In recent years, philosophers have either ignored the virtue of humility or found it to be in need of radical redefinition. But humility is a central human virtue, and it is the purpose of this book to defend that claim from a Kantian point of view. Jeanine Grenberg argues that we can indeed speak of Aristotelian-style, but still deeply Kantian, virtuous character traits. She proposes moving from focus on action to focus on person, not leaving the former behind, but instead taking it up within a larger, more satisfying Kantian moral theory. Using examples from literature as well as philosophy, she shows that there is a Kantian virtue theory to be explored in which humility plays a central role. Her book will have a wide appeal to readers not only in Kant studies but also in theological ethics and moral psychology.

Jeanine Grenberg is Associate Professor of Philosophy at St. Olaf College, Minnesota.
KANT AND THE ETHICS OF HUMILITY

A Story of Dependence, Corruption, and Virtue

JEANINE GRENBERG

St. Olaf College, Minnesota
To Anthony, the love of my life
# Contents

**Acknowledgments**

*page ix*

**Introduction**

1

**PART I  KANTIAN VIRTUE**

1 Dependent and corrupt rational agency 15

2 Constraints on any possible Kantian account of virtue 49

3 A Kantian account of virtue 80

**PART II  A KANTIAN RESPONSE TO RECENT ACCOUNTS OF HUMILITY**

4 A Kantian response to recent accounts of humility 107

**PART III  THE KANTIAN VIRTUE OF HUMILITY**

5 The Kantian virtue of humility 133

6 Humility and self-respect 163

7 The humble person 193

**PART IV  THE VIRTUES OF KANTIAN HUMILITY**

8 The humble pursuit of self-knowledge 217

9 The humble pursuit of respect for persons 242

Conclusion 252

*References* 259

*Index* 263
Acknowledgments

Trying to thank all of the people and institutions who have contributed to the publication of this book seems an impossible task. But then so, at one time, did the very publication of this book. So, with actuality as the proof of possibility on the latter score, I endeavor here to accomplish the former, that is, to express my gratitude to the many persons and institutions without whom and which this book would not have been possible, or actual.

No bit of this book overlaps with my dissertation, but I could not have written this book without having engaged in that earlier project, a set of reflections on the import of Kant’s moral feeling of respect for understanding motivation to moral action. I am grateful to the Woodrow Wilson Foundation for giving me a Charlotte Newcombe Fellowship to facilitate completion of that work. I am grateful also to those members of the Emory University Philosophy Department who helped to create a lively and challenging intellectual environment amidst difficult times, and particularly to Rudi Makkreel, Don Rutherford, Tom Flynn, Nick Fotion, and Pam Hall.

The dissertation would not have become this book without Thomas Hill’s capacity for envisioning what was trying to emerge from my dissertation work. I am grateful to him for suggesting to me, after reading one of my dissertation chapters, that perhaps it was not so much “reason” or “feeling” as “character” that I was really interested in.

The writing of the book itself was made possible by major grants from the American Association of University Women and the American Council of Learned Societies. The time and space these grants gave me to lose myself in my own mind were absolutely critical for completion of my thoughts, and I will always be grateful to these institutions for those gifts.

But empty time and space only take a writer so far. At some point, I needed to share my ideas with others, and I have been very fortunate to have many people, from many and varied places and philosophical points of view, take the time to read and comment on sections of the book. It must be said that the only people to have read the entire book in draft form are
two anonymous readers from Cambridge University Press, both of whom were everything and more than I could have hoped for in press reviewers. Their careful reading and incisive comments and recommendations helped to make this work more coherent and, ultimately, more meaningful.

Henry Allison’s willingness to read early drafts of Parts I and II helped to keep me an honest Kantian, and taught me to appreciate even more than I had previously what a fine reader of texts Dr. Allison is. He understood not only what I had written, but also what I meant to have written, and that was a great gift. Allen Wood has also been a tireless supporter of my work, sending me copious email comments both on drafts and on odd thoughts I would have here and there, but always with his unique blend of a Kantianism-cum-Marxism that would make me smile. Paul Guyer provided crucial support and advice at various points in the project.

Although I take Onora O’Neill to task philosophically in the forthcoming pages, I am also grateful to her for the time she spent reading a very early overview of the book project and for reminding me early on in the project that Uriah Heep was not to be overlooked. That I broadened her suggestion somewhat by introducing not only Uriah but a whole range of literary figures to people my writing is not, perhaps, what she intended me to take from her suggestion, but I am grateful to her nonetheless. I am grateful also to Don Rutherford for introducing me to the work of O’Neill and for helping to make me the kind of philosopher who could hope to write a book like this.

There are many other individuals who have patiently read pieces of this book project and have provided helpful comments and suggestions along the way: members of the Minnesota Monthly Moral Philosophy Meeting (“4M”) and also members of my own St. Olaf College Philosophy Department provided regular, helpful, and challenging feedback to earlier drafts of several chapters; members of the Philosophy Department at St. Cloud State in Minnesota and of the Philosophy Group at the University of Hertfordshire did similarly with an earlier version of chapter 3. I am particularly indebted to Martin Gunderson, Henry West, Sarah Holtman, Valerie Tiberius, and Ed Langerak. Sharon Anderson-Gold’s role as a commentator on an earlier version of chapter 1 during an APA meeting of the North American Kant Society helped me to fine-tune and focus what had until then been rather unclear thoughts.

My editor at Cambridge University Press, Hilary Gaskin, hasproved exceedingly efficient, competent, and extraordinarily patient through every step in the process, and for all of these things I am grateful to her.
Finally, I want to thank my skeptical philosopher-historian-theologian husband, Anthony Rudd, for being the font of patience and support that he is. His calming influence on me during months of writing (Me: “Problem? Problem?? What do you mean, ‘the problem I’m having with chapter 3’?? I’m not having a problem with chapter 3!!” Him: “No, of course not darling, quite right. I’m glad things are going so well.”) and the acute philosophical insight he brought to endless English lunchtime discussions of my work-in-progress were the stable foundation upon which I rested my soul, and without which this book would not have come to be. To him, both my gratitude and my love.