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Visible humility in the middle of the thirteenth century: William Peraldus's *signa humilitatis*

Abstract

In the middle of the thirteenth century in Lyon, the Dominican William Peraldus (ca. 1200-ca. 1271) compiled a list of signs of humility (signa humilitatis) as part of his treatment of the virtue in his highly successful "Summa de virtutibus", which was preceded by a "Summa de vitiis". In this paper, I examine the epistemic value of Peraldus's list of signs of humility and the logic that underlies it. I situate Peraldus's "aesthetics of humility", which I analyze as a gender-sensitive "aesthetics of concealment", within the broader context of instructing proper behavior and shaping character, a task Peraldus explicitly undertook, and I connect it to the wider theologico-soteriological framework he shared with his readership. Finally, I argue that the treatment of the signs of humility, alongside the indicators of pride in the "Summa de vitiis", responds to widespread concerns about the aesthetics of morally ambiguous traits such as humility and pride.

Keywords

Aesthetics and morality, William Peraldus, Humility (history of)

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1. *A list of signs**

In the mid-thirteenth century, the Dominican William Peraldus (ca. 1200-ca. 1271), who was likely educated in Paris and served as a friar and prior in Lyon, compiled a list of signs of humility (*signa humilitatis*) as part of his treatment of this virtue in the *Summa de virtutibus*¹. These signs include: first, loving other humble individuals; second, avoiding opportunities for exaltation; third, loving one's own mediocrity; fourth, willingly undertaking menial tasks; fifth, following advice; sixth, meekly enduring offenses or scolding; seventh, valuing discretion; and eighth, gladly obeying².

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¹ William Peraldus's *Summa de virtutibus* is quoted here and elsewhere according to the text of a thirteenth-century manuscript containing both the *Summa de virtutibus* and the *Summa de vitiis*: Laon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 126, ff. 1ra-118va, 119ra-197va. I am grateful to Richard G. Newhauser for directing me to this manuscript as a reliable witness to the *Summae*.

² "Sequitur de signis humilitatis, qui multa sunt. Primum est amor humilium personarum. Eccl. 13: Omne animal diligit simile sibi. Secundum est fuga altitudinis. Humilitas laudes fugit sicut venenum et sicut sagittas mellitas et ut sermones fascinantes. [...] Christus, qui vere humilis erat, fugit volentes eum rapere in regem. Io. 6. Tertium est amor propriae vilitatis. Bernardus: Verus humilis vilis vult reputari, non humilis praedicari. Gaudet de contemptu sui, hoc solo sane superbus, quod laudes contempnit. De hoc exemplum habemus in David 2. Reg. 6: Ludam, inquit, et vilior fiam. Et in Dialogo Gregorii legitur de quodam statura parvo qui Constantinus dicebatur, quod cum dixisset ei quidam quod nihil hominis haberet, protinus laetus in amplexum eius ruit, eumque ex amore nimio constringere brachiis coepit et osculari, magnasque gratias agere quod de se talia indicasset, dicens: Tu solus es qui in me oculos apertos habuisti. [...] Unde sicut superbia gaudet de gloria, sic humilitas de ignominiam. Humilitati ea sunt preciosa quae alii essent vilia. Ipsa enim spiritum abominationis et contemptus convertit quasi in aurum et gemmas. Ipsa vilis vult videri aliis, sicut et sibi vilis videtur. Et quanto est sibi vilior, tanto est Deo preciosior. [...] Quartum est, si humilia officia libenter quis facit. De hoc exemplum habemus in Abigail, 1 Reg. 25, pro qua cum misisset David ut ea duceret in uxorem, ipsa ait: Ecce famula tua fit in ancillam, ut lavet pedes servorum domini mei. In Vitis Patrum quidam senex perfectus virtutibus oravit Dominum: Ostende mihi Domine quid sit perfectio anime, et faciam. Et cum requireret consilium a quodam alio sene, ille respondit ei de hoc per revelationem: Vis facere

Before Peraldus, other authors had expressed the idea that signs of humility can be detected in a person's behavior, body, clothing, and gestures. In the fourth century, John Cassian, a central figure in the development of monasticism, laid out a set of *indicia* by means of which humility could be verified in his *De institutis coenobiorum*³ (Adnès 1969: 1163). In his extensive ethical work *Speculum universale* (Ernst 2021), and particularly in his treatment of *penitentia*, the theologian Radulfus Ardens (ca. 1140-ca. 1200) linked *contritio cordis* with *patientia* and *humilitas*, as states of mind that possess corresponding outward signs. The specific signs of humility – which indicate contrition of the heart, albeit quite obscurely – are “humility in dress, appearance, and gestures; self-effacement; and a vigorous reproaching of oneself”⁴. In describing the clothing rules for novices, Hugh of

quicquid dico tibi. At ille: volo. Et dixit: Vade, pasce porcos. Et fecit sic. Et cum alii viderent quod pasceret porcos, dixerunt quod factus esset fatuus. Et visa humilitate eius, revocatus est ad locum suum. Quintum est, si consilio acquiescit, sicut hoc quod aliquis non acquiescit consilio, signum est superbiae. [...] Sextum est, si contumeliam vel etiam correptionem mansuete audit. Gregorius: Qui gloriam non querit, contumeliam non sentit. Idem: Non timet confundi in conspectu hominum qui solum gloriam quaerit apud Deum. Septimum est, si secretum diligit. Bernardus loquens de illo verbo 2. Ad Cor. 12: Parco autem etc.: Quam pulchre, inquit, dicit parco. Non parcit sibi arrogans, non superbus, non cupidus vanae gloriae, vel iactator actuum suorum, qui vel sibi arrogat, vel mentitur de se quod non est. Solus vere humilis parcit animae suae, qui ne putetur quod non est, semper quantum in se est, vult nesciri quod est. Octavum est, si libenter obedit [...]. Qui enim humilis non est, non libenter obedit” (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, ff. 112va-113rb).

³ “Humilitas uero his indiciis conprobatur: primo si mortificatas in sese omnes habeat uoluntates, secundo si non solum suorum actuum, uerum etiam cogitationum nihil suum celauerit seniore, tertio si nihil suae discretionis, sed iudicio eius uniuersa committat ac monita eius sitiens ac libenter auscultet, quarto si in omnibus seruet oboedientiae mansuetudinem patientiae que constantiam, quinto si non solum iniuriam inferat nulli, sed ne ab alio quidem sibimet inrogatam doleat atque tristetur, sexto si nihil agat, nihil praesumat, quod non uel communis regula uel maiorum cohortantur exempla, septimo si omni uilitate contentus sit et ad omnia se quae sibi praebentur uelut operarium malum iudicari indignum, octauo si semet ipsum cunctis inferiorem non superficie pronuntiet labiorum, sed intimo cordis credat affectu, nono si linguam cohibeat uel non sit clamosus in uoce, decimo si non sit facilis ac promptus in risu” (Iohannes Cassianus 1888: 75, 1-76, 1).

⁴ “Enimvero qui sic se coram Deo accusat, dignus est excusari; qui sic in se testificatur, dignus est tegi; qui sic seipsum dampnat, dignus est absolui; qui sic seipsum punit, dignus est dimitti; qui tales habet intercessores, dignus est exaudiri; qui tales habet fideiussores, dignus est liberari. Porro cum cordis contritione humilitas et patientia inseparabiliter in mente committentur, deprehenditur exterius ipsa cordis contritio aut per propria signa aut per signa patientiae aut per signa humilitatis. Et signa quidem pro-

Saint Victor (ca. 1096-1141), whose influential writings were often quoted in relation to matters concerning the discipline of humility (Negri 2016), stated that garments ought to bear a sign of humility in their form, in addition to being decent and reverent. This meant that they should be “neither too large, hanging, or loose, nor too tight, nor in any other way twisted according to the vanity of the world”⁵.

In contrast, Peraldus deliberately collected signs of humility and presented them in a schematic, easy-to-remember form in an ethical work written for preachers and confessors, thereby turning them into material for both the judging and counseling of others. Peraldus completed his *Summa de virtutibus* just a few years after having written a *Summa de vitiis* (Dondaine 1948; Verweij 2006; Brown 2007; Newhauser 2014; Newhauser 2016; Wenzel 2017; Newhauser 2022). The works circulated, either together or separately, in complete or abridged form, in more than 1,000 manuscripts and can be considered as “the most influential pastoral treatments of ethics produced in the late Middle Ages” (Newhauser 2018: 187). In the work, positive moral attitudes are systematized in light of the canon of theological and cardinal virtues that had become firmly established by the thirteenth century (Newhauser 1993). The theological virtues take up proportionally more space than the cardinal ones, which are further divided into multiple subspecies. The theological and cardinal virtues are followed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and, finally, the Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew. Humility is presented as a Beatitude –

pria contritionis sunt gemitus, suspiria, planctus et lamenta. Cognoscitur autem contritio aperte per gemitus et suspiria, apertius per planctus, apertissime per lamenta. Signa uero patientie sunt et patienter et amabiliter amplecti illatam accusationem, obiurgationem et satisfactionis grauitatem. Signa uero humilitatis sunt humilitas habitus, uultus et gestus, abiectio sui, uehementia seipsum accusandi. Per signa igitur propria contritio demonstratur, per signa patientie intelligitur, per signa humilitatis significatur. Per prima clare, per secunda obscure, per tertia obscurius significatur” (Radulfus Ardens 2020: 274, 2729-275, 2745).

⁵ “In habitu quinque modis disciplina custoditur: in genere et qualitate, in colore et formatione, et coaptatione uestimentorum [...]. In formatione, ut sint decenter et religiose composita et humilitatis signum habentia, id est non nimis magna aut dependentia aut fluxa, nec nimis stricta siue quolibet alio modo secundum seculi uanitatem detorta” (Hugo de Sancto Victore 1997: 50, 490 and 495).

specifically as an aspect of poverty of spirit – and as the opposite of *superbia* (pride), the latter being a common feature in the traditional classifications of humility (Newhauser 2008; Vecchio 2022)⁶.

The first definition of humility that Peraldus cites and briefly comments on is the widely disseminated (pseudo-)Augustinian statement: “Humility is a voluntary inclination of the mind, arising from the awareness of one’s own condition and of one’s creator, ordered in the inmost self toward its creator”⁷. Other definitions followed, reflecting the characteristic structure of Peraldus’s work as a mosaic of quotations – mainly from the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and Bernard of Clairvaux – interwoven with brief commentaries and arguments and further supported by additional citations. In the case of Bernard of Clairvaux, Peraldus commented on his two definitions of humility, stating that they refer to two different aspects of humility: one epistemic, as it corresponds to true knowledge of one’s own shortcomings, and the other affective, as it consists in despising one’s own excellence⁸.

In Peraldus’s *Summa*, the chapters dedicated to humility are organized into five parts: its definitions (*de humilitatis descriptione*) (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, ff. 109rb-109va), its praise (*de humilitatis commendatione*) (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, ff. 109rb-109va), its motives (*de causis humilitatis*) (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, ff. 111va-112vb), its signs (*de humilitatis signis*) (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, ff. 112vb-113ra), and its divisions (*de divisione humilitatis*) (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, ff. 113ra)⁹. While we find equivalents to the first sections, and even the final section on “divisions”, in the case of almost all the other virtues, discussions of the “signs” of a virtue are rarer in the *Summa*. Indeed, aside

⁶ “Consequenter agendum est de his in quibus consistit paupertas spiritus, scilicet de humilitate [...]. Et primus agetur de humilitate, sicut enim initium omnis peccati superbia” (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, f. 109rb).

⁷ “Humilitas est ex intuitu propriae conditionis et sui conditoris voluntaria mentis inclinatio in suo imo ordinabili ad suum conditorem” (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, f. 109rb).

⁸ “Bernardus in libro De XII gradibus humilitatis eam sic describit: humilitas est virtus qua homo verissima sui cognitione sibi ipsi vilescit. In Epistulis vero sic eam describit: Humilitas est contemptus proprie excellencie. Prior descriptio Bernardi videtur pertinere ad humilitatem intellectus, sequens vero ad humilitatem effectus” (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, f. 109va).

⁹ These divisions were explicitly indicated as such – typically, as rubricated titles – also in early manuscripts of the *Summa de virtutibus*. See also e.g. France, Troyes, Médiathèque Jacques-Chirac, 962, f. 280 ff.; *De signis humilitatis*, ff. 288v-289r.

from humility, the only other virtue in relation to which signs are systematically articulated is the love for God¹⁰. In that context, signs enable a careful assessment (*perpendi*) of emotional states and passions, such as love, in human beings. Lovers of God are characterized, among other things, by the delight they take in thinking about God, visiting his house, speaking about or with him, and listening to him (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, f. 42ra-b). Similarly, when it comes to the signs of humility, there is a close connection between signs and emotions: the signs of humility manifest themselves either as specific passions directed toward particular objects, such as a love for humble individuals, love of one's own irrelevance, or love of discretion, or as emotions that accompany and qualify actions, such as "gladly" undertaking humble tasks or "happily" obeying. Just like emotions, signs manifest themselves to the senses.

In the thirteenth century, the term *signum* was commonly employed in the sciences of the *trivium*, in philosophical-theological discourse, and in the fields of medicine and law (Meier-Oeser 2011). In the juridical sphere, for example, signs were unique and exclusive drawings chosen by notaries to accompany their names in document subscriptions. Each *signum* identified a single notary and served as proof of the authenticity of legal acts (Rovere 2022). Several centuries earlier, Augustine of Hippo had elaborated a complex theory of signs, which was still highly influential at the time when Peraldus wrote his *Summa*. In Augustine's works, a sign is understood as something that falls under the senses and conveys to the mind a meaning that goes beyond the sign itself (Wienbruch 1971). Regardless of whether Peraldus was committed to the Augustinian conception of a sign (he was not a theoretician, but was primarily concerned with the didactics of morality), in writing about the external signs that humble individuals bear, he assumes that they manifest something beyond themselves – that is, a certain mental trait. Peraldus refers to certain allegedly observable phenomena – i.e., behaviors and emotions – that his audience would have likely associated with specific mental attitudes. In particular, humility, as an "inclination of the mind" defined by the recognition of one's positionality and shortcomings and by a disregard for one's own excellence, is taken as a prerequisite for the willingness to negotiate and balance power.

According to Peraldus, discerning what is worth showing (and to whom) and what should be concealed (and from whom) is crucial for recognizing

¹⁰ "Notandum ergo quod decem sunt signa quibus perpendi potest utrum aliquis amet Deum" (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, f. 42ra).

and practicing humility, as well as for resisting its vicious opposite, pride. Yet the logic of concealment and disclosure, which is closely bound up with the polar opposition between humility and pride, is also presented as foundational to the broader task of teaching the virtues. In the prologue of the work, where he presents himself as “the lowliest of the Order of Preachers”, who “wished to gather certain things found scattered in writings on the virtues”, Peraldus declares that he has dared to compose a *Tractatus virtutum* “for the benefit of the humble”¹¹. The proud, he continues, cannot even approach the work or its contents: they disdain to sit at the common table with the others and spurn the *scripta communia*. “Thus”, he writes, “at the very moment when some writing is made public to the humble, it is hidden from the proud”¹². The imagined readership of the *Summa de virtutibus* is therefore, at least in the rhetorical gesture that constitutes it, a “protected” community comprising those capable of shared participation, of seeing what is made public with regard to virtues.

In this paper, I will examine the epistemic value of Peraldus’s list of signs of humility and its underlying logic. I will situate his “aesthetics of humility” within the broader context of instruction concerning proper behavior and character formation – a task he deliberately undertook – and connect it to the wider theologico-soteriological framework that he shared with his readership. Finally, I will argue that the fact that the signs of humility are discussed alongside the indicators of pride in the *Summa de vitiis* is a response both to widespread concerns about the aesthetics of morally ambiguous traits, such as humility and pride, and to questions about the moral negotiation of aesthetics. William Peraldus belonged to a generation of preachers and scholars who, in their writings, pursued ambitions connected to the “education of the senses” (Newhauser 2022: 97; Newhauser 2016) and to what we might more broadly call an “aesthetic education” in urban contexts, where moderation and prudent economy were increasingly valued (Muzzarelli 2019, 2021; Negri 2023; and, for another perspective, Stahlbuhk 2021).

¹¹ “[...] ausus sum aggredi tractatum virtutum ad humilitatem humilium” (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 2 rb).

¹² “Superbi enim dimittendi sunt sibi, quia separatim est convivium eorum, Osee 4. Deditur enim sedere ad commune mensam cum aliis, scripta communia contemnentes. Unde eo ipso quod aliqua scriptura humilibus publicatur, superbis absconditur. Facies enim eorum nimis inflata non finit eos videre que ab aliis videntur” (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 2rb).

2. *The craft of virtuous behavior*

In fact, Peraldus did not specify whether the purpose of his semiotics of humility was to instruct others about how to put humility into practice or about how to detect someone else's humility (or the absence thereof). In all likelihood, it served both functions. I believe that we ought to situate Peraldus's systematization of the "signs of humility" within the broader context of the textual codification of orthopraxis for a diverse segment of believers in the thirteenth century – namely, those targeted by confessors and preachers. As Mary Carruthers puts it, "orthopraxis emphasizes a set of experiences and techniques, conceived as a 'way' to be followed" (Carruthers 1998: 1). Within a religious framework, orthopraxis "relies upon patterns of oral formulae and ritualized behavior to prepare for an experience of God" (Carruthers 1998: 1). However, "orthopraxis" extends far beyond religion to encompass everything that ought to be learned through practice – and, more specifically, through "practical imitation and complete familiarization of exemplary masters' techniques and experiences" (Carruthers 1998: 1). Carruthers emphasizes that early monastic education, whose specific craft she identifies as meditation, functioned, exactly like any other craft, following an "apprenticeship model" (Carruthers 1998: 2). Discipline, which encompassed intellectual and moral education, socialization to shared norms, and adherence to common aesthetic values, was considered a craft in early European monastic communities. Within the Benedictine monastic model, the cultivation of specific habits or virtues – such as taciturnity, obedience, and humility – functioned as a subset of the broader "apprenticeship model", in which rule and lifestyle converged and in which shaping individuals was a collective endeavor (Negri 2016). From the twelfth century onwards, communities of shared values – be they religious or mundane – consistently became more diverse, and orthopraxis in the moral sphere became an increasingly widespread concern (Breitenstein 2024). Accordingly, the "apprenticeship model" was discursively, medially, and practically reshaped, reinvented, expanded, and transplanted (Pansters 2015). Given that the majority of the people who were supposed to be trained in moral discipline were not primarily living within communities, such as monasteries or cloisters, that followed a single rule and example, new strategies for transmitting the "craft of virtuous behavior" were pursued.

Examples, quotations, definitions, distinctions, and practical advice were now integrated to create manuals with both theoretical and practical value, such as the manuals on vices and virtues that circulated widely

from the twelfth to the fifteenth century (Newhauser 1993; Casagrande, Vecchio 2000; Casagrande 2015). These works belonged to a category of tools designed for the moral apprenticeship of teachers and pupils alike. Dominicans like William Peraldus were concerned with the spiritual and moral training of confessors and preachers, as well as of laypeople from different social classes (Wenzel 2017). The apprenticeship in virtues and vices was multifaceted: the tools provided needed to be systematic and general, yet sufficiently detailed to enable communication and, ultimately, the acquisition of the skills required to act appropriately and virtuously, as well as to navigate social life through the negotiation of appearances.

A list of signs of humility was a response to both the necessity of abstraction and generalization, and – precisely because it hinted at something observable – to the need to visualize ways of being and doing things correctly. In the chapters dedicated to the signs of humility, Peraldus is reticent to provide further details about the agglomeration of passions, feelings, and actions that marks those who are humble. Examples taken from the Scriptures vividly reinforce the list of *signa humilitatis*. Jesus Christ, the truly humble one, in fleeing those who sought to make him king (John 6:1-15), embodies the notion of refusing a position to which one is entitled due to one's excellence (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 112va). Likewise, Abigail, who declares to her future spouse David that she is the servant who washes the feet of her lord's servants, and an old man from the *Vitae Patrum*, who seeks the soul's perfection and is sent to feed pigs, exemplify the willingness to undertake lowly tasks¹³. These examples are rhetorically powerful and point to a shared imagery. However, they are less helpful in determining the specific situations in which signs of humility could be "recognized" in individual cases. The impression that one has when reading the chapter is that Peraldus intentionally left the list vague and open-ended, thus inviting interpretative attempts from his readers and confronting them with the challenge of applying theory to practice.

¹³ "De hoc exemplum habemus in Abigail 1. Reg. 25, pro qua cum misisset David ut eam duceret in uxorem, ipsa ait: Ecce famula tua sit in ancillam, ut lavet pedes servorum domini mei. In Vitae Patrum quidam senex perfectus virtutibus oravit Dominum: Ostende mihi Domine quid sit perfectio anime, et faciam. Et cum requireret consilium a quodam alio sene, ille respondit ei de hoc per revelationem: Vis facere quicquid dico tibi. At ille: volo. Et dixit: Vade, pasce porcos. Et fecit sic. Et cum alii viderent quod pasceret porcos, dixerunt quod factus esset fatuus. Et visa humilitate eius, revocatus est ad locum suum" (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 112va). On the scriptural and liturgical aspects of feet washing, especially with reference to humility, as a praxis of Clara of Assisi, see Dalarun 2012.

We must, of course, bear in mind that, in composing his list, Peraldus relied on sources and motifs that already belonged to a shared horizon of references, at least within the social group to which he belonged – namely, that of a learned elite engaged in pastoral and didactic activities. For example, what Peraldus identifies as the third sign of humility (*amor propriae vilitatis*) was constructed around the Bernardine conception of true humility – that is, a humility recognizable as the trait of someone who does not wish to be praised as humble, but rather regarded as lowly, someone who avoids having his merits recognized, above all the merit of humility (Dreyer 2008). Salimbene de Adam, a Franciscan contemporary of Peraldus, whom he once met in Vienna¹⁴, referred in his *Chronicle* to the same quotation Peraldus employed (“Verus humilis vilis vult reputari, non humilis praedicari”)¹⁵ when describing the Friar Minor Nicola da Montefeltro as the humblest human being he had ever met¹⁶. In making this judgment, he relied upon what Peraldus would have called “signs” (Salimbene himself did not do so). Nicola, who was a stout man in his later

¹⁴ “Et cum essem aliquando Vienne, venit frater Guilielmus ex Ordine Predicatorum, qui fecerat Summam de vitiis et virtutibus, de Lugduno Viennam causa predicandi et confessiones audiendi. Et quia in civitate illa fratres Predicatores locum non habebant, declinavit ad hospitandum cum Minoribus fratribus; et placuit guardiano quod eum associarem, et familiariter fui cum eo, et ipse me cum, quia humilis et curialis homo erat, quamvis parve stature” (Salimbene de Adam 1998-1999: 334, 27ff).

¹⁵ “Appetere autem de humilitate laudem, humilitatis non est virtus, sed subversio. Verus humilis vilis vult reputari, non humilis praedicari. Gaudet contemptu sui, hoc solo sane superbus quod laudes contemnit. Quid perversius, quid ve indignius, ut humilitatis custos, confessio, superbiae militet, et inde velis videri melior, unde videris deterior? Mirabile iactantiae genus, ut non possis putari sanctus, si non appareas sceleratus. At talis confessio speciem habens humilitatis, non virtutem, non solum veniam non mereatur, sed et provocat iram” (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1957: 95, 6-12).

¹⁶ “Accedamus iam nunc ad fratrem Nicholam de Monte Feltro et de eo breviter aliquid dicamus [...]. Hic fuit humilis super omnes homines quos unquam vidi in mundo [...]. Hic non reputabat se aliquid esse nec reputari volebat, et ideo verus humilis fuit, sicut dicit beatus Bernardus: Verus humilis vilis vult reputari, non humilis predicari [...]. Tante enim humilitatis fuit, ut, cum aliquis vellet sibi reverentiam facere, statim in terra prostratus osculabatur pedes eius, si poterat. Omnibus se reputabat indignum, omnes superiores se arbitrabatur, credens veraciter ita esse. Hic, quando pulsabatur campanella refectorii ad comedendum, primus erat qui veniebat ad ponendum aquam in lavatorium manuum fratrum. Cum autem veniebant fratres forenses, primus erat qui ibat ad lavandum eis pedes. Et cum esset ineptus, quantum ad apparentiam, ad talia officia facienda, eo quod corpulentus homo esset et senex, tamen caritas et humilitas et sanctitas et curialitas et liberalitas et alacritas eum habilem, placentem et ydoneum faciebant” (Salimbene de Adam 1998-1999: 809 [14, 18, 22, 28-31]-810, 3).

years and whom Salimbene probably encountered in Bologna, saw himself as worthless and, as Salimbene emphasizes, truly believed that everyone else was better than him: when someone tried to show him reverence, he would throw himself to the ground and kiss their feet; when the bell rang in the refectory, he was the first to fetch water so that the other friars could wash their hands; and when strangers arrived at the convent, he immediately washed their feet. Indeed, happily taking on tasks proper to servants, whether within or outside the convent – the fourth of Peraldus's signs of humility – had, by the thirteenth century, become a recognized criterion for assessing humility (or for displaying it, depending on which side one chooses to emphasize) and continued to be seen as such long after.

3. *From signs to cities*

Returning to Peraldus's list, one should note that the indicators of humility in the *Summa de virtutibus* are not arranged according to an explicit ascending or descending order, in which certain signs would appear or become recognizable before others, nor is there a hierarchy of importance among them. It is also not specified whether all the signs of humility must occur together or whether a certain minimal number of them must be detectable for someone to be considered humble. The logic underling their organization differs from the systematization of humility into degrees – a pattern already developed by the *Regula Benedicti* and Bernard of Clairvaux, and one that would continue to shape treatments of humility at least until the fifteenth century (Adnès 1969: 1163-6; de Vogüé 2001; Bellitto 2023: 52-63). In these systems, an upward movement was implicitly or explicitly articulated, involving a progression from the first and lowest (i.e., introductory and preparatory) steps to the higher ones. What is distinctive about signs, in contrast to degrees, of humility is that the former can be seen and must be interpreted. When placed within the appropriate frame of reference, they acquire meaning and point to what they truly signify – although the opposite may also occur. In the case of signs borne by human beings to indicate their qualities, observers and interpreters are necessary in order for them to function as signs. The visibility of humility via external expressions (i.e., its aesthetic dimension) is the focal point here.

To be sure, in the theological tradition to which Peraldus belonged, humility and pride were regarded as more than mere states of mind. What

was at stake was something deeper than the simple act of correctly interpreting signs (Bellitto 2023: ch. 3). In a passage known and cited by Peraldus, Gregorius Magnus describes humility itself as the clearest sign that someone belongs to the elect, whereas its opposite, pride (*superbia*), unmistakably points to the execrable¹⁷ (Baasten 1986). At the core of the symptomology of humility (as well as of the love of God), there was a soteriological or – as Peter von Moos expressed it – a “soterio-psychological” issue that had been formalized by Augustine. For Augustine, the hallmark of the citizens of the damned city is pride and self-love, while the distinguishing trait of the inhabitants of the blessed city, God’s lovers, is humility (Baumann 2009; 2020). Therefore, the ability to recognize both pride and humility in a person’s soul is ultimately a matter of discerning which group one truly belongs to, from the perspective of eternal salvation or damnation. However, in this life, a fundamental uncertainty, a crucial secret, marks every soul: the uncertainty of whether we belong to either the city of the devil or the city of God (Von Moos 2007: 9). In *Sermo* 32 of the collection *Sermones ad populum*, in which Augustine comments on Psalm 143 – the psalm of David against Goliath, with the chant *Homo vanitati similis factus est* – Goliath’s forehead (which received the fatal stone) is depicted as “the forehead that bore the insolence of its pride”, whereas David’s is “the forehead bearing the humility of Christ’s cross”. This is why, Augustine continues, Christians bear the sign of Christ’s cross on their foreheads: the cross is the mark of Jesus’s humility. In any case, Augustine warns against mechanically reproducing the sign without understanding it, urging that the outward sign of humility correspond to a genuine inner imitation of Christ’s humility¹⁸.

As Peter von Moos observes, within this “soterio-psychological” paradigm, no human can properly know “the secrets of the heart”. Only God can. Human beings can merely look to signs that hint at a hidden truth about

¹⁷ “Diabolus enim est rex super omnes filios superbiae, ut legitur in Iob. Et sic dicit Gregorius: Evidentissimum signum reproborum est superbia, humilitas electorum” (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 166v. See also Gregorius Magnus 1985: 1742).

¹⁸ “Goliath autem de se, de viribus suis, superbus, elatus, inflatus, primo totam uictoriam uniuersae partis suae in se uno constituit. Et quia omnis superbia habet impudentiam frontis, in ipsam frontem lapide ueniente deiectus est. Euacuata est frons quae habebat impudentiam superbiae suae, et uicit frons quae habebat humilitatem crucis Christi. Propterea et nos signum ipsum crucis in fronte portamus. Qui illud intellegit? Hoc dixi, fratres, quia multi illud faciunt et intellegere nolunt. Factorem quaerit deus signorum suorum, non pictorem. Si portas in fronte signum humilitatis Christi, porta in corde imitationem humilitatis Christi” (Augustinus 1961: 404, 235-45).

which city they belong to (Von Moos 2007: 9). Hence, the semiotics of pride and humility provide material for a provisional diagnosis – one that requires a specific hermeneutic approach to decipher its indicators.

The vice opposed to humility – namely, pride (*superbia*) – was thought to be quite recognizable in people and their exaggerated search for visibility and power (Casagrande, Vecchio 2000). In his long, almost obsessively detailed discussion of pride, which he wrote prior to the chapter on humility, Peraldus distinguishes between an internal pride, which is either intellectual or affective, and an external pride (Newhauser 2016: 251-6). On his account, external pride proceeds from internal pride and makes it visible¹⁹. It manifests itself primarily in the body (e.g., the mouth uttering stupid words, elevated eyes, an upright neck) (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 166rb) and its adornments, but also in possessions such as horses, buildings, or precious books.

Still, pride can be elusive, especially when it belongs to a species less prone to externalization. The issue of pride disguising itself as humility, or the paradox of false humility turning into pride, was well known to the Church Fathers (Casagrande, Vecchio 2000: 21-2). Paradoxically, the two qualities of the soul that served as indicators of one's destiny (i.e., pride and humility) could be confused with one another. In other words, signs of the soul's condition did not function like a notary's *signa*. In Christian Europe from the thirteenth century onward, dealing professionally with this epistemic uncertainty became an essential part of the role of confessors and preachers. At this point, reading the secrets of the heart became a skill that now had to be trained – just as much as recognizing the signs of humility (Denery 2005: ch. 2).

The ideological foundations for the claim that it is necessary to provide tools for both practicing and recognizing humility are also illustrated in a passage of the *Summa de arte praedicandi* written by Thomas of Chobham (who studied in Paris under Peter the Chanter) between 1216 and 1222 – this was the time when knowledge about the benefits of humility, as the virtue opposed to the highest devilish sin, pride (*superbia*), likely started to be widely diffused through preaching (Dahan 2016). Recogniz-

¹⁹ "Vocatur autem superbia exterior aliquid extrinsecum quod a superbia interiore procedit, et eam ostendit. Et potest distingui ista superbia secundum diversitatem rerum, in quibus superbia hominum potest apparere. Potest autem apparere superbia hominum vel in ipso corpore, vel in equis, vel in ornatu, vel in amplitudine familie et in conviviis, in aedificiis, in deauratis libris" (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 166rb).

ing one's vices, and the corresponding failure to practice virtue, was integral to the sacrament of penitence and confession, which all Christians were required to undertake at least once a year, as reaffirmed in 1215 by the Fourth Lateran Council.

Thomas de Chobham gave preachers, both "theology doctors" and "clerks" (Thomas de Chobham 1988: 4, 37-47), very specific advice about how they should talk to lay people about humility: "quomodo predicandum sit laicis de speciebus fortitudinis. Et primo de humilitate" (Thomas de Chobham 1988: 239, 3016-7). Preaching humility should be based on the idea that humility is the highest virtue, just as pride is the biggest sin: "Si autem superbia maximum peccatum est, sicut dicunt sancti, oportet per locum a contrario quod humilitas maxima sit virtus" (Thomas de Chobham 1988: 239, 3019-21). While it was pride that led mankind to be cast out of paradise, it is humility that will lead us back. To enter heaven, we must bow our heads: "Unde patet quod non potest aliquis introire in regnum celorum nisi capite inclinato per humilitatem" (Thomas de Chobham 1988: 241, 3090-1).

No specific definition of humility (or pride) was given to the laity; instead, vivid representations drawing on the scriptures were offered. What is important here is that humility should be regarded not only as a sign of one's fitness to wield power, but also as a sign of predestination for heaven: "Sicut enim diabolus summam habuit superbiam, et ad illam hominem dolose induxit ut vellet esse sicut Deus, cum maior superbia ess non potuit, ita Dominus per humilitatem summam non reparavit, quia non potuit esse maior humilitas quam Deus voluit fieri homo" (Thomas de Chobham 1988: 239, 3035-240, 3039). Thomas of Chobham is explicit on this point: God recognizes his own by the signs of humility, just as the devil knows his followers by the marks of pride: "Sicut enim superbia manifestum signum est quod sub rege militat diabolo [...], ita e contrario manifestum est indicium humilitatis qui in iugo humilitatis dominice se subiecit [...]. Naturalis enim humilitas ita certum est signum predestinationis divine, quod ipsum numquam permittet perire" (Thomas de Chobham 1988: 241, 3070).

According to the author of the *Summa de arte praedicandi*, preaching should also serve as a deterrent, by instilling in the audience a fear of damnation (Thomas de Chobham 1988: 32, 469-70). The emphasis on the salvific power of humility – in contrast to the destructive consequences of pride – was likely part of a strategy aimed at encouraging, or at least identifying, humble behavior in others. Yet such behaviors were far from comprehensively defined or specified in Thomas's *Summa*.

4. *The dynamics of ambiguity*

As Richard Newhauser has shown, discourses on vices masquerading as virtues, along with allegorical and performative representations of the ambiguity inherent in the expression of both virtues and vices, have been part of the moral analysis of character traits since late Antiquity (Newhauser 2001). For both the learner and the teacher of virtuous conduct, the uncertainty involved in displaying and discerning true virtues, distinguishing them from vices concealed beneath the guise of virtue, was considerable – and this difficulty was addressed in different ways. In the case of humility, the challenges involved in correctly discerning it were greater, as it proved even more slippery: from very early on, feigned humility was regarded not as neutral, but as deeply negative, for it arose chiefly from the very opposite movement of the soul, from pride, the desire to be seen as virtuous (Newhauser 2001: 389).

However, according to Newhauser, the location of the ambiguity between virtues and vices – i.e., whether it lay in the soul of those torn between conflicting desires and intentions, thus giving off contradictory signs out of confusion (perhaps under demonic influence), or whether it arose from deliberate deception – varied according to contextual factors and, of course, the personal convictions of the authors who addressed the issue. In considering the time and religious context in which Peraldus was active (that of the Dominican Order), Newhauser offers an instructive observation with reference to Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, the hypocrite who conceals a vice beneath the guise of virtue (that is, who presents as virtuous what is in fact vicious) is always reprehensible, since such behavior arises from a deliberate intention to acquire or protect a good reputation (Newhauser 2001: 395-6). Seen from this perspective, moral ambiguity is not chiefly an inner struggle, but a matter of public negotiation and self-presentation within the social arena. The Dominican friar Iacopo Passavanti (ca. 1302-1357) (Macchiarelli 2020), whose discussion of humility in his *Mirror of true penitence*, including its signs, drew heavily on Peraldus's *Summa*, states the overlap between humility and hypocrisy quite plainly when commenting on Ecclesiastes 19:23: "We show the difference between true and false humility, that is, a false and contrived humility which exists only in outward appearance, like the feigned humility of hypocrites [...]"²⁰. Soon after, however, theological and moral discourse

²⁰ "E mostrasi la differenza tra la vera e la falsa umiltà ch'egli è una umiltà falsa e fitta ch'è solo nella vista di fuori, come l'umiltà infinta degl'ipocriti, della quale dice il savio Ecclesiastico: "Est qui nequiter se humiliat, interiora autem eius plena sunt dolo": egli è

would once again come to be dominated by uncertainties connected to the very experience of the self and self-knowledge (Newhauser 2001: 399; Denery 2005).

If it is plausible, as I have sought to show, that Peraldus's compilation of a list of signs of humility arose from the need to provide hermeneutical tools for deciphering human behaviors that could be interpreted in multiple ways, his endeavor also seems to have been shaped by an optimistic confidence in the correspondence between inner movements and intentions and their outward expression. Reading Peraldus beyond Peraldus, one might say that ambiguity in moral matters resided, for him, in the act of interpretation, rather than in the thing itself, just as deception was conceived of as the deliberate disruption of interpretive frameworks, rather than as the product of inner confusion. The very fact that signs of humility could be detected, recognized, counted, and set out in a list implied not only that humility could, and perhaps ought to, be expressed in specific ways, but also that these outward expressions could reliably reveal inner intentions.

A radical understanding of the connection between signs and what they signify – more specifically, between inner qualities and their outward expression – underlay Francis of Assisi's conception and lived experience of humility as material poverty (Pansters 2012). Francis fashioned a radical aestheticization of humility that became *eo ipso* a habit, a manufactured textile. The sign, the habit, was itself the thing signified: i.e., a humble soul (Salvati 2020: 234). In his *Historia Occidentalis*, Jacques de Vitry (1175/1180-1240) (Donnadieu 2014), an early and notable witness to the rise of the Franciscan Order, emphasizes its remarkable distinctiveness in matters of humility: "In truth, they are lesser and more humble than any religious of our time in dress, poverty, and contempt for the world" (*vere minores, et omnibus huius temporis regularibus in habitu et nuditate et mundi contemptu humiliores*) (Iacobus de Vitriaco 1972: 71-246; 158.20-159.1). In every "Christian province", the chronicler continues, "they present themselves before those who observe them as a shining mirror of contempt for secular vanity" (*non est aliqua christianorum provincia in qua aliquos de fratribus suis non habeant, qui in seipsis velut in speculo*

chi si umilia non dirittamente né veramente, ché quello ch'è dentro è pieno d'inganno. Vuole dire che l'umiltà mostrata solo ne' sembianti di fuori non è vera umiltà, ma conviene ch'ella sia principalmente dentro nel cuore, ché negli atti di fuori no sta la vera virtù, ma nella elezione mentale, ch'è dentro, come dicono i savi filosafi e dottori" (Pas-savanti 2014: 386-7).

mundissimo mundanae vanitatis contemptum oculis inspicientium representant) (Iacobus de Vitriaco 1972: 160, 16-8).

Perhaps as a reaction to the “hyperrealism” of Francis’s understanding of humility, which entailed a specific aesthetic of transparency (Salvati 2020: 234) – or perhaps because William was not primarily concerned with novices, whose formation involved a specific set of norms regarding humility in gestures, posture, and clothing – textiles are notably absent from Peraldus’s list of signs of humility. This absence is striking, as the imagery of humility, both in Peraldus’s time and in the years that followed, was closely tied to that of vesture (Negri 2018). To take another example as a point of comparison: In his *Epistula de tribus votis substantialibus religionis*, Humbertus de Romanis (ca. 1200-1277) (Oberste 2002), Master General of the Dominicans from 1254 to 1263, included clothing (one should not wear eye-catching attire), in his enumeration of the signs of humility²¹. According to Humbertus, “humility adorns our actions with its beauty” (*Ipsa enim humilitas virtutes caeteras conservat, capiti nostro nos assimilat, actiones pulchritudine sua ornat*) (Humbertus de Romanis 1888: 22, 8). By contrast, no reference to beauty in connection with humility is found in Peraldus’s treatment of the virtue. To be precise, Peraldus treated the avoidance of excess in clothing and concern for one’s corporal beauty as remedies for pride. He had, in fact, discussed humble attire and visible beauty in connection with humility some years before he wrote on the virtues, in the context of his treatment of pride. It is there that one can probe more deeply his conception of moral and social aesthetics.

²¹ “Signa humilitatis sunt gratiam hominum negligere, sentiis aliorum acquiescere, correctiones libenter audire, caput inclinare, vestes notabiles non ferre, risum temperare, ampullosa verba non proferre, tortuosum incessum vitare, majorum praecepta sine discussione perficere, aequalibus ad obsequia paratum esse, minores non contemnere, simplici gradi via, nunquam duplicitatis aut fictionis vestigium praetendere, in litibus nolle victoriam obtinere [...]. In vestimentis servetis tale medium, ut nec curiositate nec pretiositate sint notabilia, nec etiam vilitate nimia deturpata” (Humbertus de Romanis 1888: 21-2).

5. *Aesthetics of concealment*

Most of the signs of humility listed by Guillelmus Peraldus involve a conception of humility as an intentional mode of relating, in which power and influence are mutually negotiated along an axis spanning high and low²². These include: loving other humble individuals, avoiding occasions for self-exaltation, willingly performing menial tasks, meekly enduring offenses or rebukes, and gladly embracing obedience. Other signs align with what contemporary theorists of humility describe as a proper sense of the self in relation to others: an awareness of one's moral and intellectual limitations that entails a reflexive movement between self and community, as well as a sensitivity to the mutual gaze. These signs include: loving one's own mediocrity, shunning public celebration, and choosing to conceal whatever is most precious, even from oneself. It is this latter dimension, closely tied to the dynamics of visibility and concealment, that unveils the aesthetic framework implicit in Peraldus's catalogue of humility, as I will try to show in what follows.

The relatively unspecific treatment of the signs of humility in Peraldus's *Summa de virtutibus* contrasts with the highly detailed and gender sensitive description of the expressions of pride in clothing and possessions found in his *Summa de vitiis*. When addressing the topic of external pride and its manifestations, Peraldus devoted several pages to the negative excesses of dressing, adorning oneself, and celebrating beauty (*pulchritudo*), particularly in women and those in positions of power (Newhauser 2016: 255-6). Sensible beauty (*pulchritudo*) is presented as a distinctly feminine value that may stand in tension with goodness and, above all, is potentially dangerous: "It is, namely, something like a treasure publicly displayed, desired by many"²³. According to Peraldus, it is foolish to strive after visible beauty, especially by wearing luxurious clothing, because – and this is only the first of many reasons he offers – by adorning the body, which is merely the base covering of what is truly precious, the soul, one assigns greater value to the embellishment of what is in fact ignoble or ugly – namely, the body²⁴. By contrast, humble attire (*habitus*

²² See above, Fn. 3.

²³ "In magno periculo est pulchritudo mulieris. Est enim quasi thesaurus in aperto, qui a multis concupiscitur. Gregorius: Depredari desiderat, qui thesaurus publice in via portat" (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 146ra).

²⁴ "Notandum ergo quod prima stultitia ornantium se est quod ipsi exteriora sua que vilia sunt interioribus suis que preciosa sunt preponunt" (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 166vb).

humilis), like sackcloth is presented as both a remedy for the external pride expressed through clothing and an appropriate covering for one's precious interiority²⁵. Merchants, too, are depicted as models of prudent concealment: when they possess valuable textiles, they cover them with unworthy wrappings²⁶. The aesthetic of hiding – even wisdom, we are told, conceals herself “under a filthy cloak”²⁷ – follows a logic of preservation and is even naturalized: “Go and do the same; hide yourself beneath a humble garment. Our very nature itself counsels this, hiding beneath the lowliness of the earth gold and other precious things, and beneath the wrinkled skin the sweetness of the core”²⁸.

The economic metaphors involving value, preciousness, and the risk of theft also shape the imagery Peraldus mobilizes at the very beginning of the *Summa de virtutibus*. He opens the work with a quotation from Jeremiah 15:19, “if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman” (*Si separaveris preciosum a vili, quasi os meum eris*), and comments that what is truly valuable is the soul, recalling, with Proverbs 6:26, that “the woman stole the soul from the man”²⁹. Virtues, too, are valuable, whereas the body and material goods are worthless³⁰.

By drawing a sharp dichotomy between the valuable/spiritual/ virtuous/masculine and the worthless/bodily/vicious/feminine, Peraldus fashions a gendered morality aimed at detaching oneself from earthly and feminine values, in order to pursue spiritual, masculine goods. Within this

²⁵ “Secundo possumus uti contra superbiam ornatus exemplis. Multa autem sunt que exemplo suo dissuadent nobis superbum ornatum et suadent humilem habitum. Primo suadet nobis ipse deus, et hoc tripliciter (add. i. m.). Primo in plasmatione hominis. Voluit enim Deus preciosum spiritum sub vili sacco carnis abscondere. Nec est verisimile quod voluerit corpus quod vile est preciosum tegumentum habere, qui precioso spiritui vile tegumentum voluit dare. Secundo in hoc quod patribus nostris post peccatum tunicas pelliceas fecit [...]” (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 166va).

²⁶ “ad idem etiam monemur exemplum mercatorum, qui quando torsellum est de panno precioso, valde ipsi faciunt ipsi coperturam de butello” (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 166va).

²⁷ “Unde Sap.: sepe est sub palliolo sordido sapientia” (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 166va).

²⁸ “ad idem etiam monet nos ipsa natura, que sub terre vilitate aurum et alia preciosa abscondit, et sub vilitate corticis dulcedinem nuclei” (Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis*, f. 166va).

²⁹ “Si separaveris (corr. ex disceparaveris) preciosum a vili, quasi os meum eris. Ier. 15. Preciosum est anima, Pr. 6: Mulier animam viri preciosam rapit” (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, f. 2va).

³⁰ “Preciose etiam sunt virtutes [...] vilis vero est corpus [...] vilia etiam sunt bona temporalia” (Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus*, f. 2va).

framework, one can read further into the list of signs of humility. Humble behaviors serve to conceal one's status, merits, and power, as well as the soul's good qualities. They serve to preserve and safeguard what is "really" precious, the soul, and to conceal existing material privileges. According to Peraldus's dichotomy, dressing humbly, or at least avoiding excess, as well as undertaking menial tasks and concealing one's merits, are practices required of both men and women, since the list of the signs of humility in the *Summa de virtutibus* is not gendered. Yet these practices are framed as a distinctly masculine and virtuous way of safeguarding the good of the soul, its inner humility, while expressing it unambiguously through acts of voluntary concealment.

6. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to draw together the main points highlighted in this paper. In the mid-thirteenth century, William Peraldus, the author of one of the most – if not the most – influential *summae* on virtues and vices circulating in the late Middle Ages, undertook to articulate criteria that could be used to identify humility in human beings through visible signs. In doing so, he established and quantified aesthetic criteria, understood here as criteria for observing sensible phenomena, for assessing humility, a character trait he regarded as essential for negotiating power, as well as for recognizing one's own positionality and limitations. More than other virtues, humility challenged both theorists and practitioners, for its very visibility could be, or could be perceived as, a hypocritical display. It is not difficult to imagine how some of the signs listed by Peraldus could be observed: e.g., undertaking tasks proper to grooms or domestic servants, such as feeding animals or washing others, and doing so gladly, even if (or precisely because) one was not a servant, as well as, more generally, performing services when they were not required or accepting criticism without overreacting. Other signs pertain more to the sphere of emotions, such as loving other humble people or overtly rejecting compliments.

Peraldus's aesthetic of humility, I have argued, was conceptualized within a broader program of late medieval orthopractical education and anchored in a soterio-psychological paradigm – one formalized by Augustine and Gregory the Great and later absorbed by theologians and preachers such as Thomas of Chobham. Within this framework, humility was to be read as a sign that one belongs to the city of the elect, whereas pride

signified damnation. As the reading of signs became part of the professional practice of preachers and especially confessors, Peraldus's endeavor appears to have had a distinctly practical purpose. He belonged to a generation of authors who were convinced of the existence of a correspondence between signs and what they signify, as long as the right tools for deciphering these signs were available. I have characterized the quality of Peraldus's aesthetics of humility as an "aesthetics of concealment". The aesthetic value of embodied and practiced humility lies, according to Peraldus, in its capacity to conceal what is precious, thereby preserving it, while at the same time neutralizing its potentially dangerous, deceptive brilliance. Drawing on an anthropological perspective that dismissed the body and the bodily as unworthy and saw the soul and its qualities, namely the virtues, as truly precious, while also making use of economic imagery, Peraldus – at least in his treatment of humility and pride – conceived of ornaments, refined attire, and sensible beauty, which are all associated with the feminine, as dangerous and inappropriate, vulnerable to theft and misuse. Expressions of humility, whether through modest, unassuming attire, a love of discretion, or the willingness to perform menial tasks, functioned, within Peraldus's gendered conception of virtue, as an appropriate, virile covering for valuable spiritual goods.

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