

Humilitas by John Dickson

Book Review by Bret L. Simmons

YouTube overview by the author, John Dickson:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDyytL2YhE4>



Dickson defines humility as “the noble choice to forgo your status, deploy your resources or use your influence for the good of others before yourself.” such that a “humble person is marked by a willingness to hold power in service of others.” (p. 24). By this definition you can see that humility starts from a position of dignity, strength, and a healthy sense of my own worth and abilities. Unlike humiliation, which can be thrust upon me by others, humility is a choice I make willingly. And humility is social, more about how I treat others than about how I think of myself.

Dickson argues that humility is important for leadership because humility is persuasive. Humility unlocks the door to referent power. “We are more attracted to the great who are humble than to the great who know it and want everyone else to know it as well.” (p. 69). He quotes Aristotle’s belief that character is the controlling factor in persuasion: “We believe good-hearted people to a greater extent and more quickly than we do others on all subjects in general and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt.” (p. 139). We trust the humble more than the proud to act in our best interest.

Dickson also argues that humility is **generative**, a powerful key to learning and growth. Pride is the engine of mediocrity because the proud think they have “arrived” and have nothing left to learn, certainly not from you and me.

I agree with Dickson that humility trumps tolerance. Tolerance requires all parties to soften their convictions, whereas humility does not. “Humility applied to convictions does not mean believing things any less; it means treating those who hold contrary beliefs with respect and friendship.” (p. 167). Dickson maintains that as leaders we must learn to respect and care even for those with whom we profoundly disagree. We maintain our convictions but choose never to allow them to become justification for thinking ourselves better than those with contrary convictions. We move beyond mere tolerance to true humility, the key to harmony at the societal level. (p. 170).