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REPLIES TO VRINDA DALMIYA AND STACEY MCELROY-HETZEL

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Abstract: In this response I address concerns raised by Dalmiya (2022) and McElroy-Hetzel (2022) about features of the account of intellectual humility developed in *The Mismeasure of the Self* (2021). I focus on the worries that humility is insufficiently relational, compatible with apathy, and potentially ineffective in the service of liberatory projects. I conclude with a brief discussion of the measurement of humility.

The accounts of the intellectual virtues and vices of self-evaluation developed in *The Mismeasure of the Self* (2021) are intended to be empirically plausible and politically useful. These accounts are, thus, presented as constituting a partial theory of the psychology of oppression. It is, therefore, particularly pleasing to see the views I defended in this book challenged for their empirical and political adequacy. In her engagement Vrinda Dalmiya's (2022) criticises the version of the virtue of humility offered in this book for being insufficiently politically liberatory. Stacey McElroy-Hetzel's (2022) focuses instead on conceptual questions about the understanding and measurement of humility, while elaborating a multi-stage intervention to promote humility designed to extend the value-affirmation proposal developed in the last chapter of this book. In this short reply I cannot do justice to all the generous and insightful suggestions and criticisms made by these commentators. Instead, I focus on a few themes to clarify my views but also to explore possible avenues for further research based on the constructive suggestions made by Dalmiya (2022) and by McElroy-Hetzel (2022).

The virtue of humility is the primary focus of both commentaries. It is reassuring to read that, in McElroy-Hetzel's (2022) words, the emerging psychological consensus is to view humility as a virtue that is directed primarily to the self rather than to other people. There is, as I remark in this book, a risk of confusion on these matters. Humility is in my view an evaluative stance that one takes toward oneself. But this stance is not egoistical or self-centred. The person who is humble does not value the self above all else. So, to say that humility is directed to the self is simply to describe the target of evaluation. That evaluation of the self, however, is not driven by an excessive prioritisation of one's own self-interest. McElroy-Hetzel (2022) avoids this confusion but wishes to challenge the claim that humility

is an evaluative stance that focuses exclusively on the self. Instead, she points out correctly that any assessment of one's own abilities must depend on social comparison judgments. As I point out in this book, subjects do not measure their own capacities against objective standards, instead they compare themselves to other people. Hence, McElroy-Hetzel (2022) is correct that evaluations of other people are part of the evidential basis of the attitudes that underpin humility. However, even though assessment of the abilities of others are part of what psychologists call "the content" (but philosophers would call "the evidential basis") of the attitude, the attitude itself is about the self's features. It is in this sense self-directed rather targeting other people or their relations to the self.

Dalmiya (2022) also takes issue with this aspect of the account of humility I develop in this book. In her view, if humility is to be a liberatory virtue it must include a concern with the needs of other people. Dalmiya (2022), thus, interprets humility as a virtue of justice that stems from a commitment to promoting the intellectual flourishing of all agents rather than just oneself. If humility is conceived as Dalmiya's (2022) suggests, it is a deeply relational virtue since it is a disposition to care for the well-being of every epistemic agent. I agree with Dalmiya (2022) that the virtue of justice is more effective than humility, as I understand it, in the service of liberatory projects. In my view, humility is concerned with the kind of valuation of the self that is a pre-requisite of proper self-respect because it is neither self-abasing nor self-aggrandising. Dalmiya's (2022) virtue of justice is a virtue of respect or care for all agents. I do not think, but cannot defend here, that respect for all follows as a matter of necessity from proper self-respect. Hence, I conclude that Dalmiya (2022) and I are talking about two distinct virtues.

It is hard to assess which of the two should be labelled 'humility'. It is also plausible to think that not much hangs on this terminological point. In defence of my position, I can only re-iterate that there is no tension in thinking that a person, such as a scientist, might be humble about her epistemic achievements whilst being relatively unconcerned with the intellectual flourishing of other people. Such a person would not be humble if she behaves unfairly toward other people by, for example, trying to take the credit for their successes. So, the humble person cannot exhibit vices of injustice. But it is perfectly possible that she might not be virtuously just. Vice, after all, is the contrary of virtue rather than its contradictory.

In this context Dalmiya (2022) also raises issues for my motivational account of virtue. In *The Mismeasure* (2021) I defend the view that a person who is humble is motivated in her assessments of her own psychological features by a desire to know the truth. However, if she makes these evaluations in environments where misleading information is prevalent, it is

possible or perhaps even likely that her self-assessments are not accurate. Instead, Dalmiya (2022) proposes that liberatory virtues must be reliable to be effective. I agree; the person whose self-evaluations are true is often in a better position than the person whose self-assessment are off the mark to engage in effective action. This point, in my view, highlights the differences between Dalmiya's (2022) project and the account I offer. In this book I focus on the character damage done by unjust social relations to the beneficiaries and the victims of injustice. I do not discuss the virtues required to fight for justice. What Dalmiya's (2022) perceptive comments highlight is that the virtue of humility, as I have described it, is not sufficient to accomplish that task. Nevertheless, it contributes to the liberatory project since humility is required for proper self-respect even in conditions of oppression. However, it must be supplemented by other virtues when one tries to remedy injustice.

In this book I seek to avoid a cold cognitive account of epistemic virtues by highlighting the motivational role of emotions in driving the kind of cognitive processing characteristic of people who possess the virtues and vices of self-evaluation. Hence, for example, timid individuals are fearful. Their fear biases their self-evaluations so that these acquire the profile associated with timidity; but fearfulness also drives their evaluations of other objects and circumstances. It thus contributes to causing the whole host of behaviours -such as self-silencing and risk avoidance– that are the typical manifestations of the vice of timidity. In this book I identify hopefulness or optimism as the emotional orientation characteristic of humility. I focus on hope because without it the humble person who is aware of her limitations might become despondent. In addition, awareness of limitations cannot by itself provide the motivation to overcome the shortcomings it highlights. Instead, hope is required to avoid the risks posed by apathy and pessimism to the maintenance of a positive self-esteem in the knowledge of one's own limitations.

McElroy-Hetzel (2022) worries about the dangers of apathy and indifference posed by awareness of limitations in the absence of a drive to learn and to improve. In my view the account of humility offered in this book can address her concerns. First, the motivation to get it right drives the cognitive processes leading to the formation of the attitudes that underpin humility. This motivation is partly a desire to know about one's limitations since one cannot be accurate in one's self-assessments if one does not try to find out what these limitations are. Hence, there is a kind of desire to learn that in my account is in-built in the notion of humility. However, as I mentioned above, it is in principle possible that having learnt about one's limitations, a person acquires a pessimistic outlook about one's ability to address them. Such pessimism could lead to apathy and resignation to one's limitations. I do not believe it

would lead to indifference since humility is characterised by a desire to know about limitations and thus it is incompatible with indifference about their putative existence. Be that as it may, in this book I suggest that true humility requires an optimistic emotional orientation precisely to avoid the despondency highlighted by McElroy-Hetzel (2022). The account, however, does not address McElroy-Hetzel's (2022) worry about the compatibility of humility with political disengagement. But I think this is as it should be, since, as I highlighted before, I do not think that humility is a virtue of fighting for justice. In this book I argue that humility is compatible with proper pride about one's own achievements. Moreover, if humility is to be a virtue of self-respect, it needs to be accompanied by pride without being marred by hubris. In this book I also contend that there exists a positive kind of shame that is generated by a perception that one has failed to meet the standards that one has set for oneself. This is an emotional stance that is characteristic of proper pride. Dalmiya (2022) latches onto this discussion to elaborate on the positive role potentially played by shame in the service of the liberatory virtue of justice. I wholly agree. However, and this is a matter of emphasis rather than substantial dispute, I also worry that the focus on shame might in this context be counterproductive.

Individuals who suffer from servility tend to defer to more powerful people on many matters including those concerning values. They might therefore adopt the false values that are prevalent in unjust societies and be prone to feeling shame for falling short of the standards that accord with the dominant values. Since these are values that contribute to their subordination, their internalisation makes the subordinated complicit in their oppression. This complicity is manifest in an emotional orientation prone to chronic shame which, I argue in this book, is a feature of servility. I thus worry that encouraging shame in support of a liberatory project might aggravate the disposition, prevalent among those who suffer from feelings of inferiority, to feel ashamed for their alleged limitations. That said, the mere fact that Dalmiya's (2022) proposal carries this danger is no objection to it, since risks are always present when one faces pervasive, and seemingly normal, injustices. Be that as it may, in this book I focus on hope rather than shame, because I presume that this emphasis might be of help to those who are at risk of being timid and servile, and already too prone to feel ashamed of themselves.

I found Dalmiya's (2022) imaginative connection of my discussion of hope as a source of personal optimism with the notion of radical hope as a source of political optimism inspiring. Although my brief treatment of this positive emotion is intended to explain how individuals need not be crushed by the realisation of their own shortcomings, radical hope can also be

seen as a political and civic emotion because it can sustain optimism or hopefulness also in the absence of a detailed plan about how to bring about political justice. There are dangers inherent to hope in the absence of strategies since these hopes can become little more than mere dreams. Nevertheless, hope for a just future is an essential aspect of the liberatory virtue of justice. Dalmiya's (2022) discussions of hope and of justice provide useful suggestions about how to extend the framework presented in *The Mismeasure* (2021) to articulate accounts of those liberatory virtues required in the fight for justice. These virtues are explicitly political and clearly oriented toward promoting the flourishing of epistemic subjects other than oneself. As such these are not virtue of self-evaluation, but as I have indicated here, they might presuppose the virtues of self-assessment since having the proper regard for oneself might be necessary if one is not to be crushed by the difficulties associated with liberatory struggles.

I would like to conclude this short reply to my commentators with some brief remarks about McElroy-Hetzel's (2022) discussion of the measurement of humility. McElroy-Hetzel (2022) notes that there are broadly speaking two families of measures of humility: trait and object. The first are designed to measure humility as a character trait. The second to measure object-specific humble attitudes. The approach adopted in *The Mismeasure* (2021) strongly suggests, even though I do not defend the point there, that object measures should be preferred.

The framework defended in this book takes attitudes to particular objects, rather than traits, as the underpinnings of virtues and vices. According to that framework, people are primarily humble or arrogant about some thing or other. It is thus possible to be arrogant about one's rhetorical skills without being arrogant about one's mathematical abilities for instance. The person who is aptly called "arrogant" is the person who has arrogant attitudes to many objects, and whose attitudes are strong in the sense of being activated across numerous situations. McElroy-Hetzel's (2022) remarks that trait measures of humility appear to track how much one values humility more than they track whether one exhibits humility offer indirect support for the attitudinal framework defended in *The Mismeasure* (2021). At the same time, though, it also raises a potential objection to the framework. In this book I have presupposed that the attitudes characteristic of humility (or of arrogance, etc.) can cluster, but have not provided evidence for this claim. Reading McElroy-Hetzel's (2022) commentary has made me realise that this presupposition needs to be put on a sound empirical footing by ascertaining whether individuals who consistently exhibit the judgments, emotions and behaviours characteristic of various virtues and vices over time and across varied situations

are those who also score highly in varied object measures of these aspects of character. More broadly, McElroy-Hetzl's (2022) remarks shows that more work needs to be done to test empirically the attitudinal framework advanced in *The Mismeasure of the Self* (2021).

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