

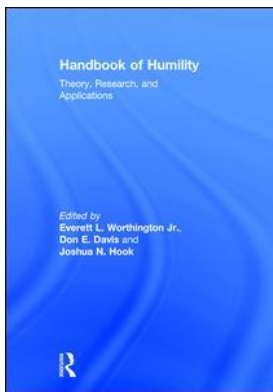
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Everett L. Worthington, Don E. Davis, Joshua N. Hook

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Everett L. Worthington

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POLITICAL HUMILITY

A Post-Modern Reconceptualization

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.

In the United States today, political interactions within the political system are characterized with highly partisan divisions between parties, and even within parties, there are stark differences. Acrimony and intransigent adherence to cherished positions seem to rule discussions about political issues.

When I mention that I am writing on political humility, an almost universal reaction is to mutter something about an oxymoron. It seems that the common lay belief (and I admit that the validity of my observation is uncontaminated by actual scientific data) seems to be that it is virtually impossible to find a politician who is politically humble. The general attitude seems to be that when people talk about political issues with others who do not share their beliefs and values, humble, or even respectful, sharing of ideas or compromise is, at best, unlikely.

Political lack of humility has many historical and proximal causes. In a brief chapter, I can at best hope to provide a cursory overview and point readers to some relevant literature. Although I admittedly will be skimming the surface, I hope to advance the conversation. Perhaps this cross-disciplinary chapter will provide fertile ideas for investigation across disciplines. I close with practical suggestions for civil discourse in a free society.

Understanding Political Humility as One Type of Humility

Several understandings of humility have developed from its study within positive psychology (for a review, see Davis, Worthington, & Hook, 2010). I will define humility as I understand it and then describe several types of humility.

Defining Humility

Humility is defined as (a) having accurate self-assessment that involves seeing oneself as a limited agent, (b) presenting oneself modestly to others, and (c)

holding an attitude oriented toward benefiting others (not just oneself) that might be characterized as exerting power under control to build others up and not squash them down (Worthington et al., 2016).

Types of Humility

Humility may be divided into subtypes. *General humility* is a trait self- or other-evaluation that describes the person as meeting the definition of humility in virtually all situations and relationships. *Relational humility* is humility within a particular relationship. The humble president of a country, leader in political office, corporate boss or CEO, military leader, parent, child, teacher, student, or scientific expert might share some qualities of how their relational humility manifests, but they will also differ on some. Some relationships involve a considerable amount of intellectual interchange, and in those cases, intellectual humility might be a substantial portion of the relational humility. *Spiritual humility* is humility before what one considers sacred (Davis, Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Jennings, 2010). For many, this is God. For some, it is nature or environment; for others, humanity; for still others, it is what seems transcendent or beyond the mundane.

Intellectual humility involves an accurate awareness that one's knowledge is limited, a modesty in being able to admit, and actually admitting, one's limited knowledge, an acknowledgment that one could be wrong that is heartfelt and not perfunctory, and a way of sharing ideas that values the person with whom one is sharing and takes his or her ideas seriously. It also involves the willingness to revise one's beliefs, values, and practices as a result of interpersonal interactions with other-minded (and like-minded) people that maintains a sense of coherence yet openness to correction or modification when persuaded to do so by reason or to preserve valued interpersonal relationships. When people differ intellectually, the ego is placed under strain and that often brings about either humility or lack of it. Intellectual humility is a subtype of humility that allows people to respect others' ideas and intellectual positions. Many topics have ideas in which people personally invest. *Political humility* is a subtype of intellectual humility. Political humility is imbued with particular emotional charge for people who are invested in leadership, people who feel very affected by the leadership of a country or organization, or people whose expertise might depend on the way public events are interpreted (i.e., news commentators, politicians, political scientists, etc.). It is also considered crucial for people who treat political identity or treat country as sacred. Political humility is specifically concerned with negotiating and respecting others' political, philosophical, and pragmatic ideas. *Religious humility* is also a subtype of intellectual humility, but it is of special significance because it involves people's commitment to the sacred.

People can hold many things to be sacred, and when they do, the objects are imbued with special significance.

Zeroing In on Political Humility

We briefly turn to the philosophy of science to illustrate political philosophy. Philosopher of science Imre Lakatos (1922–1974) suggested that scientific research programs were made up of both hard core and auxiliary hypotheses (Lakatos, 1978). The hard core included theoretical assumptions, values, beliefs, practices, and strongly supported findings that form the structure and process of the research program. The auxiliary hypotheses were less supported by data and theorizing and not integral to the structure of the research program. Karl Popper (1963) had suggested that science seeks to disconfirm theories and hypotheses by finding contrary evidence. Thus, disconfirming evidence should be grounds for abandoning a favored theory. Yet, in practice, that rarely happened. Scientists held on to their favored theories tenaciously. Lakatos argued that forming or changing ad hoc auxiliary hypotheses helped theories become elaborated.

If we may take some license, we might apply these ideas to political humility. People have core beliefs, assumptions, and supporting networks about political reality. For some people, the hard (political) core is very important. A great deal of psychological energy is invested in their political assumptions, values, beliefs, and practices. Those are rarely doubted, and when challenged, people are usually not open to modifying them. Other political ideas might seem quite important but are less crucial to the structure of assumptions, values, beliefs, and practices that make up the hard core. A politically humble person is someone who considers both the logic of a challenging intellectual argument and the interpersonal environment within which the argument is levied. The politically humble person is open to modifying his or her auxiliary political assumptions, values, beliefs, or practices if the reasoning or interpersonal situation is compelling enough. Importantly, though, the politically humble person usually maintains a hard core that is much more impervious to modification.

Political humility then involves (a) being aware of and honest about one's hard core and auxiliary hypotheses regarding politics, including the weaknesses and limitations as well as one's adherence to commitments to people (i.e., individuals, communities, and political systems); (b) presenting one's political assumptions, values, beliefs, and practices modestly in ways that are not off-putting, belligerent, and argumentative; and (c) being other-oriented (i.e., aware of interpersonal situations, structures, relational commitments, obligations, and nuances) so that one is able to build people up, respect their political sensibilities and positions, and act with responsible power toward people

similar and different to one politically in a way that exhibits power under control to help others instead of hurt others.

A Brief and Simplified History of Humility and Its Intersection with Secularization

In the present section, I provide a brief summary of the history of political humility. This will lead us to today's perspective rooted in modernity and post-modernity.

Greek and Roman Absence of Humility

In the Roman world, government was derived from a Greek cultural democratic perspective. Culturally, one of the biggest reasons for human moral failure within the Greek culture was *hybris*, overweening pride. The concept of humility did not exist in Greek thought. In the Roman Empire, Greek culture and Roman military might reigned. Augustine (354–430) became the pre-eminent theologian in the Roman Empire. In Augustine's view, people were completely dependent on God for moral capability. Humility reflected this absolute dependence. The fundamental sin was thus pride, a rejection of humility. That way of thinking held hegemony into the Age of Enlightenment (ca. 1650s to ca. 1780s).

Erosion of the Augustinian Hegemony

The Enlightenment was focused on what Charles Taylor (2007) called a "subtraction story" (p. 22). By this he meant that secular modernity subtracted confining horizons, or limitations of knowledge. Often the religious underpinnings were subtracted. Regarding humility, Hume (1711–1776) tried to redeem pride as a virtue from the slur of what he considered Augustinian-derived false religion. Hume vilified humility as keeping people mired in weakness and inaction. Pride empowered human agency. Thus, humility was characterized as limiting, confining, harmful, and, above all, *weak*.

Hume's agenda was largely to remove Christian considerations from public life. That project has been the center of the culture wars of recent decades. In many ways, Hume's agenda succeeded. Earlier, deism was an attempt to maintain personal spirituality but exclude God from the public arena. Also, concepts like a wall of separation between church and state were introduced and gained a foothold. The Christian-shaped Augustinian view of humility as virtuous was largely undone. Augustinian humility required absolute dependence on God, and Protestant theologies formulated during the Reformation reinforced the idea that God was supreme and thus a religious view must mean that humans were dependent. Thus, humility was seen primarily as virtuous, but often as

weak. Until recently, viewing humility as a desirable virtue has been largely confined to overtly religious communities, and it does not necessarily dominate all of those. Humility in secular life, especially secular political life, has been out of favor.

Recent Attempts to Reclaim a Secular Grounding of Humility

However, in a provocative book, *Secular Powers*, Julie E. Cooper (2013) seeks to rehabilitate humility by examining three other Enlightenment writers: Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). Cooper claims that Hobbes has not been carefully read. He is often seen as a co-belligerent of Hume. But, Cooper argues that instead, Hobbes advocated humility as empowering, a source of strength because it acknowledged all humans as equal. Spinoza and Rousseau came at the issues differently (see Cooper, 2013, for excellent and thorough analytic accounts). They were both explicitly hostile to humility; however, they were also hostile to pride. Both saw a necessity of removing God from politics. Cooper argues that Enlightenment philosophers' efforts to free politics from theological considerations were not an attempted prideful overthrow of God by arrogant humans. Rather, it was seen as a collective project empowered by an appreciation of human capabilities and limits. Humility, then, as awareness of such an appreciation of both capabilities and limitations, could be seen to empower, not weaken, humans.

Philosopher Stephen K. White (2009), in *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen*, was eager to redeem humility from the secular doldrums where it had languished since Hume and the Enlightenment writers. White agrees with Augustine that humility requires accepting individuals' inherent weaknesses, which he terms embracing one's finitude. However, by acknowledging one's individual moral and existential weaknesses, one can engineer a society that guards against inevitable human weaknesses and foibles. By accepting human weaknesses, the humble person can build checks and balances into government, can set term limits on chief political officers, can provide for a system of passing laws that engages people with multiple perspectives, and can require a process that is often prolonged.

A Secular Age and the Role of Humility within It

Perhaps the definitive modern understanding of secularism has been articulated by Charles Taylor (2007) in *A Secular Age*. He asks how in 1500 virtually all people held religious views, but by the end of the twentieth century, society simply was not seen often as an arena for religious beliefs and values. His answer was that in 1500 selves were "porous" (Taylor, 2007, p. 38)—vulnerable to attack by demons, spirits, situations, and powerful human agents. Modernity led to a concept of the self as "buffered" (p. 38)—impermeable, encapsulated,

and disengaged. They were distanced and separated from their own minds, the external world, and other people. They sensed that one was able to order life without God. But Taylor argues that this was not an urge to dethrone God and take over sovereignty. It was, instead, a feeling that one is buffered from attacks by the encapsulated self. Secular people felt that some pride was appropriate, not the sinful curse with which Augustinian theology had tarred it.

We live not just in modernity but on the bubble between modernity and post-modernity. The post-modern person has nagging doubts that people really can be impermeable, encapsulated, disengaged, and separated from their own minds, the external world, and other people. Rather, some tenets of post-modernism are that people live in co-constructed worlds; thus they are inevitably influenced by culture, other people, and situations (Gergen, 2015).

Taylor understands the secular world as one that is characterized by diversity. He also believes that it is virtually impossible for any side to array a case with evidence that holds unopposable force. Thus, he recommends humility as a realistic, pragmatic stance. He believes that most people know that unsailable arguments are impossible. They thus feel that their own arguments are fragile. That knowledge, he asserts, “fragilizes” (p. 531) life, creating an underlying belief that others think differently from oneself and thus, dogmatic self-assertion is foolish. Humility, thus, is perhaps *the* virtue for the secular age. This meshes with a post-modern understanding of values that are contextualized within communities. Diversity is embraced, because reality is understood differently in different communities and none is *ipso facto* superior.

Eight Reasons for Recapturing Political Humility as a Virtue

Although a post-modern understanding of political humility might make it untenable to expect that political humility would be universally understood, I suggest that there are important reasons to recapture a sense of humility. Namely, the nature of political conflict, the nature of relationships, and the status of interparty and intraparty conflict in the United States have all changed in recent decades and will likely change even more in the future. There are several reasons why political humility is needed and is within practical grasp today.

Humility Is Needed When Real Power and Resources Are Being Negotiated

Humility is needed when the ego is under threat. Because political negotiation is often about power, the participants in the system are almost always in a state of ego challenge because real power is being wielded that can literally affect people’s survival. Thus, humility is almost always needed within the political system if people are to negotiate agreements from different philosophical and political positions.

Political Polarization Makes Humility More Needed Than Ever

Second, political humility has been sorely lacking in recent years due to political polarization. Effective government and political action often requires bipartisanship and reaching agreements with people who are different politically. The lack of humility and the consequences of this are seen in our government today, especially the inability to work together to pass legislation, government shutdown, etc. Perhaps humility could provide a way forward. Haidt (2012) suggests that this gridlock is due to ideological differences at the core of belief. He suggests seeking to try to understand (rationally) the core values of the people in other political camps to promote less polarization. However, it is likely that effective solutions might be less rational. Worthington et al. (2016) have adduced evidence in support of the social bonds hypothesis. People who are humble are hypothesized to be more likely to form and maintain social bonds. McElroy et al. (2014) found that participants who were able to hold different intellectual beliefs about ideas, religion, or politics and to share them respectfully experienced more trust and forgiveness and reported higher relationship quality than did those lower in intellectual humility. Thus, politicians who are more politically humble might be able to develop stronger personal bonds that could improve collaboration across the political aisle.

Humility Is Needed When the Stakes Are Winning and Losing

Third, the social oil hypothesis (Worthington et al., 2016) states that humility makes repair of relationship ruptures and forgiveness more likely. The public political process is about defeating the other side, which causes friction and relationship breakdown. Perhaps humility could buffer the negative effects that come with these competitive traits that are commonly found in politicians.

International Pressures Make Humility More Necessary

Fourth, with increasing globalization—not to mention the spread of communications technology that keeps people in contact electronically throughout the world in almost real time—it has become increasingly important to be respectful of others' different political ideas. Even as the United States is becoming less religious and more spiritual, the rise of Islam has meant that political negotiations are increasingly conflated with religious differences. Political humility is needed to disentangle the conflagration and work out peaceful solutions.

Social Pressure Makes Humility More Necessary Today

Fifth, social pressure has increased as a consequence of mass media. Legislative and executive hearings are often televised. News media monitor politics 24/7. Bloggers opine about every public act. Social media outlets provide public forums.

Such social scrutiny ups the pressure on politicians to convey the impression they have firm (and often extreme) political opinions. This contributes to a polarized social climate.

***Changing Demographics Affect the Electorate and Political Parties and
Make Humility More Necessary***

Sixth, political humility is demanded by the changing demographics in the country (Teixeira et al., 2015). In decades past, each of the two major political parties had a clearly demarcated constituency. Demographics have shifted dramatically and are predicted to shift further by 2060. The *States of Change* monograph (Teixeira et al., 2015) predicts that many states will not have a racial or ethnic majority within their borders in the near future. Each party will be trying to appeal to *several* minorities, each with competing values and agendas. Neither party is likely to have a clear platform that can rally a strong consensus. This might transform the political process to a multiple-party, coalition-government system. Also, ethnic diversity will demand more ability to respect the political differences of various constituencies. And, if coalitions do emerge, political humility will be needed to permit coalitions to work together.

Humility Is Needed When an Administration Is in Power

Seventh, after an election, political humility is still needed. Political humility involves being aware of one's limitations. Being nondefensively analytical about how an administration is doing might aid effective governing.

***Scientific Research on Humility Has Provided a Definition that Can
Accommodate Polar Different Political Philosophies***

Eighth, scientific advances provide a better understanding of political humility. By using our three-part definition and observing that it is suited to post-modern, community-contextualized applications, science has set the stage for public acceptance of political humility, which can now be accurately viewed not as weakness, but as power under control.

Summary

I have drawn on our understanding of political humility to suggest eight reasons why political humility is needed today. But neither a host of needs nor an adequate definition is enough to advocate a societal shift in stance toward a post-modern, science-informed political humility. We need a body of research that demonstrates the benefits of political humility for politicians and citizens. The research on general humility is burgeoning. It is important, therefore, to examine the status of scientific research specifically on political humility.

Implications for Research on Political Humility

Unfortunately, scientific research on political humility is sparse. This is an excellent target for researchers seeking to study humility. Four of the five published articles were done by a single research team in Italy (Chirumbolo & Leone, 2010; Desimoni & Leone, 2013; Leone, Chirumbolo, & Desimoni, 2012; Leone, Desimoni, & Chirumbolo, 2012), and the fifth (Lee, Ashton, Ogunfowora, Bourdage, & Shin, 2010) was done in Canada and Korea. Thus, we know little about how the findings might generalize to the United States or other countries.

Some Studies that Are Relevant for Political Humility

Chirumbolo and Leone (2010) investigated the impact of the HEXACO model of personality structure in predicting political ideology and voting. For 517 participants, conscientiousness was linked to voting for right-wing parties in Italy. Honesty–Humility, Agreeableness, and Openness were related to voting for left-wing parties in Italy.

Leone et al. (2012) hypothesized that “dangerous world” beliefs shape Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and “competitive jungle” beliefs shape Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), which is a preference for hierarchical rather than egalitarian relationships among social groups. In Study 1 with 297 Italian adults, personality associations with RWA were unmediated by dangerous-world beliefs. Personality associations with SDO were mediated by competitive-jungle beliefs. In Study 2 with 344 participants from the United States, Honesty, Humility, Openness-culture, and Openness-curiosity were each correlated with RWA and SDO.

Lee et al. (2010) investigated the personality bases of Hierarchy (versus Equality) Orientation and Social Conformity (versus Change) Orientation. In Canadian ($N = 207$) and Korean ($N = 185$) college student samples, Lee et al. found that preference for hierarchy correlated primarily with low Honesty–Humility, whereas social conformity correlated primarily with low Openness to Experience.

Leone et al. (2012) hypothesized that the relationship between Honesty–Humility and SDO and that between Openness and RWA would be moderated by interest in politics for 344 participants. Honesty–Humility affected SDO, and Openness affected RWA more strongly among individuals with a higher level of interest in politics.

Desimoni and Leone (2014) sought to replicate and extend findings from Lee et al. and Leone et al. (2012). In Study 1 ($N = 820$), Humility negatively predicted RWA, whereas Honesty positively predicted RWA. Humility, but not Honesty, was related to SDO. In Study 2 ($N = 586$), Desimoni and Leone replicated both those findings and the moderating role of interest in politics.

Research Questions in Need of Rapid Answers

Much has been found regarding Humility's negative correlation and Honesty's high correlation with Right-Wing Authoritarianism and preference for hierarchy in Italy. Not surprisingly, high interest in politics sharpens the connections. We can consider political humility a fledgling subfield of humility studies, yet the questions investigated to date are myopic. Here are a dozen questions that need to be addressed soon.

1. How is political humility related to general humility?
2. How similar and different is political humility from other intellectual humility? With whom does political humility matter besides those with high interest in politics?
3. How much of political humility is due to internalized attitude, and how much is learned?
4. What is ideal political humility in a candidate for elective office? Do combative and arrogant positions usually help candidates get elected? When voters' mood is primarily negative toward incumbents, might more militant positions be favored more than when voters' mood toward incumbents is supportive?
5. Can the political humility of a politician or a citizen discussing political ideas with someone of different political persuasion facilitate joint decisions?
6. Does other-oriented political focus extend to out-groups as well as in-groups?
7. How is political humility different in closer relative to less close personal relationships? Does having a closer relationship facilitate states of political humility?
8. Political humility tends to promote civil discourse and smoother political processes, but political parties might not value political humility as much as political loyalty, commitment, and even fanaticism. What predicts attitudes toward political humility?
9. What kinds of intrapersonal and interpersonal effects might a citizen versus an elected official expect if he or she became more politically humble?
10. Can people learn to be more politically humble? How?
11. What can be done to induce states of political humility in people who are emotionally engaged in a political issue? Is it beneficial to do so? In what ways?
12. How can people demonstrate political humility in political discourse with family members, coworkers, friends, and acquaintances?

The social scientific study of political humility is wide open. There are enormous gains to be made and few people aimed at studying the issues. The benefits and potential payoffs are high for researchers. I highly recommend this as an exciting area of study.

Practical Advice

In this section, I provide practical advice regarding political humility in two important arenas. I first consider advice to public politicians. Then I suggest advice for citizens.

Practical Advice for Public Political Processes

Know Yourself and the Opposition

Haidt (2012) has observed that different political orientations are powered by different fundamental beliefs and values. People actively engaged in public political service place themselves under scrutiny by elective or appointive bodies. They thus declare and invest in those commitments. However, politicians sometimes misunderstand opponents' political ideologies. And we must understand that all political behavior is not driven merely by ideological consistency. Practical politics involves public compromises. A humble stance can open people up to compromising or forging win-win scenarios.

Widen the Circle of the "Other"

Political systems are always other-oriented. For public officials, the "other" is first of all their constituents. However, for civil interaction, the circle of others has to be widened to include one's opponents.

Talk Civilly During Conflicts

An excellent set of guidelines on having difficult public discussions regarding hot political topics is Richard Mouw's (2010) *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. Some of Mouw's advice applies more to Christians than people who do not adhere to Christianity, like taking a "divine gaze," or a perspective from what one believes to be God's perspective. However, anyone can benefit from his advice. For example, he suggests contacting opponents privately prior to making a negative public statement to ask whether the statement is offensive or wrong. Convicted civility is based on relationships—even tentative and uneasy ones—in which one considers the other empathically. Thus, if people have acted uncivilly in the past, they might apologize and seek forgiveness. Mouw also calls for careful hearing and careful speaking, honoring people who differ. If people adhere to these guidelines, they will be more likely to

act civilly—with “public politeness . . . tact, moderation, refinement and good manners towards people who are different from us” (p. 14). Importantly, Mouw emphasizes that we do not have to approve of other people’s views or like them. Instead, we commit ourselves to at least listen to others’ views respectfully.

Political Conversations with Family, Friends, Colleagues, and Acquaintances

Almost everyone belongs to many personal networks. People disagree across networks. Even if one adopts a strategy of keeping political (and religious) opinions close to the vest, we sometimes get pressured into speaking publicly. A politically humble person can do things before, during, and after sharing. I draw on a program of negotiating, the Harvard Negotiation Project (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011), which describes a way of arriving at win-win solutions to difficult and often seemingly intractable conflicts that is consistent with political humility.

Preparing to Share Controversial Political Ideas

Intellectual preparation is paramount to acting politically humble. My basic attitudes in preparing for political discussion are these. I remind myself of several things I know. First, I cannot “win” any argument by force of argument and still maintain a good relationship. I might overpower the other person’s arguments by my force of logic, but that usually produces resentment, wounded egos, and bitterness. Second, my opponent is neither stupid nor evil just because he or she advocates a different position than I do. Third, I have issues or actions that often trigger emotional, unthinking combative, withdrawing, or approach responses. (I have had enough emotion-regulation failures in my past to make this a time-consuming inventory.) Fourth, I need to be teachable. Fifth, I remind myself of various ways to promote states of humility. Ruberton, Kruse, and Lyubomirsky (Chapter 18, this volume) have identified and discussed three—self-affirmation, gratitude, and awe—that inspire humble states.

I need to know my own positions and the interests behind those positions. Fisher et al. argue that intractable conflict occurs because each party locks in incompatible positions on issues (i.e., either vote a policy up or down), but they take the positions (i.e., auxiliary hypotheses; Lakatos, 1978) they do because they are protecting several interests (or hard-core assumptions, values, and beliefs; Lakatos, 1978). If parties examine the interests behind their positions, they often find ways to meet both parties’ interests. Similarly, I need to assay my opponent’s value as a human, ability to teach me things, triggers, likely positions, and interests behind those positions. My attitude should be one of “convicted civility” (Mouw, 2010, p. 14).

Discussing Consistent with “Convicted Civility”

My relational commitments form the context for discussions. I am usually closest to my family, next closest to coworkers (because they are hard to change), next to friends, and least to acquaintances. Value of the relationship governs much of my care in discussion. I want to use good communication methods regardless, but usually take more care in valued relationships than in more distant ones. From couple counseling (see Ripley & Worthington, 2014), we know that good communication involves “I-language,” not accusatory “you-language.” Emotion regulation is important. When I get angry or feel anxious or threatened, I must self-soothe, taking calming breaths. Threat instigates stress (Lazarus, 1999) and defensiveness (Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chatel, 1992), and good emotion-focused coping can mitigate both (Lazarus, 1999). I try to reason logically even if I am emotionally aroused (Kahneman, 2011). I employ the Harvard Negotiation Project getting-to-yes method (Fisher et al., 2011) of discovering our interests behind the positions we advocate. I also seek to cultivate and exhibit other virtues—patience, self-control, justice, fairness, and courage—besides humility. And I forego the temptation to exhibit my superiority through the dark triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathology (Djeriouat & Trémolière, 2014).

Numerous social psychological theories tell us why it is hard to stay issue oriented during conflict or debate. Those emotion-laden conversations are situations, and they can bring other motives to the fore—those I am not proud of—because I am reacting to faces, words, tones, nonverbal communications, memories, associations, and the entire associative history of my interactions with the person. Instead of adhering to principle-driven discussion, it is easy to get threatened, defensive, and stressed and to engage evolutionarily prepared coping mechanisms—freezing (panic), fleeing (moving away from), or fighting (moving against) or seeking social support that yields tending and befriending (Taylor et al., 2000).

Do a Post-Mortem

After the conversation, I try to reflect on it rather than merely lick my wounds or gloat over my victory. In the post-mortem, I consider whether I need to apologize for things I did, said, or even implied (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). And I need to seek forgiveness for my wrongs (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010), and, after doing so, I seek to deal with any self-condemnation through self-forgiveness (Worthington, 2013). Relationship repair is important, if for no other reason than I might have to have similar discussions in the future.

Conclusion

Despite the common reaction that political humility is an oxymoron, political humility has a long history in political philosophy from religiously inspired humility, to a post-modern approach that sees situations as highly differentiated with community norms shaping each community's value on political humility. I described reasons why political humility is important today and then provided practical advice for political humility. Political humility that embodies reflective intrapersonal awareness, modest interpersonal self-presentation, and orientation to building others up is an attitude and social stance that reflects the best of humans and often draws humble reactions from others. Politics might make the world go round but relationships hold it together, and being committed to political humility within and then being able to discuss political issues and still maintain relationship closeness are necessary twenty-first-century skills for committed civility (Mouw, 2010).

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