticism.

All of these points concerning the relational nature of Benedictine spirituality do suggest the distinctive value of a relational understanding of human development in informing, questioning, and ultimately in strengthening understandings of Benedictine spirituality. A guiding principle for the analysis within the remainder of this chapter then is understanding how exactly psychological theory advanced by the relational spirituality model can contribute not just important, but necessary understandings of human psychology and development that, as I intend to show, are integral to the processes of growth and change in the Benedictine spirituality of humility. In the remainder of this section, I continue providing a psychological commentary on the Benedictine spirituality of humility by returning to the different components of the relational spirituality model outlined in chapter three, and examining how their theoretical perspectives and empirical findings might be grounds for analyzing, evaluating, and informing key principles and practices of the Benedictine spirituality of humility.

³⁵⁷ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 29.

Attachment Theory & Differentiation of Self

This discussion begins with a focus on attachment theory and differentiation of self in tandem, since, while they are separate theories, both concepts include a strong focus on the capacity for the self-regulation of emotion. Indeed, both secure attachment and high levels of differentiation of self characterize a person's positive ability to hold onto his- or herself and modulate reactivity in the midst of stressful life situations, times of growth and change, while interacting across differences, and during periods of solitude as well as while connecting with others. Exploring attachment and differentiation together allows for a more concentrated exploration of how self-regulation is such an important capacity for the expression of many key dimensions of humility, including as the virtue is understood within the Benedictine tradition.

As is evident in the empirical findings reviewed in chapter three, psychological research to date has found significant connections between attachment style and level of differentiation of self, and general humility. Results from several studies show that both secure attachment, as well as a high level of differentiation of self, are positively associated with the virtue. As suggested by authors of these studies, an underlying capacity for emotional regulation tied to both secure attachment and high differentiation is likely responsible for enabling persons to successfully express key aspects of humility, including accurately and realistically assessing one's own abilities and potential weaknesses, as well as relating to others in an open and non-domineering way.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ See for example Ruffing et al., "Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework," 536; Jankowski and Sandage "Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models," 78.

Researchers utilizing the relational spirituality model to explore humility see self-regulation as so critical to a person's capacity for humility that the authors of one study even suggested that humility might represent what is essentially a mature form of self-regulation, or what they refer to as "the developmental capacity for differentiated self-other relating."³⁵⁹ Given that self-regulation is tied so closely to the expression of different dimensions of humility as defined by psychology, and also because psychological dimensions of the virtue including realistic self-acceptance and openness to others are so important to Benedictine conceptions of the virtue (as seen above in this chapter), it stands to reason that an analysis of the dynamics of self-regulation in the spirituality of Benedictine humility can be quite valuable for informing spiritual practices within this tradition.

On the one hand, I believe it can be argued that there are several resources and practices within Benedictine spirituality that have the potential to support persons in developing the capacity for self-regulation. Relative to the *Rule's* writings on humility in particular, as was seen in chapter two of this dissertation, there is a strong emphasis given by Benedict especially towards the end of chapter 7 of the *Rule* on humility's ultimate meaning lying in the development of a loving relationship with God (cf. RB 7.67-69). This can be seen from a psychological perspective as offering a resource for a dwelling-oriented spirituality, potentially providing a spiritual resource for secure attachment with God and thus supporting growth in persons' ability to self-regulate emotion. Along with

³⁵⁹ Jankowski and Sandage, "Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models," 78.

elements specific to humility, it is interesting to consider from a broader perspective how some other parts of the *Rule of Benedict* might resonate both with attachment- and differentiation-related themes. The opening lines of the *Rule* for instance, when read from an attachment-based perspective, can be considered for their psychological significance: “Listen, O my son to the precepts of the master, and incline the ear of your heart: willingly receive and faithfully fulfill the admonition of your loving father” (RB ProL. 1). The warm-hearted affective resonance of this passage – especially when adapted with more inclusive language – can impart the sense of the *Rule’s* author offering a safe haven to his readers. Even the *Rule* itself could potentially function as both a safe haven as well as a secure base through offering a symbolic “presence” of encouragement and safety to persons in the midst of their spiritual journey. Such resources related to the development of self-regulation in the *Rule of Benedict* are worthwhile to take note of, especially when also considering some of the liabilities around this psychological capacity that the *Rule* and its tradition of monastic spirituality might also contain.³⁶⁰

One such liability that can be weighed into this analysis is the concept of shame, which as psychologists writing from a relational spirituality perspective have pointed out is a potential concern that arises in conceptions of humility within historic texts and traditions of Christian spirituality.³⁶¹ Shame, as a form of low self-regard tied to both an

³⁶⁰ It is also worth noting the psychological reality that persons who may already possess poor self-regulatory strategies may be more likely to struggle to initiate and sustain practices of spiritual formation, due to the demands they place on a person to relate to self and others, despite the potential for such practices to ultimately help persons in developing such capacities.

³⁶¹ Claire E. Wolfe et al., “Humility: Empirical Psychological Research in Dialogue with Practical Theology - Part I,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 20, no. 1 (2016): 153; Jankowski and Sandage, “Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models,” 76-77.

insecure sense of self in conjunction with a lack of secure relatedness to others, is an innately dysregulating emotion.³⁶² Tangney, who has studied and reflected extensively on the nature of shame, considers shame to be a member of a family of negative “self-conscious” emotions that also includes guilt and embarrassment, with shame in particular including a constellation of affective experiences of isolation, diminishment, worthlessness, and inferiority to others.³⁶³ By interfering with the capacity to self-regulate both intrapersonally and interpersonally, shame can be taken as a significant barrier to the development and expression of humility.³⁶⁴ Furthermore, while some psychological authors have been careful to point out the value of contextual understandings of spiritual texts, including as a means of circumventing potentially harmful interpretations that might promote shame, they have also argued that it is nonetheless the case that persons who are already primed to think of themselves in shameful ways may find reinforcement for their negative self-perceptions within these works.³⁶⁵

³⁶² Jankowski and Sandage, "Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models," 76-77.

It should be noted here that shame may be considered a more adaptive emotion in certain Eastern cultural contexts; see David R. Paine et al., “Cultural and Racial Perspectives on Positive Psychologies of Humility,” in *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Positive Psychology*, ed. Nicholas J. L. Brown, Timothy Lomas, and Francisco Jose Eiroa-Orosa (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 294.

³⁶³ June Price Tangney et al., "Are Shame, Guilt, and Embarrassment Distinct Emotions?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, no. 6 (1996): 1265. See also June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer, *Self-conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).

³⁶⁴ Jankowski and Sandage, "Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models," 76-77.

³⁶⁵ See for example Ruffing et al., "Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework," 528.

Multiple papers written from a relational spirituality perspective have pointed to the *Rule of Benedict*, and specifically to step 7 of the *Rule*, for its potential to evoke a sense of shame in persons, especially in those who may already have a tendency to experience this emotion.³⁶⁶ Authors draw attention to particular selections of the text, including that a person “should... pronounce with his tongue that he is inferior to and more common than all” (RB 7.51), as well as Benedict’s quotation from Psalm 22, that, “*As for me, I am a worm and no man, shameful among men and an outcast of the people* (Ps 22:7)” (RB 7.52). Clearly, by using such language to describe practices of humility, Benedict’s text, when taken at face value and without any other interpretive resources from the discipline of spirituality studies, could rightly be thought to have the potential to evoke a shameful view of the self in the reader, which in light of an analysis based on the relational spirituality model could have a dysregulating effect that ultimately could interfere with or inhibit the expression of humility.

Additional interpretive possibilities for this text are also available and important to consider here as well, based on the analysis of this section of the *Rule* given in chapter two above. Monastic commentators, as discussed previously, see in this step of humility a connection to the monastic practice of the generation of self-knowledge and insight into the inner dynamics that guide a person’s thoughts and actions, including those of sin – or tendencies that cause a person to fall short in their love of God and neighbor. The symbol of the broken heart, evoking the pain that can come about through this process and experience of self-discovery, along with a strong desire for and faith in God’s healing - or

³⁶⁶ Ibid.; Wolfteich, Keefe-Perry, Sandage, and Paine, “Humility: Empirical Psychological Research in Dialogue with Practical Theology – Part 1,” 152.

what Louf refers to as a “frantic trust in grace” - were identified as prominent elements of this monastic practice which is also echoed in Benedict’s *Rule*.³⁶⁷ Commentators such as Böckmann have also been careful to point out the potential psychological implications of this practice, suggesting it could become a liability to persons who lack an adequate degree of spiritual maturity, and especially a deeply rooted knowledge of God’s love along with their own basic goodness.³⁶⁸

These alternative perspectives on the seventh step of humility open up additional possibilities for exploring the practical dynamics of Benedictine humility through a relational spirituality analysis, and especially in this case in relation to the capacity for emotional regulation. On the one hand, the practices of deepening self-knowledge, and seeking consolation and relief from God in the midst of the stressors and challenges that can go along with this process, could be interpreted from an attachment-based perspective as an example of healthy attachment-seeking behavior. In the midst of a trying period of spiritual growth, to seek out God to soothe anxiety and experience a sense of felt security can be seen as being in alignment with the safe haven function of attachment, and thus could be taken to be a psychologically-healthy response that promotes self and relational regulation. Furthermore, it is also quite relevant to consider here how John Bowlby, one of the psychologists who founded attachment theory, challenged the notion that adults are ideally to be self-reliant in terms of their needs for

³⁶⁷ Louf, *The Way of Humility*, 11, 14.

³⁶⁸ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 192-193.

emotional safety and soothing. Rather, Bowlby considered the attachment system to be active throughout life, and thus that the safe haven function of seeking felt security from another person could be considered a healthy response at any time of heavy stress or struggle.³⁶⁹

On the other hand, an attachment-based relational spirituality perspective on these practical dynamics of Benedictine humility could also indicate a potentially problematic aspect of these monastic practices, especially in relation to an anxious or preoccupied attachment style. As discussed in chapter three, anxious or preoccupied insecure attachment can develop when a person's primary attachment figure(s) were only intermittently available to provide a felt sense of security and safety, thus leading a person to rely on increasingly dramatic and intensive proximity-seeking behaviors to elicit a response from a caregiver. Such a dynamic could lead to a chronic form of neediness in relationships, especially in times of anxiety or stress. This dynamic, through a relational spirituality perspective, can also be seen as having the potential to map onto spiritual practices of relating to God. In the case of the Benedictine practice under consideration here, the combination of the practice potentially leading to a temporarily low self-image through confrontation with one's shortcomings, combined with a recognized need for God's grace for healing which Louf characterizes at one point as "frantic," could potentially map onto a person's already-established preoccupied

³⁶⁹ Mikulincer and Shaver, *Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics, and Change*, 11.

attachment style.³⁷⁰ Such a situation could result in a psychologically-harmful state of dysregulation via intrapersonal and relational insecurity, which ultimately could prevent the development of qualities associated with the virtue of humility.

It is also possible to analyze the Benedictine practice of the “fear of God” (RB 7.10) in relation to the concept of self-regulation. There is the possibility for one that this “fear” that is so central to the first step of Benedict’s ladder of humility could be interpreted as fear in the sense of existential anxiety or insecurity, which would be assumed to have a dysregulating effect on one’s relationship with the divine. This of course is in contrast to some of the interpretive possibilities described at length in chapter two of this dissertation, where fear of God was shown, both through biblical sources as well as within the *Rule of Benedict*, to indicate an awareness of God and self, along with a sense in general of reverential awe toward the Sacred.³⁷¹ Beyond this, there are also presented in this step some images of God as a particularly harsh eschatological judge, in passages which state for instance that “those who despise God will be consumed in hell for their sins” (RB 7.11), and additionally that a person “is regarded from heaven by God at every hour, and that his actions in every place are perceived in the Divine Vision” (RB 7.13).³⁷² From a relational spirituality perspective, such theological points of view could

³⁷⁰ This scenario would also represent an instance of the correspondence pathway linking one’s learned attachment style to an attachment style with God; for more on this, see chapter two.

³⁷¹ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 139; Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 145.

³⁷² Such theological points also resonate with others located in different parts of the *Rule*, such as in the Prologue where Benedict states near the beginning, “For we must always so serve him with the good things he has given us, that not only may he never, as an angry father, disinherit his children; but may never

also potentially elicit a certain degree of dysregulation stemming from a sense of relational insecurity with God. From an attachment perspective, without a divine figure who is capable of providing a safe haven for dwelling within one's spiritual life, one may lack an important resource for developing and supporting self-regulation, which could further inhibit or interfere with a person's ability to grow in and express humility. As was also discussed in chapter two, there is the likelihood that some strong contextual factors in Benedict's time contributed to the sharp and harsh tone of some of these passages and their theology, including the social and political upheaval occurring during the collapse of the Roman empire, and possibly the character of those persons who were entering Benedict's monasteries at that time.³⁷³ However, it's nonetheless true from a relational spirituality perspective that these psychological dimensions of the practice of the fear of God in Benedict's *Rule* should be included as considerations for spiritual practice and formation within the tradition.

Narcissism

Narcissism is another primary theoretical lens through which the virtue of humility has been studied by psychological researchers within the relational spirituality framework. As was seen in chapter three, results of studies on the relationship between narcissism and humility to date reveal a significant negative association, with dimensions of narcissism, including spiritual grandiosity as well as idealization hunger, both being deemed by researchers as significant "spiritual barriers" to the development of

as a dread Lord, incensed by our sins, deliver us to everlasting punishment as most wicked servants who would not follow him to glory" (RB Prol. 6-7).

³⁷³ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 129.

humility.³⁷⁴ Pathological narcissism, in both its grandiose and vulnerable forms, has been associated with inhibiting realistic self-awareness and acceptance as well as openness and a non-domineering approach in relating with others, and thus interferes with the expression of humility as it's been defined both in psychology as well as within the Benedictine spiritual tradition.³⁷⁵

In order to explore some of the potential dynamics of narcissism within Benedictine spirituality and its practices related to humility, a beginning can be made by considering grandiose narcissism. On the one hand, the seventh chapter of Benedict's *Rule* concerning humility could definitely be seen as tempering grandiosity, especially in its admonishments against pride. As discussed at much greater length in chapter two of this dissertation, Benedict is quite stringent in pointing out the dangers of pride to spiritual and communal life at the beginning of his chapter on humility (cf. RB 7.1-4). In his extensive discussions on pride in other parts the *Rule*, as also seen in chapter two, it is apparent how Benedict associates pride with qualities of an over-inflated sense of self, along with resulting forms of relational discord, both of which could be seen as aligning quite well with the psychological conceptualization of grandiosity. It is also possible to recall that Benedict is exacting in pointing out the variations of pride that can become manifest within spiritual communities, one affecting those who are newer to the community and way of life, another that may affect others who have progressed for some time in the spiritual life which may be expressed as a kind of arrogance that is likely to

³⁷⁴ Sandage, Paine, and Hill, "Spiritual Barriers to Humility: A Multidimensional Study," 207.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

lead to “jealousies, quarrels, detractions, competitiveness, dissensions, and depositions from office” (RB 65.7).³⁷⁶ To again cite Böckmann’s creative description of the nature of pride in the *Rule*, she refers to the Latin word *superbia*, commenting that the prefix *super-*, meaning “over,” can evoke the image of: “Somebody puts up his nose, wants to be better than others and might look down on others contemptuously, competes with others. This applies not only to the relationship to God but also to the community and the superior.”³⁷⁷

While Benedictine humility would appear to guard strongly against grandiosity, on the other hand it is pertinent to recall here Antoine Vergote’s argument described in chapter two concerning a psychological perspective on Benedictine humility. Vergote made the perceptive observation, one which has also been accepted by his Benedictine critics, that the ascetical focus in Benedict’s teaching on humility could lead to an emphasis on the quest for an ideal self, so that the *Rule’s* teaching on the virtue could ultimately lead to a narcissistic emphasis on self-enhancement, combined as well potentially with a reluctance to admit one’s faults and failings.³⁷⁸ It can likely also be added based on a relational spirituality perspective that this dynamic in Benedictine spirituality could pose special problems for those persons who already possess tendencies toward grandiosity. It’s worth noting that these points in general also correspond with the concept of spiritual grandiosity as advanced by the psychological researcher Robert

³⁷⁶ Böckmann, *From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility*, 36.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Vergote, “A Psychological Approach to Humility in the Rule of St. Benedict,” 421-422.

Moore, who describes how a person's psychological tendencies toward narcissism can interact with and become activated by spiritual experience in a way that leads to elevated levels of self-inflation.³⁷⁹

It is furthermore possible to explore the potential dynamics of vulnerable narcissism within the Benedictine spirituality of humility. Psychological researchers writing from a relational spirituality perspective have discussed how forms of spirituality that promote a low, shame-laced view of the self, combined with a comparatively high view of the divine, could be seen as having the potential to promote or elicit a style of vulnerable narcissism, especially when this type of stance is taken in order to psychologically defend against recognizing and accepting personal limitations (by identifying with an idealized other).³⁸⁰ As has been pointed out by relational spirituality researchers, this dynamic of vulnerable narcissism could potentially map onto the monastic practice of developing self-knowledge connected to the seventh step of Benedict's ladder of humility, which was also discussed above in relation to self-regulation.³⁸¹ This correspondence may be limited however, depending on certain circumstances. If the effort involves looking within the self to discover one's un-ordered or sinful patterns for the sake of moving towards a more virtuous way of life, this honest form of self-reckoning might not fit exactly with a pattern of vulnerable narcissism that is

³⁷⁹ Robert Moore, *Facing the Dragon: Confronting Personal and Spiritual Grandiosity* (Wilmette, IL: Chiron, 2003), 68-77.

³⁸⁰ Sandage, Paine, and Hill, "Spiritual Barriers to Humility: A Multidimensional Study," 210; see also Ruffing et al., "Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework," 528-529.

³⁸¹ See *ibid.*

driven by the need for defense against recognizing such personal limitations. It is nonetheless valuable to recognize that the dynamic of this practice, especially for someone who may already have a tendency to exhibit vulnerable narcissism, could potentially elicit this response within a person's spirituality as well. A key marker perhaps could be whether a person is adopting a shameful view of the self (thus evincing a more vulnerable narcissistic stance), or whether they are actively working within themselves to better understand their personal limitations and liabilities so as to move in a direction toward understanding, forgiveness and healing in relationship to God. A similar dynamic would also be important to take into account around the fifth step of humility, having to do with the manifestation of thoughts to a spiritual elder or the abbot: if a perduring shameful attitude is adopted, along with an idealization of the elder is adopted in this relationship of spiritual guidance (which in the case of the abbot could also perhaps be made more possible through Benedict's teaching that he or she retains "Christ's place" in the monastery (RB 2.1)), a strong correspondence with vulnerable narcissism could also be manifesting in this situation as well.

Mature Alterity

The final theoretical component of the relational spirituality model that can be drawn upon to explore the Benedictine spirituality of humility is that of mature alterity. Mature alterity, as seen in chapter three of this dissertation, includes the concepts of both intercultural competence as well as social justice commitment. As described earlier in the present chapter under the topic of cultural humility, there is not much direct attention paid to cultural matters in either classical or contemporary constructive

conceptualizations of Benedictine humility. However, as also pointed out previously, there are certainly a number of points in the tradition that can connect well with and serve as a foundation for an intercultural perspective on Benedictine humility. These include the emphasis placed upon maintaining a spirit of attentiveness towards the other, seen for instance at the “summit” of humility in Benedict’s *Rule* which is largely about love of God, and in the connections that commentators have drawn with Benedict’s seventy-second chapter which is largely about openness and charity towards others. Openness and an appreciation of diversity is also one of the core features of the feminist interpretation of Benedictine humility, including Chittister’s construal of humility as “the basis for right relationships in life,” and “the foundation for our relationship with God, our connectedness to others, our acceptance of ourselves, our way of using the goods of the earth and even our way of walking through the world without arrogance, without domination, without scorn, without put downs, without disdain, without self-centeredness.”³⁸² Mention can also be made of resources that connect with forms of mature alterity within other chapters and themes of the *Rule of Benedict*. There is of course Benedict’s emphasis on the value of hospitality toward other persons, which has some resonance with intercultural competence. There is also Benedict’s advisement to pursue the works of mercy in chapter 4 of the *Rule*, which represents another instance of the importance ascribed to openness and concern for others that can resonate with the concept of social justice commitment as well.

³⁸² Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*, 62, 74.

Along with these resources to support growth in mature alterity in Benedictine spirituality, it is also important to consider possible liabilities as well. It would appear that in general, contemporary writings on Benedictine humility have not engaged directly with either cultural or social justice matters, beyond the feminist interpretations of humility that were discussed previously. This lack of reflection and integrative work is of course a liability for the incorporation of mature alterity into Benedictine spirituality on a broader scale. Another consideration is the critique lodged by Vergote, who alleges that the Benedictine spirituality of humility doesn't include a strong emphasis on community engagement and personal responsibility.³⁸³ However, as my analysis of Benedictine humility presented in chapter two attempted to show, it is essential to read Benedict's teaching on humility within the ambit of the wider system of Benedictine spirituality and the *Rule*, a document which has a clear emphasis on community relationships as the most central locus of spiritual development and transformation.

Along the lines of further reflecting on the centrality of community relationships within Benedictine spirituality in a way that is relevant not only to mature alterity but potentially also to the virtue of humility as well, in a final component of this section I'd like to reflect on some living examples within the Benedictine tradition of communities who manifest strong examples of engagement in the areas of intercultural relationships and social justice. Doing so seems particularly important, given that at several points in this chapter I've noted a lack of scholarly reflection on the nature and practices of Benedictine humility in relationship to these two areas of mature alterity.

³⁸³ Vergote, "A Psychological Approach to Humility in the Rule of St. Benedict," 425.

Weston Priory is one of these example communities, a relatively small Catholic Benedictine community of men located in Vermont, who stand out for their actions beginning in 1984 of offering sanctuary to a family of Guatemalan refugees escaping political oppression, an arrangement of hospitality, intercultural exchange, and justice work that lasted for nearly twenty five years.³⁸⁴ As another example, Holy Wisdom monastery, a small community of women living an ecumenical Benedictine way of life, have undertaken as part of their mission the restoration of the prairie and other native habitats where they are located in Wisconsin, and accept guests for extended periods of time to share their life, work, and values in developing a more environmentally-harmonious and just way of life.³⁸⁵ A third example community is that of Newark Abbey, a community of Catholic Benedictine men who have maintained a presence in the heart of Newark, New Jersey, since the mid-nineteenth century, and who run a school attempting to offer a quality education to students from disadvantaged communities in the city.³⁸⁶

The Benedictine communities named here, while just a sampling of those which could be discussed, represent and make manifest in their living examples not only an engagement in the two facets of mature alterity, but also represent in their witness several qualities of what could be considered as a socially-engaged form of Benedictine humility.

³⁸⁴ For more details of this story, see the archived information on Weston Priory's website, at: <http://www.westonpriory.org/sanctuary/index.php>.

³⁸⁵ More can be found regarding Holy Wisdom monastery's programs for earth care and environmental justice can be found at: <https://benedictinewomen.org/care-for-our-common-home/>.

³⁸⁶ More on Newark Abbey and St. Benedict's Preparatory School can be found at: <https://www.sbp.org/>.

This can be determined by noticing several qualities of Benedictine humility present in these communities' actions, including a strong, vital sense of self-awareness, especially one focused on their location vis-à-vis power dynamics in intercultural and even inter-species relationships. Also present is a clear and active concern for the well-being of others and the espousal of principles of justice, diversity, and peace in society.

Furthermore, the actions and living witness of these communities would also appear to center on an awareness of the presence and will of God, which aligns quite strongly with principles and practices including fear of God and obedience that are integral to the nature of Benedictine humility. Communities such as these could rightly be said to be giving witness to a socially-engaged form of Benedictine humility that has yet to receive scholarly attention to date, but which in fact could become a particularly relevant and powerful way in which this spiritual tradition can engage with and have social relevance to matters concerning mature alterity in today's world. Further commentary in the final chapter of this dissertation will also discuss some of the important disciplinary dynamics within practical theology and spirituality studies that pertain to studying applied examples of virtues that can be found in community contexts, and their relevance for the continuing study of Benedictine humility.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has attempted to show the potential value of incorporating perspectives from psychology, specifically concerning the virtue of humility, as well as a

scientific relational anthropology based on the theory of the relational spirituality model, into the conceptual, practical, and formative dimensions of the Benedictine spirituality of humility. The first section of this chapter laid out a number of points of resonance as well as difference in conceptions of humility within both empirical psychological research and Benedictine spirituality. Of note, Benedictine conceptions of the virtue appear to have strong resonance both with the two forms of general humility understood in psychology – including self-awareness including of one’s limitations on an intrapersonal level, along with an awareness, openness, and concern for others on the interpersonal level. In addition, psychological definitions of the concept of intellectual humility were shown to have the potential to draw out some further dimensions of the virtue that are present in Benedictine spirituality, but perhaps in a less explicit or more indirect formulation.

Section two of this chapter also revealed how the relational spirituality model can be drawn upon to analyze the psychological dynamics of Benedictine humility from multiple theoretical perspectives. Based on the principle of relationality that weaves throughout the Benedictine spirituality of humility, and Benedict’s wider spirituality in general, it was considered how theory originating from the relational spirituality model of human development can inform in some critical ways those spiritual practices and principles that are fundamental to Benedictine humility.

CHAPTER 5. PSYCHOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

Overview

This chapter, constituting the second installment of this dissertation's interdisciplinary dialogue, turns to consider how the Benedictine spirituality of humility can inform, enhance, or question elements of the psychological discourse on the virtue. As a way of proceeding, the first section deals primarily with conceptual matters, especially those of definition and how the virtue is treated within the separate disciplines. Section two then considers how Benedictine perspectives on humility might inform applications of the virtue in psychotherapeutic interventions.

Section 1. Psychological Conceptions of Humility in Light of Benedictine Spirituality

Theological Dimensions of Humility

In what is perhaps its most significant potential import for the field of psychology, Benedictine perspectives on humility can supply resources that meet the demand among psychological researchers who have called for the development of contextual, religion-specific definitions of humility.³⁸⁷ As was seen in chapter two of this dissertation, the *Rule of Benedict* is capable of providing rich, multi-faceted theological treatments of the virtue. Especially in the material at the “summit” of humility presented towards the end

³⁸⁷ See for instance Davis et al., “Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature,” 248-249.

of chapter 7 of the *Rule*, Benedict reveals humility to ultimately be directed to a person's drawing closer to God, in an experience of the "love of God" (RB 7.67) which, according to commentators, indicates the experience of participation in God's own life. As was discussed in chapter two as well, this interpretation of the aim of humility can also be understood according to the soteriological theme of deification, which in early Christian teaching meant a participation in God made possible by the workings of divine grace.³⁸⁸ This theological perspective can add significant religious overlay, context and specificity to psychological conceptions of humility, which could help inform future research and theoretical applications especially applied to Catholic Christian-identifying (e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Anglican) populations. Further reflection on the potential imports of Benedictine humility specifically for psychotherapeutic applications is given in the second section of this chapter below.

It would also seem important to consider here how such theological conceptions of the virtue can potentially raise certain tensions within psychological conceptualizations of humility. One particular issue arises around the categorization of humility within psychology as a virtue of temperance, a classification that traces back to an early typology of the virtues by the positive psychologists Peterson and Seligman.³⁸⁹ These authors, who formulated a rather extensive handbook of the virtues for applications within psychology, understood and categorized humility as a virtue of temperance in the sense that it protects against excesses, especially of arrogance in humility's case, by

³⁸⁸ See Ortiz, "Deification in the Latin Fathers," 78.

³⁸⁹ Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues a Handbook and Classification*, 431-444.

“tempering” a person’s activities.³⁹⁰ This conception resonates with many of the ways in which psychology has come to commonly define humility as were discussed at length in chapter three of this dissertation, both in terms of avoiding the excesses of self-aggrandizement and self-diminishment in one’s self-perception (the intrapersonal dimension), as well as the avoidance of excesses of domination or passivity in how one relates to others (the interpersonal dimension).³⁹¹

From the perspective of Benedictine spirituality however, humility goes beyond a definition marked primarily by temperance or moderation. Monastic writers such as Louf are explicit in fact in challenging this way of categorizing humility, which he traces in Christian spirituality back to the work of scholastic theologians including Thomas Aquinas.³⁹² Louf argues that humility must instead be granted the status of a foundational theological virtue, understood properly as a way of growing in the love of God through union with Christ.³⁹³ This being said, it is still true, as was seen in chapter four of this dissertation, that aspects of Benedictine humility do resonate with elements of psychological definitions having to do with the moderation of excesses, including having an accurate assessment and acceptance of oneself along with an openness toward and concern for others. However, a discrepancy in terms of categories used to think through the ultimate meaning of humility does pose challenges for the potential use and

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 431.

³⁹¹ See for instance Jankowski and Sandage, "Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models," 76.

³⁹² Louf, *The Way of Humility*, 7.

³⁹³ Ibid., 6-10.

integration of Benedictine perspectives on humility with those used in psychology, especially among psychologists who identify humility primarily as a virtue of temperance.

Benedictine conceptions of the virtue do on the other hand connect more directly with alternate modes of understanding humility in psychology that were discussed in detail in chapter three above. These include those dimensions of humility which, though not constituting the most dominant psychological conceptions of the virtue in terms of their usage in the field's literature, are still being developed and reflected upon by researchers. One of these includes Wright and colleagues' proposal that humility entails the epistemological capacity to see oneself, and conduct oneself appropriately, in relationship to a broader whole, whether it be the wider material cosmos or the Sacred.³⁹⁴ Such a way of understanding humility certainly has the capacity to resonate more with the theological perspective on the virtue advanced within Benedictine spirituality.³⁹⁵ Another example from psychology includes the early work on humility done by Tangney, who includes as one of the elements of humility a recognition of oneself as one truly is vis-à-vis a higher power of some form. This notion concerning the meaning of humility also has the capacity to connect with a theological understanding of humility advanced within Benedictine spirituality.

In addition, Benedictine spirituality's treatment of humility, in pressing consideration of the specifically religious dimensions of the virtue, also brings to the fore

³⁹⁴ Wright et al., "The Psychological Significance of Humility," 4.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 4-5.

the important question concerning how and even whether psychologists are open to the study of such dimensions of the virtue. This ties together, as was discussed in chapter three, with an observation raised by Tangney, that psychologists up to the beginning of the twenty-first century tended to avoid the study of humility given what they perceived to be its high religious and moral valence.³⁹⁶ One may still question whether a bias against religious value-laden understandings of humility continues to affect how humility is defined and operationalized within psychology. From the perspective of the field's methods, a related consideration, which connects with material discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, is how ontological assumptions made within the discipline of psychology affect and guide the epistemological considerations upon which psychological research operates. Practically speaking, the multiple theologically-rooted perspectives on humility from the Benedictine tradition that have been discussed throughout this dissertation help define and press the important question that psychologists of religion must face, as to whether they to choose to study humility based solely on categories derived from psychology, or whether theological dimensions of the virtue can or perhaps even should, based on inputs from theological traditions, be accorded a place in their research as well.

For psychologists who do engage more directly with theological dimensions of humility in their work, Benedictine commentators can also contribute a theological component to psychological discourse on the virtue that is rooted in feminist theological perspectives on the virtue. While some psychological studies have discussed the gendered

³⁹⁶ Tangney, "Humility," 411.

nature of the virtues, and how consideration for women's self-development needs to be attended to within the application of humility, it is also true that Benedictine writers can add a feminist theological and spiritual perspective to this discussion as well.³⁹⁷ Chittister for instance describes how a feminist perspective on Benedictine humility would embrace a spirituality where "God... is not a goal to be reached," thus repudiating the goal-driven values of patriarchal culture, but rather "a presence to be recognized."³⁹⁸ Rather than interpreting spirituality through the lens of procurement and achievement, feminist forms of Christian spirituality can instead invite persons to look within to contemplate an immanent divine presence, "who waits quietly within for us to exhaust our compulsive race to nowhere."³⁹⁹ Sources such as these can help inform psychological definitions and applications of humility that take seriously a feminist perspective on spiritual and moral development.

Humility as a Virtue of Communal Growth

Another focus within the Benedictine spirituality of humility that can fruitfully interact with psychological conceptions of the virtue are its prosocial dimensions. As seen in chapter two of this dissertation, humility functions by drawing persons into deeper, more just and loving forms of relationality, both with God as well as with other people, with the ultimate *telos* of the virtue represented in the notion of communal deification, or a communal participation in the life of God. Benedict's spirituality is

³⁹⁷ Ruffing et al., "Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework," 529.

³⁹⁸ Chittister, "Pride and Humility: A New Self-Acceptance," 29.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

clearly one that is grounded within a community of practice, one where virtues like humility are cultivated that in turn have a transformative effect on the relationships that community members experience with themselves, with others, and with the Sacred. In fact, in the constructive feminist as well as the ecological approaches to understanding Benedictine humility that were discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, there is also the sense in which the spirituality of humility draws community members into deeper relationships with all of creation. In a way that could be said to speak to both of these perspectives, Carruth observes that humility “encourages us to cultivate an ethic of care for all that is,”⁴⁰⁰ while Chittister refers to it as “the basis for right relationships in life”⁴⁰¹ as well as “a proper sense of self in a universe of wonders.”⁴⁰² Humility, as understood within the Benedictine tradition, is integral to the promotion of positive, growthful relationships within human communities as well as the whole earth community itself.

This emphasis on the development of a communal ethics, rooted within a concrete relational context, can suggest an alternative perspective to one voiced by some within the field of psychology that was explored in chapter three of this dissertation, which argues that humility lacks a solid grounding in pro-social motivation.⁴⁰³ Such a perspective would seem disparate, if not at odds, with religious perspectives on the virtue of which the Benedictine tradition is but one example. Benedictine humility, rather, can

⁴⁰⁰ Carruth, “The Monastic Virtues of Obedience, Silence and Humility: A Feminist Perspective,” 145.

⁴⁰¹ Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*, 62.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ See for example Exline, “Taming the Wild Ego: The Challenge of Humility,” 57-58.

be understood as focusing not only on the development of interpersonal relationships, but on relationship with God, as well as with the entire natural world. Perspectives from the Benedictine tradition, is it also important to note, do in fact resonate more with some other psychological definitions, including the one offered by Wright and colleagues that includes both an “epistemological” recognition of, and an “ethical” responsiveness to, one’s relationships with the whole cosmos, and/or a transcendent God.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, Benedictine spirituality can also serve as a distinctive resource for provoking a stronger consideration of the ecological dimensions of the virtue in psychological perspectives as well, especially given the need for greater attention to the human-nature relationship in many areas of human development and society.

Humility’s Embeddedness Within a Wider Value System

Another element of the Benedictine outlook on humility that can be of potential relevance to psychological reflection is the way in which humility within Benedictine spirituality clearly functions as part of a much wider value system and worldview. Chapter two above addressed explicitly and in detail how Benedict’s teachings on humility are connected to the foundational tenets of his spirituality. Seen in this broader perspective, the different practices associated with humility, covered in the different steps of Benedict’s ladder, are oriented towards a particular end, a *telos* representing an ideal state of human existence. All of the practices associated with humility, those having to do with body, mind, and soul, those developed interiorly and expressed outwardly, all have a

⁴⁰⁴ Wright et al., “The Psychological Significance of Humility,” 4-5.

place within the ambit of a much broader worldview, an overarching perspective on reality and human life grounded in Christian commitment.

Such an understanding of humility can suggest the need for clarifying how psychological visions of humility operate and are sculpted within the ambit of broader visions of human life and its ideal state or line of development. One example that can be taken from the psychology literature regarding this notion is the way in which humility has been treated by researchers who are grounded in the relational spirituality model, and who thus view humility from the perspective of its potential to enable persons to develop towards the *telos* of this model of human and spiritual development, which is a state of spiritual maturity (see chapter three for a discussion of this). In keeping with the example of the relational spirituality model, it was seen in chapter three how researchers from this theoretical vantage point have even come to define humility as equivalent in many respects with a state of mature relational spirituality, or as “the developmental capacity for differentiated self-other relating.”⁴⁰⁵ In general, through paying attention to the contextual nature of conceptions of humility, psychologists can develop more explicit theory around how core anthropological and ontological assumptions relate to the multiple ways in which humility is defined and operationalized within the discipline.

Engaging Interfaith Perspectives on Humility

The Benedictine spirituality of humility can also potentially inform psychological engagements with diverse religious, philosophical and spiritual perspectives on the virtue. As seen in chapter two, the Benedictine literature contains studies of humility written by

⁴⁰⁵ Jankowski and Sandage, "Attachment to God and Humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models," 78.

Christian writers, who engage with other traditions in order clarify and potentially highlight new or previously underrepresented understandings of humility within Christian contexts. This approach, which is most akin to the methods of the relatively new field of comparative theology, has yielded some interesting results in comparative work with Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, and Confucian traditions.⁴⁰⁶

Currently, there is some evidence of an interest in inter- and multi-faith perspectives on humility within the field of psychology. Two conceptual pieces authored by Paine and colleagues probed different religious traditions for insights into the nature of humility and how these diverse meanings might compare and resonate with one other.⁴⁰⁷ Similar psychology-based projects in the future could also make use of studies within the Benedictine literature for contributing a thick description of multiple religious perspectives on the virtue. In addition, psychological researchers could potentially take inspiration from monastic researchers for engaging in a more in-depth way with primary texts from different religious traditions, an approach which doesn't yet appear to be taken up in the multi-faith explorations of humility completed by psychologists to date. Tapping into scriptural texts and spiritual classics from multiple traditions can add richness and depth to religious meanings that are perhaps less available in secondary analyses. Teams of scholars from the disciplines of psychology and religious studies and

⁴⁰⁶ See Corcoran, "Benedictine Humility and Confucian 'Sincerity,'" and de Dreuille, "A Commentary in Light of World Ascetic Traditions." For more on comparative theological methods, see Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

⁴⁰⁷ See Paine et al., "Humility as a Psychotherapeutic Virtue: Spiritual, Philosophical, and Psychological Foundations"; Paine et al., "Cultural and Racial Perspectives on Positive Psychologies of Humility."

theology may be especially capable of engaging effectively in these kinds of interdisciplinary endeavors.

Section 2. Humility Interventions in Spiritually-Integrative Psychology in Light of Benedictine Spirituality

This second section moves from treating conceptual matters concerning the nature and definition of humility as a virtue, to consider how the Benedictine spirituality of humility might serve as a religious resource for psychotherapeutic interventions. In what follows, I first offer a review of perspectives from within psychology on the use of humility in psychotherapy. I then turn to consider a set of possibilities for how the Benedictine spirituality of humility could potentially contribute resources for fostering humility within spiritually-integrative psychological interventions.

Perspectives on Humility Interventions in Psychology

A review of the psychological literature shows that there is a growing collection of empirical intervention and review studies concerning the use of the virtues, including forgiveness, gratitude, and others, within psychotherapeutic interventions.⁴⁰⁸ However, only a small number of these empirical studies to date have focused on humility. Among these, Lavelock and colleagues found that completing a 7.5 hour humility workbook (which they refer to as the “PROVE” method) led to increased humility over time, along

⁴⁰⁸ See for example, Don E. Davis et al., "Thankful for the Little Things: A Meta-Analysis of Gratitude Interventions," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 63, no. 1 (2016): 20-31; Nathaniel G. Wade et al., "Efficacy of Psychotherapeutic Interventions to Promote Forgiveness: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 82, no. 1 (2014): 154-70.

with increased forgiveness and patience, and decreased general negativity.⁴⁰⁹ Lavelock and another group of researchers again found that completing a revised version of the same workbook lead to the development of higher levels of humility, as well as reductions in negative affect.⁴¹⁰ More recently, Cuthbert and others explored the potential effects of a 16-exercise positive psychology workbook for developing humility within a sample of religious leaders, but found no significant effect for the intervention on participants' levels of life satisfaction, or spiritual or intellectual humility.⁴¹¹ Limitations of the studies in this small collection include the brief nature of the interventions conducted, along with the use of undergraduate student samples in two of the three studies.

While empirical research into the potential dynamics and benefits of humility in psychotherapy is minimal at this point and not without its limitations, some authors have begun expanding conceptual arguments around the potential ways in which the virtue, as it is understood within the field of psychology, may play an important role in clinical interventions. Paine and colleagues make the important and overarching point that, given humility's positive association with a range of indices of psychological and relational health (many of which were reviewed in chapter three of this dissertation), there would

⁴⁰⁹ Caroline Lavelock et al., "The Quiet Virtue Speaks: An Intervention to Promote Humility," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 42, no. 1 (2014): 99.

⁴¹⁰ Caroline Lavelock et al., "Still Waters Run Deep: Humility as a Master Virtue," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 45, no. 4 (2017): 286.

⁴¹¹ Andrew D. Cuthbert et al., "Cultivating Humility in Religious Leaders: The Effectiveness of a Spiritually Integrated Positive Psychology Intervention," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 5, no. 4 (2018): 227.

seem to be strong grounds to argue for the relevance of humility to psychotherapy and other types of mental health interventions.⁴¹² Sandage and colleagues have attempted to draw attention to humility's therapeutic potential by describing it both as a balanced and accurate assessment of oneself, as well as the capacity to mentalize (or, to maintain an open and aware state toward both self and others).⁴¹³ Worthington and Sandage have also referred to humility's potential to serve as an important factor in coming to terms with one's own limitations and weaknesses, which can have important implications within psychotherapeutic processes of change and growth.⁴¹⁴ Rowden and others have also asserted, based on the views of a group of psychological experts they surveyed, that humility may play a role in facilitating relational therapy by supporting clients in being open, in attending to self and others with honesty, dignity, and respect, in inviting responsibility, and in practicing benevolence.⁴¹⁵ Some psychologists have also noted that humility's rather strong religious and value-laden associations are likely to make it especially amenable to applications in spiritually integrative interventions with clients.⁴¹⁶

Psychological authors have also framed humility as having important potential benefits for clinicians as well. Paine and colleagues provide one focused perspective on

⁴¹² Paine et al., "Humility as a Psychotherapeutic Virtue: Spiritual, Philosophical, and Psychological Foundations," 4.

⁴¹³ Everett L. Worthington and Steven J. Sandage, *Forgiveness and Spirituality in Psychotherapy: A Relational Approach* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016), 303.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴¹⁵ Trampas J. Rowden, Steven M. Harris, and Katharine Wickel, "Understanding Humility and Its Role in Relational Therapy," *Contemporary Family Therapy* 36, no. 3 (2014): 388.

⁴¹⁶ Paine et al., "Humility as a Psychotherapeutic Virtue: Spiritual, Philosophical, and Psychological Foundations," 4.

this, describing how humility can potentially support clinicians' practice in the areas of multicultural competence, constructing therapeutic alliances, incorporating client feedback, seeking out professional consultation, and gaining facility in working within collaborative care contexts with other healthcare disciplines.⁴¹⁷

Altogether, the conceptual arguments reviewed here offer some perspectives on how humility, as it is understood within the discipline of psychology, can potentially contribute in a number of ways to positive psychological and relational outcomes when applied in psychotherapeutic interventions. Future clinical research could help generate empirical validation of such perspectives, thus lending further support around humility's capacities and usefulness in promoting good mental health.

Imports of Benedictine Humility for Spiritually-Integrative Psychotherapy

In this final section of the chapter, I would like to consider how the Benedictine spirituality of humility, as it has been explored in this dissertation, contains potential resources for incorporation into spiritually-integrative forms of psychological interventions for fostering humility in clients. This effort falls into line with the perspectives of some psychologists, including Rye and colleagues, who have argued for the relevance and benefit of incorporating religious and spiritual meanings of virtues within psychological interventions with religious clients.⁴¹⁸ Drawing upon the Benedictine tradition likely makes these resources best suited either to Catholic Christians clients, or to those who may have some interest in or commitment to Christian

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 13-20.

⁴¹⁸ Rye et al., "The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Positive Psychology Interventions."

monastic practices or spirituality even if they do not formally belong to any particular religious tradition. Underlying the following is my view that humility does change and grow through a variety of factors that can be found among several different approaches to therapy, including but not limited to modes of cognitive reflection on the virtues, new relational experiences with others – including one’s counselor – as well as with the Sacred, and the development of intra-psychic self-regulatory capacities including mindfulness and mentalization (an awareness of the thoughts and feelings of self and others). The following commentary, in other words, is not limited to one particular method or perspective on psychotherapy, nor regarding ways of promoting virtues like humility within clinical contexts.

The first area in which Benedictine spirituality could potentially inform spiritually-integrative psychological interventions for promoting humility is around the theological perspectives and definitions of the virtue that the tradition provides. A connection can be drawn here to Lavelock and colleagues’ positive psychology workbook on humility, which takes participants through a number of exercises that give them an opportunity to reflect on the meanings of humility, which also primes participants for engaging in humility-related practices later on in the program.⁴¹⁹ Within the context of a spiritually-integrative intervention, theological definitions and examples of humility can be included in this type of reflective practice as a way of priming and orienting clients to religious as well as psychological meanings of the virtue. It may also

⁴¹⁹ Caroline R. Lavelock, Everett L. Worthington, and Don E. Davis, *The Path to Humility: Six Practical Sections for Becoming a More Humble Person* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014), 14.

be particularly effective from a psychoeducational perspective for participants to learn about religious definitions of the virtue that show some alignment with psychological meanings as well. To take one example of a definition provided by the Benedictine Chittister:

Humility, in the Rule of Benedict, is not subservience. It is openness to the totality of life, both within the soul and within the human community. From a Benedictine perspective, humility does not diminish a person; it provides a basis for realistic evaluation for accepting who and what I am, for being willing to grow beyond my demanding self, and so for allowing other people to be who and what they are. This kind of humility requires a new kind of self-acceptance.⁴²⁰

This perspective on humility would resonate with psychological definitions, including for instance the capacity to acknowledge and accept oneself.

A caveat is also necessary to add however, particularly due to the potential for certain writings within the Benedictine tradition – including portions of the *Rule* itself – to be interpreted in a way that could serve to promote shame or self-abasement, a danger discussed in more detail above in chapter four. There is also the potential, referencing some of the critical feminist perspectives on humility from within the Benedictine literature, for interpretations of humility to lead to the subjugation of women and other socially oppressed groups of people, in ways that limit their vocational potential, personal development, and political and institutional agency. For this reason, it is especially important to recommend that therapists in general practice discernment in selecting religious texts to incorporate, as well as utilize a well-enough informed hermeneutic for dealing with these potentially problematic areas of different traditions. Here in particular, the material presented in the second section of chapter four of this dissertation containing

⁴²⁰ Chittister, “Pride and Humility: A New Self-Acceptance,” 28.

the analysis of Benedictine spirituality based on a relational spirituality perspective can be especially valuable as a resource for therapists toward understanding both resources as well as potential pitfalls within the Benedictine spirituality of humility in relation to healthy human development as understood by psychological science. Attention to the dynamics of attachment, differentiation of self, healthy ego development, and intercultural competence and social justice commitment were discussed as the primary frames of reference with which to grapple with some key understandings and practices of humility in Benedictine spirituality.

Another aspect of the Benedictine spirituality of humility that can potentially lend itself to applications in spiritually-integrative psychotherapy is what Kardong has called “the mindfulness of the monk,” centering on the material contained in the first step of Benedict’s ladder of humility regarding the fear of God.⁴²¹ As discussed in the second chapter, this attitude implies both an open awareness towards God as well as towards oneself. In a more implicit sense, mindfulness is also extended to other persons in Benedict’s teaching on humility as well, seen especially in connections that commentators have drawn between chapters 7 and 72, the latter of which focuses on awareness of and concern for the well-being of others in the community. In this way, Benedictine humility ties together a sense of mindfulness towards God, self, and others, an inclusive form of Christian awareness and subjectivity that can also be understood as a foundation for charitable action.

⁴²¹ Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule*, 140.

Along with their inherent theological significance, these mindfulness-related aspects of humility from the Benedictine tradition also have the potential to cohere with psychological aspects of the virtue as well. The proposal made by Sandage and colleagues, which is particularly geared towards clinical applications, of humility including both realistic self-acceptance and awareness (which could be thought of as a form of intrapersonal mindfulness) as well as a capacity for relational mindfulness, corresponds with the Benedictine form of mindfulness that is associated with humility.⁴²² A further spiritually-integrative connection can also be made between Benedictine monastic mindfulness and the aspect of humility defined by Tangney as self-awareness, including of one's limitations, vis-à-vis a higher power. These correspondences between spiritual and psychological definitions of the virtue are significant in offering ways of incorporating interdisciplinary understandings of humility into clinical work with clients, where both theological and psychological definitions are likely to have relevance to clients' lives and worldviews. The development of humility through increases in mindful, realistic self-acceptance could be particularly important as a resource for clients who struggle with shame (as an affective state of self-rejection; see chapter four for a fuller account), whereas growth in humble, realistic acceptance of others could also be a potential resource for clients who struggle with accepting others due to an insecure attachment history, low levels of self differentiation, or due to deficits in intercultural development.

⁴²² Steven J. Sandage et al., "Humility in Psychotherapy," in *Handbook of Humility: Theory, Research, and Applications*, ed. Everett L. Worthington (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2017), 303.

Another aspect of Benedictine humility which could potentially be incorporated into spiritually-integrative psychotherapeutic interventions is the step of humility concerned with the process of generating self-knowledge and growth in self-awareness, which as seen at previous points in this dissertation includes a sense of becoming more conscious of one's limitations (framed in some monastic sources in the language of sin). In a way, Benedictine monastic spirituality can be seen as guiding persons towards seeking solace and support from God in the midst of this process, which as discussed in chapter four could also be taken within the context of the relational spirituality model as a practice of healthy attachment-based coping. God, in this case, can be interpreted as an attachment figure who a person reaches out to in order to gain a felt sense of security. As was also discussed in the previous chapter, it is important from the perspective of psychology to consider the dynamics of shame and dependency within a person's engagement in this type of spiritual practice, including whether a preoccupied attachment- or vulnerable narcissistic-based relational style might become activated, that could then potentially impede a client's ability to stay regulated during this type of self-examination.

Another potential resource from the Benedictine spirituality of humility is the emphasis it clearly puts upon the importance of helping relationships as a key factor for growing in humility. This is accentuated perhaps most clearly in step five of Benedict's seventh chapter in the *Rule*, which centers on the manifestation of one's thoughts to a spiritual elder or abbot. Showing that humility can grow through processes of mutual discernment, this aspect of Benedict's teaching can also resonate with the growing

number of psychotherapists who advocate that humility can develop within and through the clinical relationship. This aspect of monastic humility also resonates with the way in which psychological researcher Moore has defined humility, referring to it both as an awareness of one's personal limitations, along with a willingness to get needed help.⁴²³ Sandage and colleagues note that the latter dimension of Moore's definition connects also "with a clinically relevant client attitude of openness to receiving input and support from outside oneself."⁴²⁴ Benedictine teaching on humility would seem to echo this point, which could be a useful perspective for clients to consider within the context of their engagement in psychotherapy or other types of clinical interventions.

Benedictine spirituality can also contribute an emphasis upon the integration of inner formation and outward behavior in conceptualizing humility, shown especially in step eleven of the *Rule's* chapter 7 concerning the virtue. As seen in the second chapter of this dissertation, Benedict advances the view that humility is not only a matter of the transformation of the mind and heart, but also that the virtue must be revealed in all aspects of a person's life, including perhaps most especially in their relationships with others (cf. RB 7.62-66). It is also apparent in the preface to Benedict's chapter on humility, which presents the vision of body and soul (cf. RB 7.9) as forming the two sides of the ladder of humility, that underlying Benedict's thought is what Kardong refers to as a deeply incarnational perspective on the virtue.⁴²⁵ This kind of holistic vision of

⁴²³ Moore, *Facing the Dragon: Confronting Personal and Spiritual Grandiosity*, 72.

⁴²⁴ Sandage et al., "Humility in Psychotherapy," 302.

⁴²⁵ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 138.

humility and its transformative effects may also be valuable in spiritually-integrative psychology, for instance by potentially opening clients' perceptions to the integral nature of the virtues and their potential meaning in a variety of areas of life.

Finally, as more a general point, it may also be valuable to consider how Benedictine spirituality can offer a particular, spirituality-based conception of a transformational crucible, which can also be used to help frame the process of growth in humility through spiritually-integrative psychotherapy.⁴²⁶ As described in chapter three, crucibles are an essential part of the relational spirituality model's theory of change, representing the transformative contexts or vessels which contain processes of seeking and growth towards new ways of relating with the Sacred, with oneself, and with others. It could be argued that Benedictine spirituality embraces a similar concept of a resilient "container" within which change and development occur. At the very beginning of the *Rule*, for example, Benedict uses biblical imagery of the crucible to point out the faults of the sarabites, or those monks with "no rule to try them *as gold is tried in a furnace* (Prov. 27.21)" (RB 1.6). Benedict endorses rather the life of the cenobites, to whom his *Rule* is addressed, as a way of seeking God under the authority of a rule and an abbot (cf. RB 1.2). The cenobitic life, a life lived in spiritual community, takes on the nature of a crucible for Benedict.

Following this, in the Prologue of the *Rule* especially, Benedict lays out dimensions of the call to monastic life that also correspond in some interesting ways with

⁴²⁶ For more on this conceptual resonance between the relational spirituality model and Benedictine spirituality, see Tomlinson, "A Relational Human Development Perspective on Benedictine Spirituality."

the crucible model of spiritual transformation proposed by Shults and Sandage. One of these correspondences lies in the prominence that Benedict gives to seeking and questing in framing the spiritual life within the cenobium. For those who wish to join the monastery, one of Benedict's chief concerns is "whether the novice truly seeks God" (RB 58.4). Also like the relational spirituality model's description of the initial stages of seeking as a period of intensification, Benedict recognizes that the beginning of the spiritual journey may feel like a challenge, as if God had roused someone from sleep (RB Prol. 8). This certainly can apply to growth in humility as well, which may include a jarring and challenging process of growth in self-understanding along with learning to relate with others in new ways. Benedict's framing of a crucible-based path of spiritual development may also apply more broadly to persons who are contemplating their own lives and journeys within the context of spiritually-integrative psychotherapeutic interventions. This image could potentially inspire reflection on the nature of communal relationships, whether these include a person's family, workplace, or religious community, as the transformational context within which humility can grow, albeit through an at-times pressure-filled and challenging process. Relatedly, the Benedictine vow of stability can also be viewed from the perspective of a crucible-based form of spiritual transformation as a commitment to remaining in a challenging system of growth. As Kardong notes, the vow of stability anchors a person within a community that is oriented towards the development of mutual relationships and a common quest for wholeness.⁴²⁷ Obviously, discretion on the part of therapists will be needed in order to

⁴²⁷ Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 24.

determine whether or not clients are involved in relational crucibles that truly have this potential to nurture or challenge clients towards personal growth and the development of humility, versus abusive relationships (for instance, in a situation of domestic abuse) where stability would not support a client's well-being.

A few more general considerations are also pertinent to touch on, as a way of concluding this section. For one, the practices for spiritually-integrative approaches in psychotherapy will still on a practical level have to be thought through with regards to several considerations in order to be applied within particular clinical contexts and to fit the more common demands of therapeutic work. These include an awareness of such things as the state of a client's readiness for change and the necessary wisdom to gauge the timing of clinical interventions in relation to this, a keen sense of the evolving nature of clients' goals, and a strong understanding of clinical modalities and how spiritually-integrative work can be done within particular approaches to counseling or psychotherapy.

Additionally, it is useful as well to take stock of some contextual factors that can perhaps make the kind of integration between spirituality and psychological interventions that has been highlighted in this latter half of the chapter challenging to fulfill in psychotherapeutic practice. On a broad level, it must be admitted that for the most part, mental healthcare as practiced in the United States largely operates within a secular context, which can functionally lead to the adoption of more generalized, or "etic" level perspectives on religion and spirituality being adopted in counseling.⁴²⁸ This can be

readily contrasted with religious settings, which, like in Benedictine-inspired communities of spiritual practice, would have a much more specific or “emic” approach to nurturing certain understandings and practices related to religious faith. While a number of initiatives by researchers and practitioners of psychotherapy are devoting significant energies to developing spiritually-integrative forms of mental healthcare that are oriented toward fostering more holistic forms of wellness and flourishing, it is also likely the case that substantial support in the form of initial and ongoing training and education on the specificity of spiritual traditions will be necessary to form mental health practitioners who are able to engage in a substantive way with different spiritual traditions in psychological interventions. Given the immense variety of different traditions and sub-traditions, it may also be the case that a certain degree of specialization within certain spiritually-integrative approaches, including Benedictine-inspired approaches, might be the most effective avenue for promoting this form of counseling or therapy.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed several ways in which Benedictine spirituality is capable of contributing to the psychology of humility. Conceptually, Benedict’s treatment

⁴²⁸ Kenneth I. Pargament, Nichole A. Murray-Swank, and Nalini Tarakeshwar, "An Empirically-based Rationale for a Spiritually-integrated Psychotherapy," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 8, no. 3 (2005): 155.

of humility can interact with a number of important conceptual questions regarding the nature and scope of humility as a virtue in psychology. On a practical level as well, the Benedictine spiritual tradition can offer multiple resources for spiritually-integrative approaches to psychotherapy. These practices may be particularly relevant and useful for clients who identify as Catholic Christians, or who have some affinity with monastic spiritual practices.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Overview

In this concluding chapter I highlight what I take to be the most significant outcomes of my dissertation's interdisciplinary engagement between Benedictine spirituality and modern psychology around the topic humility. First, I consider the interdisciplinary methods that guided my work, and aspects of the research process that seem to be especially important to efforts at integrating spirituality and psychology from a methodological perspective. I then set out to address some important conceptual questions that future work in the dialogue between Benedictine spirituality and psychology can address concerning humility. Finally, I offer some concluding general recommendations based on the findings of this project for practical applications in the arenas of spiritual formation as well as psychotherapy.

Reflections on Interdisciplinary Methodology in Spirituality and Psychology

One of the most important areas of concluding reflections from this project should concern the several disciplinary considerations introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation. In particular, I aim to revisit here a number of the conceptual and methodological themes raised in that chapter from the three contributing academic disciplines to this project – including practical theology, spirituality studies, and the

psychology of spirituality and religion – in order to both describe the proceedings of my project in light of these disciplines, as well as to assess for any potential contributions along with ongoing questions that my project can make to these academic fields.

To revisit first a key conceptual question within the discipline of spirituality studies, the question concerning the meaning of spirituality itself became quite important to the material treated in this project as a whole. To review some of the most significant contours of this academic discussion from chapter one, Sandra Schneiders – one of the more prominent voices within the nascent discipline of spirituality studies to date – has offered a rather expansive definition of spirituality, as “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”⁴²⁹ As also discussed in the introduction, Schneiders privileges a strongly experiential focus in defining spirituality, one which does not necessarily include a distinctive theological, or even Christian, component. This can be seen in contrast to J. Matthew Ashley, who describes spirituality with a two-part definition: first, as a constellation of practices that orient a person toward the experience of conversion into the life of Christ by the power of the Spirit; and second, as the systems of expression, language and symbols that communicate regarding spiritual practice and experience.⁴³⁰ This two-part definition obviously varies from Schneiders’, by including both an expressly Christian emphasis, along with systems of reflection – which according

⁴²⁹ Schneiders, “The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline,” 5-6.

⁴³⁰ Ashley, “The Turn to Spirituality? The Relationship Between Theology and Spirituality,” 160-163.

to Ashley are functionally equivalent to theology – upon the practices that systems of spirituality contain and promote. My research certainly struck an important affinity with this latter school of thought especially in relation to the Benedictine spirituality of humility, since it was not only the practices of humility, such as the fear of God, obedience, and the manifestation of thoughts, but also the overall theological ambit of the *Rule* itself, which was integral to my analysis and especially in drawing out themes and concepts that could be engaged with the field of psychology. An example of this includes Benedict’s soteriology, which was discussed at several points in the analysis above as containing a distinctly relational approach to understanding salvation, both as communion with God along with the flourishing of relationships within a community of practice. By way of ecological approaches to understanding humility explored as well in chapter two, this relational context was even expanded out to include other species, and the whole of creation itself. Clearly, I believe, this project demonstrates the power and significance of a combined perspective on spirituality that takes into account practices, as well as theological systems of reflection on practice and belief that are integral to traditions of spirituality as a whole. This reflection may be meaningful for future interdisciplinary projects involving both spirituality and psychology.

Another important conceptual matter to reflect on that was quite important for this project was from the discipline of the psychology of spirituality and religion, concerning the methodological approaches that psychology takes to engaging with spiritual and religious phenomena. To review from the introductory chapter, the psychologist Ralph Hood has formulated a typology of psychological approaches to religious and spiritual

traditions, which Hood describes as varying depending on the ontological assumptions that are made by researchers. On the one hand, psychological researchers operating out of a “methodological atheism” approach would assert, even if only in an implicit way, that matters pertaining to beliefs regarding or practices of relating to the Sacred are not actually valid phenomena affecting human life, and thus only need be interpreted through psychological categories.⁴³¹ Researchers operating from a “methodological agnostic” perspective, on the other hand allow at least for the plausible validity of religious beliefs and practices pertaining to the Sacred or transcendent, and thus engage the study of these phenomena as aspects of human life on their own terms.⁴³² What is clear I believe from the scope of my dissertation work, for interdisciplinary projects that especially seek to uphold the integrity of spiritual and religious traditions as my project did, is that psychological theories and resources based on a methodologically agnostic stance are of distinctive value. This I believe was demonstrated in particular through my use of the relational spirituality model in my critical correlation work with the Benedictine spirituality of humility, which offers a strong theoretical framework on human development that can also engage with traditions and practices of religion and spirituality on their own terms. I do believe that this is another significant take-away that can inform future interdisciplinary projects incorporating psychology as well as the fields of spirituality and religion.

⁴³¹ Hood, “Methodological Diversity in The Psychology of Religion and Spirituality,” 80.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 79.

To turn to consider what is perhaps the most significant methodological concept that guided my dissertation work, this project was shaped by the method of mutually critical correlation, where two fields of knowledge – both allotted a standard of intellectual credibility – are allowed to be put into dialogue with and influence each other. This approach to research, as discussed previously, has been most widely and explicitly engaged with and reflected upon within the field of practical theology, although some brief mentions of the mutually critical approach can also be found within both spirituality studies and the psychology of religion and spirituality. Based on work in the field of religious hermeneutics by David Tracy, practical theologian Donald Browning offered a succinct definition of the mutually critical approach as “mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of Christian faith with the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation.”⁴³³ As I also discussed in the introduction, for this project I adapted Tracy and Browning’s method by setting up a correlation between the Benedictine spirituality of humility, and psychological research concerning humility and healthy human development. Mapping this onto the structure of my dissertation, part one reviewed both fields, while the two chapters contained in the second part engaged in the critical correlation process. The two chapters constituting the second part of this dissertation both I believe demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach to interdisciplinary engagement, opening new areas of reflection within the fields of spirituality and psychology around the nature and potential applications of

⁴³³ Browning, “Toward a Fundamental and Strategic Practical Theology,” 59.

humility. Thus I believe my work shows the prospective usefulness of the mutually critical approach for future interdisciplinary engagements between spirituality, theology and psychology, which indeed could be relevant not only for the discipline of practical theology, but related projects within spirituality studies and the psychology of religion and spirituality as well.

Closely bound up with the mutually critical correlation approach for all three disciplines concerned here is also the question of normativity. To begin again with some review from the introductory chapter, particularly within the academic discipline of practical theology, there are two perspectives which run counter to the fundamental tenet of the mutually critical correlation approach, which affords a standard of normativity to resources from both theological traditions as well as the social sciences. On the one hand, there are the so-called “confessional” practical theologians such as Swinton and Mowat,⁴³⁴ who argue that greater normative weight should be given to theological traditions over the social sciences in practical theological analyses. On the other, there are those who could be considered more “skeptical” practical theologians, including for instance Tom Beaudoin⁴³⁵ who is highly critical of theological normativity owing in part to the potential for historical theological traditions to exclude the experience of minoritized communities. In my own work throughout this project however, a share of epistemological validity afforded to both theological and social scientific perspectives, allowing each field to become open to questioning, critique and influence by the other,

⁴³⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 83-91.

⁴³⁵ Beaudoin, “Postmodern Practical Theology,” 196.

was indeed a key, central factor in enabling the results of this project to come about. As I also argued for in my introductory chapter on methods, either of the other positions espoused by the researchers Swinton and Mowat or Beaudoin would have ended up primarily analyzing one source from the perspective of another, thus preventing a mutualistic, dialogical engagement of critique and construction between the two fields of knowledge from occurring. At the same time, as I also discussed in my introduction, I attempted at several points to document some of the important social dynamics of humility especially vis-à-vis aspects of oppression and privilege, thus also taking to heart some of the critical priorities that are espoused by researchers such as Beaudoin. Considering future work, I do believe overall that for interdisciplinary projects intent on formulating constructive and critical contributions for both disciplines involved, a more balanced, mutualistic weighting of normativity afforded to both disciplines or fields of knowledge is certainly an important methodological take-away.

Some further dynamics concerning normativity in the mutually critical correlation approach can be taken account of, having especially to do with whether projects following this particular method are undertaken by either an individual researcher or a group. To look first at the context of a team of multiple researchers from different fields, on the one hand, scholars of Benedictine spirituality might well feel that their 1500-year old, theologically-steeped tradition simply isn't able to effectively dialogue with the presuppositions of modern secular social science regarding the human person. Likewise, scientific researchers from psychology may not be willing to grant Benedictine spirituality any serious legitimacy given its lack of empirically-backed findings. Such

attitudes and approaches to interdisciplinary research, where the balance of normativity is weighted more strongly towards either one or the other field, are only examples of the kinds of impasses that could potentially inhibit an effective application of the mutually critical correlation method amongst teams of researchers from multiple disciplines.

For overcoming these types of limitations, it is also useful to consider some resources that researchers could potentially draw upon from their respective fields and traditions. For the field of psychology, one such resource that was explored in chapter three of this dissertation is intellectual humility, a subdomain of humility that is associated with both an awareness of the strengths and limitations of one's own intellectual positions, as well as an openness to learning from the positions of others. Intellectual humility doesn't appear to have been considered yet for its potential applications in interdisciplinary research, but given its multifaceted meaning it would certainly seem to align well with the needs for self-awareness and a certain degree of "teachability" when engaging with other fields of knowledge. On the side of Benedictine spirituality, there are also the "interdisciplinary virtues" that are deeply engrained within this tradition, which were discussed in chapter four above. These include hospitality, a spirit of openness and welcome towards the other that is a definite part of the enduring charism of the Benedictine monastic tradition. There are also the *Rule's* other central spiritual virtues, including silence, and obedience, which as detailed more in chapter two of this dissertation can all have strong meaning around a spirit of openness to the other, including in the fundamental sense of listening "with the ear of your heart" (RB 1.1). These virtues can in general be interpreted with useful implications for work across

disciplinary boundaries, encouraging Benedictine scholars to engage with disciplines that are beyond their communities of knowledge and practice.

Concerning the situation of an independent researcher – which of course applies more directly to the particular context of this current project - another major methodological consideration to bring up from this project concerning the mutually critical correlation approach involves the values or criteria used to evaluate as well as guide the development of novel forms of spiritual and psychological practice. As was discussed in the introductory chapter, these criteria can take on the quality of researcher “loyalties,” a word which, in reflecting on my work in this project, is certainly fitting.⁴³⁶ From my own involvement in this project, it seems patently obvious that my own loyalties and values (discussed in the introduction as well) – particularly in terms of a commitment to the integrity of the Benedictine spiritual tradition, along with the prioritizing of healthy human developmental dynamics as described by the field of psychology – were integral to my analysis throughout this project. Furthermore, in looking back on my work on this project, it is also clear to me just how much these values and criteria that guided my work played a strong role in my selection of resources from both Benedictine spirituality as well as psychology that I subsequently focused on within my analysis. My use of and focus on the relational spirituality model from within the field of psychology is one instance of this, since, as discussed above, this theoretical orientation allowed for both a critical conversation with the Benedictine spirituality of humility, while also still engaging with the phenomenon of spiritual practices and their

⁴³⁶ Doehring, “A Method of Feminist Pastoral Theology,” 98.

associated theologies. Likewise, it should also be clear how I privileged throughout this dissertation a number of contemporary commentaries on Benedictine spirituality, which provided interpretations rooted in orientations including feminist, ecological, and interfaith perspectives. These methods within the Benedictine tradition also furnished possibilities for correlating the Benedictine spirituality of humility with several principles of healthy human development as understood within the field of psychology. It is certainly possible to imagine how other values or criteria, when applied to the same material I worked with, could lead to very different results, for instance if either of the loyalties I espoused were not adopted. I believe this point concerning individual researcher reflexivity and transparency thus becomes an extremely important methodological consideration to emphasize here too, not only in terms of the influence these values have on research, but also in terms of offering consumers of research the opportunity to see and grasp more clearly into how certain important premises shape and influence the proceedings and results of a project.

Questions for Future Interdisciplinary Research on Humility

This project attempted to provide contributions to the understandings of humility in two different fields where the virtue has been vigorously studied. For Benedictine monastic spirituality, this project advances interdisciplinary perspectives on humility in conversation with psychology which, as noted in the introductory chapter, have largely been absent in the scholarly literature since the work of the psychologist-priest Antoine

Vergote in the 1980's, and a few subsequent theological responses made to his paper.⁴³⁷

Likewise, this project has also attempted to engage both constructively and critically with the field of psychology and its nascent yet rapidly expanding body of literature on the virtue of humility, which includes studies exploring humility in interdisciplinary perspective with religion and spirituality, along with research on humility-related psychological interventions. In this concluding chapter, in addition to important methodological concerns that were discussed above, findings from this project also raise significant questions pertaining to the virtue of humility that future interdisciplinary work involving Benedictine and psychological perspectives can seek to address.

For the field of psychology in particular, perhaps the biggest and most interesting question that came up in this dissertation's analysis regards whether humility should properly be considered a virtue of temperance, that is, as a virtue of avoiding or "tempering" extremes in behavior, or whether humility might indicate something beyond or other than this type of classification. Qualities including having an accurate and realistic assessment of oneself, as well as an openness and proper degree of concern for the well-being of others, could be seen as aligning with the quality of temperance, that is by avoiding such excesses as an overly self-important or grandiose perspective on oneself, or the need to dominate others. There are also a number of alternative psychological definitions of humility that appear to transcend a sole focus on temperance, including for instance the ability to perceive oneself as part of a much greater whole, whether that be the cosmos or through one's connection to the Sacred. Such alternative

⁴³⁷ Vergote, "A Psychological Approach to Humility in the Rule of St. Benedict."

definitions are provided by the Benedictine spiritual tradition as well, for instance in theological assertions around the virtue of humility as a quality that brings one into deeper identification with the person of Jesus. These alternative understandings suggest humility can also be understood more along the lines of a person's perception of and engagement with her or his relational selfhood, giving humility in some ways a rich anthropological and ontological resonance with themes concerning human nature and relationships with other persons, with creation, as well as with the Sacred. Ultimately, it seems apparent that more work is needed within the field of psychology around clarifying the nature and classification of humility, and how humility's different dimensions such as temperance and relational selfhood might interrelate with one another. The analysis in this dissertation of Benedictine spirituality also showed how humility is associated with other virtues, including mindfulness, charity, silence, and obedience; more work within psychology towards building an understanding of humility's connections to other virtues would also seem like a worthy area of future study especially within the field of positive psychology. Such lines of inquiry could be developed through further interdisciplinary engagements with religious or spiritual traditions as far as they are helpful in suggesting new ways of conceptualizing and clarifying the nature of humility.

For the field of Benedictine spirituality and its treatment of humility, there is also a clear need for further reflection on the psychological and developmental dynamics of the virtue. Regarding areas of future study, this dissertation draws attention especially to the apparent need for increased reflection regarding the cultural dimensions of Benedictine humility, for which some potential starting places were offered above. In

particular, attention was drawn towards the end of chapter four to the potential for the development of a socially-engaged understanding of humility based on the examples of specific Benedictine communities. Pertinent to research methods, attention to community contexts and endemic practices therein has certainly been an important aspect of research methods in the discipline of practical theology, for instance in the methodological schema of Don Browning who believes practical theological research should both begin and end with attention to lived community contexts and practices.⁴³⁸ Possibilities for further research on humility based on communities of practice can be both informed by practical theological methods, as well as inform methodological perspectives within disciplines such as spirituality studies, which traditionally has shown less interest as a field when it comes to the empirical study of religious practices in living community contexts.

In addition, the psychological capacity for emotional self-regulation and its association with several key dimensions of humility – a topic also treated extensively in the second part of this dissertation – would also certainly seem to be deserving of further reflection within monastic research as well. Furthermore, it may also be possible to envision some potential empirical projects, which could even enlist the help of social scientific disciplines such as psychology, to test whether certain practices within the Benedictine spirituality of humility – such as the fear or mindfulness of God, or the manifestation of thoughts to a spiritual elder or accompanist - do in fact lead to increased levels humility. Engaging in such work would necessitate some initial conceptual

⁴³⁸ See for example Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*.

groundwork being laid, especially in terms of developing a measure of humility based on Benedictine spirituality, that could also be utilized in order to assess for the virtue within empirical research projects. Such research could certainly open up fresh avenues for expanding on understandings of the Benedictine spirituality of humility, as well as evaluating its impact on a number of potential areas of interest to both this tradition of spirituality as well as to psychological science.

Final Recommendations Concerning Practice in Both Fields

A final set of reflections can be offered here on the imports of this project for practical applications within both Benedictine spirituality as well as psychotherapy. To begin first by considering some recommendations for Benedictine spiritual formation, perhaps the most overarching consideration in light of the findings presented in this dissertation is the importance of taking into account the psychological horizon that is brought to interpreting and practicing Benedict's spirituality of humility. Chapter four in particular revealed the importance of the psychological overlay that a person brings to Benedict's text and tradition. As seen in the second section of this chapter, the relational spirituality model can offer several insights into how a person's own relational human development can influence how Benedictine spiritual practices are interpreted and lived out, which in turn can potentially impact a person intrapersonally, interpersonally, as well as in terms of one's relationship with the Sacred. The results of this dissertation show that a key consideration for Benedictine spiritual formation ought to be how a person's

psychological history might interact with the psychological dynamics of the *Rule* and its tradition of spirituality. Those serving in the role of spiritual accompanist should be aware of the potential psychological liabilities and pitfalls of parts of the *Rule's* treatment of humility discussed in chapter four above, and how these might interact with a person's psychological tendencies.

Relatedly, spiritual accompanists can also be aware of the importance of those relational capacities identified within the relational spirituality model that were discussed in chapters three and four of this project, and how these can support persons' spiritual as well as personal and relational development. Researchers within the relational spirituality framework have identified secure attachment and differentiation of self in particular to be key factors for promoting humility by way of enhanced self-regulation and interpersonal functioning, which can also buffer against unhealthy psychological factors such as pathological narcissism that enervate the capacity for humility.⁴³⁹ Relatedly, spiritual accompanists can also strive to become more aware of the resources that are available within Benedictine spirituality for promoting healthy relational development, both within the *Rule* as well as in more contemporary constructive interpretations of its spirituality, many of which were discussed in chapter four. As was also mentioned previously, feminist perspectives on Benedictine humility may be particularly effective in communicating a more psychologically-nuanced and balanced perspective on the virtue. For instance, Chittister offers this definition of humility:

⁴³⁹ Ruffing et al., "Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework," 525.

Humility, in the *Rule of Benedict*, is not subservience. It is openness to the totality of life, both within the soul and within the human community. From a Benedictine perspective, humility does not diminish a person; it provides a basis for realistic evaluation for accepting who and what I am, for being willing to grow beyond my demanding self, and so for allowing other people to be who and what they are. This kind of humility requires a new kind of self-acceptance.⁴⁴⁰

Such a definition, emphasizing as it does both a realistic form of self-awareness and acceptance combined with an openness and willingness to recognize the fullness and distinctiveness of others, provides an excellent bridge between psychological and Benedictine conceptions of the virtue that have been reviewed in this project, and thus would seem to be especially suited for psychologically-integrative approaches to spiritual formation within the Benedictine tradition.

To turn to also consider practical applications within the field of psychology, this dissertation hopefully has revealed the benefits that can come about from a deeper engagement with spiritual texts and traditions for the sake of crafting spiritually-integrative psychotherapeutic interventions. This was especially the focus of chapter five of this dissertation, which delved into potential imports from Benedictine spirituality for psychology and psychotherapy, specifically around meanings and practices connected to the virtue of humility. Beyond specific interventions however, perhaps this research can also suggest on a broader level the importance of psychotherapists' ability to tap into the meaning systems of different schools and traditions of spirituality, Benedictine spirituality being just one potential example. For spiritually-integrative approaches to psychotherapy that aim to delve into and connect with the religious meaning and value systems that are deeply important to clients' lives and worldviews, psychologists might

⁴⁴⁰ Chittister, "Pride and Humility: A New Self-Acceptance," 28.

benefit from honing interpretive skills to access meanings that lie in symbols and language of spiritual texts and traditions, that is to achieve a “thicker” understanding of what these texts and traditions are communicating about human nature and existence, including human persons’ vital relationships with other persons, with all of creation, and with the Sacred. Psychologists might become equipped to engage in spiritual and religious hermeneutics through gaining a solid theological and historical-contextual grounding in different religious and spiritual traditions and their historical and contemporary expressions, as well as by developing the ability to evaluate how a tradition’s teachings “speak” to the particular situation, background, needs, and spiritual affinities of the clients they work with.

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