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## **Manners and the Moral Life**

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## Manners and the Moral Life

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*'It starts when you begin to overlook bad manners. Any time you quit hearin Sir and Mam the end is pretty much in sight.'*<sup>1</sup>

These are the words of Sheriff Ed Tom Bell in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*, and they are offered as an explanation for the rise of an extreme and violent form of moral anarchy that he has witnessed in his lifetime and which the reader witnesses in the course of the novel. To many, this may seem like a surprising explanation. But the thought is in fact nothing new. A very similar idea is expressed, e.g., in Confucius's *Analects*, but the focus is on the effects of good manners rather than that of bad manners: 'The gentleman applies himself to the roots. 'Once the roots are firmly established, the Way [*Dao*] will grow.' Might we not say that filial piety [*xiao*] and respect for elders constitute the root of Goodness [*Ren*]?'<sup>2</sup> At the heart of the Confucian 'way' (*dao*) of life is the concept of *li*, which is often translated as 'ritual' but where this can be understood to include traditional norms of social propriety, or what we might simply call 'good manners'.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay I will explore the role of manners in the life of virtue, particularly with regard to their role in cultivating and then expressing virtue. The topic of manners is largely neglected among moral philosophers and when manners are discussed they are often seen as a separate domain from morality and as arbitrary (and potentially oppressive) social conventions that involve a significant degree of dishonesty (or inauthenticity).<sup>4</sup> I will seek to demonstrate how manners in fact have an integral role to

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<sup>1</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 304.

<sup>2</sup> *Analects*, 1.2, translated Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003 [c. 450 BC]).

<sup>3</sup> See Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), 411–20; and Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1972), 6–17.

<sup>4</sup> For a well-known representative of such a view of manners (though not so much with regard to the concern about oppression), see Philippa Foot, 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives', in *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). In this essay Foot speaks of 'etiquette' rather than 'manners', but I take them to be basically equivalent.

play in the moral life (i.e., the life of virtue) and how the concerns about arbitrariness and dishonesty can be overcome.

Discussions about manners typically focus on their role in the social life of *adults*. However, to properly appreciate the integral role of manners in the moral life we need to focus, first of all, on how teaching good manners to *children* is one of the key ways that we initiate them into the life of virtue. As this suggests, the approach developed here is strongly Aristotelian (and Confucian) in character, whereas recent philosophical discussions of manners that have seen moral value in them have tended to adopt a Kantian approach.<sup>5</sup> According to my Aristotelian-*cum*-Confucian approach, teaching good manners is a form of *habituation* into virtue as manners are *patterns of behavior*, often informed by culture and tradition. Before teaching young people about moral principles and theories, we teach them – if we are to teach them well – to say ‘please’, ‘thank you’, ‘you’re welcome’, ‘I’m sorry’, and ‘I forgive you’, and to act in ways that are kind, generous, fair, respectful, polite, considerate, and reverential.<sup>6</sup> In short, we teach them patterns of behavior (i.e., manners) that will help lead to a life of virtue. In this context I want to discuss three crucial functions of good manners.

## I

First of all, good manners *help social life to go well*. This is clearly part of what we want for our children when we teach them to say ‘please’, ‘thank you’, ‘you’re welcome’, ‘I’m sorry’, and ‘I forgive you’, and to act in ways that are kind, generous, fair, respectful, polite, and considerate.

Helping social life to go well is of course crucial for enabling one’s life as a whole to go well. This is because, as Aristotle puts it, human beings are by nature ‘political animals’.<sup>7</sup> One thing this means is that individual human beings lack the self-sufficiency for developing and achieving their full potential, which is only made possible by living in society with others. Aristotle says of the *polis* (i.e., the Ancient Greek ‘city-state’): ‘It comes to be for the sake of living, but it remains in existence for the sake of living well’.<sup>8</sup> Individual wellbeing is thus intimately bound up with the

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Sarah Buss, ‘Appearing Respectful: The Moral Significance of Manners’, *Ethics* 109 (1999): 795–826; Cheshire Calhoun, ‘The Virtue of Civility’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (2000): 251–75; Nancy Sherman, ‘Manners and Morals’, in *Stoic Warriors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Karen Stohr, *On Manners* (New York: Routledge, 2011). Stohr’s account does emphasize the importance of an Aristotelian understanding of practical wisdom.

<sup>6</sup> Consider, e.g., the following titles from a popular children’s book series: *The Berenstain Bears Say Please and Thank You*; *The Berenstain Bears Forget Their Manners*; *The Berenstain Bears Show Some Respect*; *The Berenstain Bears Learn to Share*; *The Berenstain Bears and the Truth*; *The Berenstain Bears: Kindness Counts*; etc.

<sup>7</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2014 [c. 325 BC]), I.7, 1097b9–12 and *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998 [c. 325 BC]), I.2, 1253a1–4.

<sup>8</sup> *Politics*, I.2, 1252b29–30; cf. III.9, 1280b29–1281a8.

wellbeing of the communities of which we are a part insofar as it is always in relation to parents, teachers, friends, neighbors, colleagues, strangers, etc., and the laws, customs, and institutions of a community that we acquire or fail to acquire the virtues and therefore that we achieve 'the good life' or fail to achieve it.

Alasdair MacIntyre provides an updated and expanded discussion of this point about our lack of self-sufficiency in *Dependent Rational Animals*. He argues that in order to become an 'independent practical reasoner' capable of achieving the good life we must participate in a 'network of relationships of giving and receiving' and acquire and exercise the 'virtues of acknowledged dependence', which, as the name suggests, require that we acknowledge and appropriately respond to the manifold ways that we all depend upon others over the course of our lives in order to live and to live well.<sup>9</sup> These virtues of acknowledged dependence sustain and enable the flourishing of networks of relationships of giving and receiving. Examples of such virtues include: gratitude, just generosity, hospitality, compassion (or kindness), mercy, and forgiveness. In light of this account, it seems clear that teaching children manners such as saying 'please', 'thank you', 'you're welcome', 'I'm sorry', and 'I forgive you', and acting kindly, generously, fairly, respectfully, politely, and considerately, is essential for cultivating the virtues of acknowledged dependence and thereby for sustaining and enabling the flourishing of networks of giving and receiving. Moreover, having acquired such virtues, exercising them will also necessarily involve such manners.

If we return to Aristotle's remark about our being by nature 'political animals', it is important to note that there is a second sense of this term: viz., we are political (i.e., social) animals in that human relationships are themselves a constitutive part of our fulfillment as human beings. This can be seen in Aristotle's account of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he says that the virtuous or 'decent' person's friend is regarded as 'another self' to whom the virtuous person wishes and pursues good for in the same way he or she wishes and pursues good for himself or herself.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the virtuous person wishes and pursues good for his or her friend for the friend's own sake precisely because he or she identifies with the friend's good such that he or she is happy (or fulfilled) when the friend is happy (and sad when the friend is sad). To say that friendship is important for achieving human fulfillment means that we can achieve greater fulfillment through identifying with the good of another person and through sharing deeply in life together than we can otherwise.<sup>11</sup> However, in order to achieve such human fulfillment through friendship we need to be capable of this best sort of friendship, which above all requires that we become virtuous or at least 'decent'

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<sup>9</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), chs. 1, 9–10. It should be noted that MacIntyre's book aims to correct the ways in which Aristotle does not go far enough in acknowledging our dependence or lack of self-sufficiency.

<sup>10</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.4.

<sup>11</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.9

(i.e., semi- or quasi-virtuous, given that full virtue is a demanding and rarely attained ideal). In other words, we must make ourselves *lovable*. The base or vicious person, by contrast, is not lovable in the required sense and so is incapable of such friendship (I affirm that there is a general love of humanity – ‘philanthropy’ – that is appropriate in virtue of all human beings possessing the same intrinsic dignity, but this is different from the kind of ‘lovableness’ at issue here with regard to the best kind of friendship). As Aristotle puts it: ‘A base person [...] is apparently not so disposed as to be fitted for friendship even toward himself, because he has nothing lovable. If, then, to be very much that way is wretched, we should be intensely active in avoiding depravity and in striving to be decent, since that way a person will be both fitted for friendship to himself and become friend to another’.<sup>12</sup> We can see here another aspect of why it is important to teach children good manners so that social life goes well: viz., the cultivation of good manners, by which we become virtuous (or decent), make us loveable. This point is well put by Roger Scruton:

Manners, properly understood, are the instruments whereby we negotiate our passage through the world, earn the respect and support of others, and form communities [...]. The fact that we can survive without manners [...] does not show that human nature doesn’t need them in some deeper way. [...] It is children who most vividly remind us of this truth. Because there is a deep-down need (a species need) to love and protect them, there is a deep-down need to make them loveable. In teaching them manners, we are putting the finishing touches on potential members of society, adding the polish that makes them agreeable (Etymologically, “polite” and “polished” are connected [...]). From the very outset, therefore, we strive to smooth away selfishness. We teach children to be considerate by compelling them to behave in considerate ways. The unruly, bullying, or smart-aleck child is at a great disadvantage in the world, cut off from the lasting sources of human fulfillment. His mother may love him, but others will fear or dislike him.<sup>13</sup>

## II

A second key function of good manners is that they often involve *ways of showing respect or reverence for that which is respect-worthy or reverence-worthy*. This of course can be connected to the previously mentioned function of good manners (e.g., showing respect for others helps social life go well). However, we should still show respect for what is respect-worthy (i.e., what has dignity) and reverence for what is reverence-worthy (i.e., what is sacred or holy) even if this does not aid our social life.

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<sup>12</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.4, 1167a24–9.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Scruton, ‘Real Men Have Manners’, in *The Philosophy of Food*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 24–5.

According to Sarah Buss, the main internal purpose of good manners consists in 'appearing respectful' (i.e., being courteous or polite) towards other persons.<sup>14</sup> By 'appearing' here she does not mean a mere outward show that is really inwardly false. Rather, she believes that the (Kantian or Kantian-esque) moral requirement of respect for persons (i.e., acknowledging their equal intrinsic dignity) requires not only that we do not trample on their rights and interests (i.e., use them as a mere means to our ends), but also that we engage in courteous behavior that is expressive of an attitude of respect and avoid rude or discourteous behavior that expresses disrespect. For instance, saying 'please' is a way of respecting the equal intrinsic dignity of other people and a way of acknowledging their autonomy in being able to choose whether or not to agree to our *request*, which is not the case if we were simply to *demand* something. It is in this context that saying 'thank you' also becomes appropriate because it gratefully acknowledges that another person has freely done a good deed for us.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most important insights in Buss's discussion of manners is found in her remarks about how courteous behavior is important not only for showing proper respect for human beings, but also for *forming* our sense of the intrinsic dignity or respect-worthiness of human beings. Drawing on Cora Diamond's work, she writes:

[Our] conventions of courtesy influence our assumptions about the moral status of human beings. The countless little rituals we enact to show one another consideration are [...] the means whereby we "build our notion of human beings." They are "the ways in which we mark what human life is," and, as such, they "belong to the source of moral life." From our earliest childhood, we learn that *Homo sapiens* is the sort of animal whose death it is appropriate to mark with a funeral, the sort of animal it is inappropriate to eat, the sort of animal it is inappropriate to kill for convenience or sport. [...] Good manners, then, not only inspire good morals. They do so by constructing a conception of human beings as objects of moral concern. To learn that human beings are the sort of animal to whom one must say "please," "thank you," "excuse me," and "good morning," that one ought not to interrupt them when they are speaking, that one ought not to avoid eye contact and yet ought not to stare, that one ought not to crowd them and yet ought not to be standoffish, to learn all this and much more is to learn that human beings deserve to be treated with respect, that they are respectworthy, that is, that they have a dignity not shared by those whom one does not bother to treat with

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<sup>14</sup> Buss, 'Appearing Respectful'. Buss's approach is Kantian in that she emphasizes Kant's second categorical imperative that enjoins us to treat humanity with unconditional respect and not merely as a means to an end. See n. 5. While my approach is strongly Aristotelian, I accept this Kantian-esque function of good manners, though, as will be seen, I understand it more within a Confucian framework and I seek to expand the range of what is to be regarded as respect-worthy or reverence-worthy.

<sup>15</sup> See Buss, 'Appearing Respectful', 802; and Stohr, *On Manners*, 27–9.

such deference and care.<sup>16</sup>

In order to avoid the moral constructivist or non-realist impression that might be given by these remarks about ‘constructing a conception of human beings as objects of moral concern’ (which I do not believe is intended), I think we should say that these manners (or ‘little rituals’) and the conception of human beings they help to ‘construct’ or ‘build up’ enable us to *see* and *experience* what human being *really are*, i.e., respect-worthy, and thus they are *fittingly* treated and regarded in these ways. In other words, these manners enable a *transformed* vision or ‘lens’ whereby the intrinsic and equal respect-worthiness of all human beings can come into view and be experienced.

Buss’s remarks in the above passage are the most direct comments she makes about the importance of manners in the moral education of young people, though she does not go very far in exploring the details of this. I think these remarks in fact connect up with and lend support for the truth of the epigraph to this essay, where Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, from Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men*, explains the rise of moral anarchy in terms of overlooking ‘bad manners’: ‘Any time you quit hearin Sir and Mam the end is pretty much in sight’. The idea here is that if young people do not learn good manners, or courteous behavior, then they will fail to build up a conception of human beings as being inherently worthy of equal respect, or even reverence, such that they set limits upon one’s will. Failing this, ‘anything goes’. Of course, it also might be that bad manners do not lead to complete moral anarchy, but rather to bad morality: e.g., we might think of a community with racist norms in which only one’s own race is treated with deference and care, while other races are treated with disrespect. Instead of building up a conception of human beings as inherently worthy of equal respect, here one builds up a conception of human beings that *blinds* one to seeing and experiencing the equal intrinsic dignity of all human beings. Thus, a lot depends upon being brought up with *good* manners (i.e., those that enable us to fully see and appropriately respond to moral reality), rather than bad ones (i.e., those that blind us from moral reality); and if we happen to be brought up in manners that are to some degree bad, then it is important that we are able to reform these bad manners and acquire good ones (I will return to discuss these matters further in the last section).

While Buss’s account in the above passage raises some crucial points, I think we

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<sup>16</sup> Buss, ‘Appearing Respectful’, 800–1. See also Cora Diamond, ‘Eating Meat and Eating People’, *Philosophy* Vol. 53, No. 206 (1978): 467–71. Diamond writes: ‘[It] is not out of respect for the interests of beings of the class to which we belong that we give names to each other, or that we treat human sexuality or birth or death as we do, marking them – in their various ways – as significant or serious. And again, it is not respect for our interests which is involved in our not eating each other. These are all things that go to determine what sort of concept ‘human being’ is. Similarly with having duties to human beings. This is not a consequence of what human beings are, it is not justified by what human beings are: it is itself one of the things which go to build our notion of human beings’ (469–70).

need to go beyond her remarks and see that manners can express not only respect (for what has dignity), but also reverence (for what is sacred or holy). Moreover, the sense of respect or reverence that manners express is directed not only towards the equal intrinsic dignity or sanctity of human beings. It can also be directed towards the specific achievements or good deeds of others. Moreover, it is not always directed towards persons. We can see how all of this is so by looking in more detail at the role of teaching manners in the process of moral education.

The first context in which a child learns to respect others is of course the home. Although saying ‘Sir’ and ‘Ma’am’ may not be necessary with regard to one’s parents – indeed it may be inappropriate insofar it conveys a kind of emotional distance that is unfitting to the loving nature of the proper parent-child relationship – it is still important that children learn appropriate ways of honoring their mother and father and thereby acquire the virtue of filial piety. The respect or reverence owed to parents here does not primarily have to do with their intrinsic dignity; rather, it is owed in virtue of what they have given and will give. First of all, parents give the gift of life itself (which is often seen as something sacred or profoundly precious), and then – when acting as they should – they give life-sustaining care and provide education that enables the child to move towards realizing what is most admirable in his or her human potential and thereby to achieving his or her good.<sup>17</sup> In this context filial piety or respect for parents is also important because it enables a needed kind of humility, which we might call ‘docility’, where this is understood in the etymological sense of being *teachable*, including with regard to being taught good manners and the virtues. Here we see the truth in Confucius’s rhetorical question: ‘Might we not say that filial piety [*xiao*] and respect for elders constitute the root of Goodness [*Ren*]?’

The good parent will teach his or her child manners that express respect or reverence not only for all human beings in virtue of their intrinsic dignity but also for teachers, elders, ancestors, traditions, customs, community, sexuality, life, death, and so on. It is in regard to teachers and elders where saying Sir or Ma’am, Mr. or Ms. So-and-so, Dr. So-and-so, and other honorific titles are particularly appropriate. This can communicate respect for teachers and elders in virtue of the good things they have to offer as well as a humility or docility in being open to receive what they have to offer. In

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<sup>17</sup> When I say parents give the gift of life, I am of course thinking of *biological* parents. Although adopted parents do not give the gift of life, they – when acting as they should – do give the other good things I mention here. In regard to giving the ‘gift of life’, it should be noted that it is sometimes claimed that one cannot properly be said to intend to benefit a child by bringing him or her into existence because, prior to doing so, there is no one to benefit. However, just because the child is not yet in existence does not mean that one cannot intend to benefit the child for his or her own sake. The thought would be something along these lines: ‘whoever my child turns out to be I intend to benefit *him or her* for his or her own sake by bringing him or her into existence’. Of course, the intended benefit here is not just bringing the child into existence, but also rearing him or her in a manner whereby he or she can best flourish.



Confucian thought, filial piety (*xiao*) is in fact often understood in an expanded sense to include respect or reverence not only for parents but also for teachers, elders, ancestors, traditions, and the community and its laws and customs. Each of these can rightly be seen to have a parent-like role in helping to guide us towards the realization of our good, and thus respect or reverence is owed to them and we must have an appropriate sense of docility or openness to instruction in each case (as we will see later, this is compatible with criticism, especially as one becomes more mature).<sup>18</sup>

In the case of respect for elders, there is often also a sense of reverence towards human life itself as expressed in the human lifespan, and something similar can be said for ancestors. The proper reverence for human life is in fact expressed in many forms of good manners. For instance, certain reverent behavior (including manner of dress and general comportment) is expected at funeral services for the sake of the living and the dead.<sup>19</sup> Something is similarly true with regard to rituals or ceremonies that welcome and honor new life, such as baptism, and likewise with regard to wedding ceremonies, though here the reverence is due to the sacred or profound nature of human sexuality and the bond of erotic love ('holy matrimony'), as well as to the promise of new life resulting from it. In general, *sacred things* – i.e., that which is reverence-worthy and set apart from the profane or mundane – require certain *reverent manners* with respect to them, as we see, for instance, in the sort of behavior that is expected in religious services and rituals. Likewise, *dignified things* require *respectful manners*.

These rites of passage and other kinds of rituals or ceremonies recall Buss's remarks about the 'countless little rituals' whereby we build up our conception of the respect-worthiness of human beings.<sup>20</sup> But, as we are seeing, these rituals are not

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<sup>18</sup> A similar acknowledged dependency on such wider factors for achieving our good is found in Aristotle's work, as I have noted. In modern times we also see it expressed by Edmund Burke: '[The] state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, callico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born' (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Select Works of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 2 [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999 (1790)], 193; cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, III.9, 1280b29–1281a1).

<sup>19</sup> In *No Country for Old Men* the importance of respect for the dead – which is at the same time respect for life – is emphasized on several occasions. For instance, Ed Tom Bell instructs his police partner not to make light of the dead as they are investigating a murder scene (44; cf. 73, 169). Bell also talks about going to 'cemetery cleanins' and remarks: 'It is community and it is respect, of course, but the dead have more claims on you than what you might want to admit or even what you might know about and them claims can be very strong indeed. Very strong indeed' (124).

<sup>20</sup> Cora Diamond seems to have these sorts of rites of passage in mind when she spoke of how 'we treat human sexuality or birth or death as we do, marking them – in their various ways – as significant or

necessarily 'little' (e.g., weddings and funerals are 'big' things) and they express respect or reverence not only for particular human beings but also for life, death, sexuality, tradition, custom, and so on. The reference here to 'countless little rituals' also brings back to mind the Confucian concept of *li*. Although *li* has its root meaning in religious ritual (or 'sacred ceremony'), Herbert Fingarette points out that Confucius uses 'the language and imagery of *li* as a medium within which to talk about the entire body of *mores*, or more precisely, of the authentic tradition and reasonable conventions of society', which are important for cultivating and then expressing human virtue.<sup>21</sup> If we use the term 'manners' in an expansive sense where it simply refers to *patterns of behavior*, then it can be said to include such rituals, ceremonies, and customs. All of these go to build up a sense of human beings and other features of our world as respect-worthy or reverence-worthy. Indeed, Confucius's use of the language and imagery of religious ritual (*li*) to understand traditional manners is precisely intended to enable us to see everyday life as imbued with profound dignity and even sanctity:

The image of the Holy Rite as a metaphor of human existence brings foremost to our attention the dimension of the holy in man's existence. [...] Rite brings out forcefully not only the harmony and beauty of social forms, the inherent and ultimate dignity of human intercourse; it brings out also the moral perfection implicit in achieving one's end by dealing with others as beings of equal dignity, as free participants in *li*.<sup>22</sup>

A main lesson to be drawn from these remarks, as well those of Buss and McCarthy, is that if we throw off all rituals, ceremonies, and customs then we do so at our moral (and we might also say spiritual) peril. The so-called 'realist' who seeks to throw off all social conventions does not in fact see most clearly but instead becomes blind to the reality of that which is respect-worthy and reverence-worthy and so invites moral nihilism.<sup>23</sup> The

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serious' (see n. 16).

<sup>21</sup> *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, 6–7.

<sup>22</sup> *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, 16. Thanks to Richard Kim for pointing me to this quote.

<sup>23</sup> Another Southern (U.S.) writer – besides Cormac McCarthy – who depicts this point well is Flannery O'Connor. In her novel *The Violent Bear It Away*, the main character, Francis Tarwater (a 14 year old), begins a path of nihilistic destruction and violence by neglecting to perform a proper Christian burial for his great uncle, Mason Tarwater, and a baptism for his intellectually disabled cousin, Bishop. This shows not only a failure of reverence for life and death but also a lack of filial piety, since the performance of both rituals was requested by Mason, who raised and cared for him. Regarding the burial, Francis says: 'The dead are poor [...]. You can't be poorer than dead. He'll have to take what he gets. [...] Now I can do anything I want to [...]. Could kill off all those chickens if I had a mind to [...]' (*Collected Works* [New York: The Library of America, 1988 (1955)], 345). Later he says: 'You don't owe the dead anything', to which a 'stranger' responds: 'Nor they you [...]. And that's the way it ought to be in this world – nobody owing nobody nothing' (363). By contrast, Mason says: 'The world was made for the dead' (339; cf. 360). As for baptism, it is described as a 'gesture of human dignity' (351). Thus, it is significant that Mason regarded it as so important that a child with intellectual disabilities be baptized,

'countless little [and big] rituals' in human life are not mere 'add-ons' to the way the world is, but provide the 'lens' (i.e., build up the conceptual resources and emotional resonances) through which a more profound reality comes into view.

### III

The foregoing suggests that there is a good case for the claim that teaching good manners to children is important for avoiding moral anarchy. But good manners not only prevent moral anarchy; more positively and relatedly, they are also *ennobling*. Therefore, a third and final key function of good manners that I want to discuss – which is at the heart of the Aristotelian-*cum*-Confucian approach that I have been developing – is that they *elevate* (i.e., *ennoble*) *our animal nature via an acquired 'second nature'*.

By 'second nature' – a term I borrow from John McDowell – I mean the acquired abilities and dispositions that human beings can come to possess through education, broadly construed to include all those aspects of self-formation (*bildung*) that are part of a human upbringing within a particular tradition-informed cultural form of life.<sup>24</sup> The acquisition of language is an obvious primary instance of something that is second nature for human beings, and with language comes other distinctively human abilities and dispositions, such as rationality, morality, spirituality, and so on. Moreover, as we see in Aristotle's work, the acquisition of the virtues is a matter of coming to acquire a

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suggesting that Bishop is regarded as possessing that same human dignity as anyone else. But Francis regards Bishop as follows: 'He's like a hog [...]. He eats like a hog and he don't think no more than a hog and when he dies, he'll rot like a hog. Me and you too [...] will rot like hogs. The only difference between me and you and a hog is me and you can calculate, but there ain't any difference between him and one' (403; Bishops own father, the scientific utilitarian Rayber, has a decidedly Peter Singer-like view: 'Nothing ever happens to that kind of child [...]. In a hundred years people may have learned enough to put them to sleep when they're born.' Francis's emotional response to these remarks is a 'war between agreement and outrage' [435]). Later a woman says to Francis: 'Mind how you talk to one of them there, you boy!' Francis responds: 'Them there what?' And the woman says: 'That there kind' as she '[looks] at him fiercely as if he had profaned the holy' (426–7).

In much of her works O'Connor is concerned with nihilism and its connection with bad manners. For instance, in a short story, 'Good Country People', bad manners (*viz.*, rudeness) in the main character, Hulga, are indicative of a nihilistic perspective (Hulga says: 'I don't have illusions. I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing' [280; cf. 283]) and portend destruction. In a letter O'Connor writes: 'Somewhere is better than anywhere. And traditional manners, however unbalanced, are better than no manners at all' (856). She also writes: 'it is easy to see that the moral sense has been bred out of certain sections of the population, like the wings have been bred off certain chickens to produce more white meat on them. This is a generation of wingless chickens' (942). And then: 'Henry James said the young woman of the future would know nothing of mystery or manners. He had no business to limit it to one sex' (943–4) Finally: 'if you live today you breathe in nihilism. [...] [It's] the gas you breathe' (949).

<sup>24</sup> See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), Lectures IV-VI. The idea of 'second nature' of course has roots in Aristotle's work, as McDowell acknowledges.

second nature, where we perform virtuous actions ‘naturally’ (in a second nature sense of ‘naturally’) and take a sense of fulfillment in performing such actions for their own sake as part of a normatively higher, nobler, more meaningful mode of life.

As human beings then we have a ‘first nature’ (i.e., native) capacity for acquiring a ‘second nature’ that sets us apart from non-human animals by making possible the ennobling of our animal nature. However, our second nature can also lead us to become the worst of all animals. Aristotle writes: ‘For as a human being is the best of the animals when perfected, so when separated from law and justice he is worst of all. [...] Hence he is the most unrestrained and most savage of animals when he lacks virtue, as well as the worst where food and sex are concerned’.<sup>25</sup> Commenting on this passage in his book *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature*, Leon Kass writes:

Man’s rationality lies behind his potential savagery, no less than his excellence, because it lies behind his broad, open, and undetermined appetites. [...] The capacity to think almost everything makes possible the capacity to do almost everything, by means of the desire to appropriate or control whatever is alien. [...] If he is not to become the worst of the animals, he must be restrained by law and justice. And if he is to become the best of animals, he must be perfected by rearing in customs that bring out and complete what is best in his nature.<sup>26</sup>

We should add that our ‘broad, open, and undetermined appetites’ also – because of the way our rationality is connected to our linguistic capacities – allow us to find significance both in virtue and vice, where the latter includes finding significance in certain ‘dark’ things, such as cruelty, revenge, humiliation, domination, and so on.<sup>27</sup> As Ivan Karamazov puts it in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*: ‘People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that’s a great injustice and insult to the beast; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel’.<sup>28</sup>

So in order to avoid these problematic aspects of our humanity we must be restrained by justice, including just laws, and if we are to become the ‘best of animals’, we must, as Kass puts it, ‘be perfected by rearing in customs that bring out and complete what is best in [our] nature’. A key part of this ‘rearing in customs’ is the teaching of good manners. Good manners help to ennoble our nature precisely through

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<sup>25</sup> *Politics*, I.2, 1253a32–7.

<sup>26</sup> Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1994]), 92–3, 98.

<sup>27</sup> See Seiriol Morgan, ‘Dark Desires’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 6 (2003): 377–410. Morgan writes (following Kant): ‘what leads human beings to treat each other worst is not so much our animality as our humanity’ (386). I take up the ‘mixed bag’ problem of human nature in more detail in my ‘Cosmic Outlooks and Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics’, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55:2 (2015): 197–215.

<sup>28</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett and rev. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York NY: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1976 [1880]), 219.

cultivating virtue, since teaching good manners is a form of habituation whereby we come to have a taste for what is noble.<sup>29</sup> When the virtues are acquired, then manners can also express virtue. In this way manners themselves can be part of the ennoblement of our animal nature via an acquired second nature. As Hebert Fingarette puts it with regard to Confucius's concept of *li*: 'Men become truly human as their raw impulse is shaped by *li*. And *li* is the fulfillment of human impulse, the civilized expression of it—not a formalistic dehumanization. *Li* is the specifically humanizing form of the dynamic relation of man-to-man'.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, learning good manners has often been seen as a key part of the 'civilizing process' where there is a normative ideal of 'civility', which is thought to contrast with being rude, barbarous, savage, bestial, primitive, rustic, crude, crass, coarse, violent, and so on.<sup>31</sup> These terms of contrast are of course terms we may feel hesitant to apply to other human beings insofar as they could be taken to involve a denial of equal human dignity, and if so, then this would be at odds with the view that I advanced in the previous section: viz., that good manners help to build up a conception of human beings as possessing the same intrinsic dignity. I will come back to discuss how this tension between the ideal of civility and the ideal of equal respect can be resolved. For now, we should see that the ideal of civility (or 'politeness', which is the Greek-derived cognate of the Latin-derived 'civility') in fact captures well Aristotle's idea that it is only in the *polis* (or *civitas*) with just laws and where virtue is cultivated that we can realize what is noblest in our humanity and thereby become the 'best of animals' and achieve human fulfillment.

In order to see how learning good manners can be part of the ennoblement of our animal nature we should consider two basic desires that we share with other animals but which can be transformed in light of human meanings: viz., the desire for food and sexual desire. As Aristotle says in the above passage, human beings are 'the most unrestrained and most savage of animals when [they lack] virtue, as well as *the worst where food and sex are concerned*'.

In *The Hungry Soul*, Kass is especially concerned with the desire for food and he seeks to show how we can eat in a way that actually contributes to the 'perfecting of our nature'. In particular, he discusses how certain human customs with regard to eating help to tame our human omnivorousness (which is representative of our 'broad, open, and undetermined appetites') and transform animal feeding into human eating, which in turn allows for the higher modes of human experience that are found in fine dining and feasting, where the categories of the noble and the sacred (or holy) find expression.

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<sup>29</sup> On the importance in the process of moral education of acquiring 'a taste for what is noble', see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.3, 1095a1–10; I.4, 1095b1–13; X.9, 1179b3–35.

<sup>30</sup> *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, 7. Thanks to Richard Kim for pointing me to this quote.

<sup>31</sup> See Kass, *The Hungry Soul*, 131–2; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol. 1: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 99–114, 138–42; and Calhoun, 'The Virtue of Civility'.

Some of these customs are concerned with what is *just* in the realm of eating: e.g., the taboo against cannibalism; restraints on inhumane treatment of non-human animals that are used for food; and rightful expectations of hospitality (see chapter 3). Other customs are concerned with what is *noble* in human eating, i.e., with bringing out and expressing what is most admirable in our humanity in the context of eating (see chapters 4 & 5). For instance, we eat around a table (or a similar surface) with others in order to foster conversation, family life, friendship, and refinement. Moreover, there are a number of basic *table manners* – e.g., sitting upright; regulating the eyes, mouth, and hands, including the use of utensils; being neat; acting temperately in not overeating or eating too fast or otherwise being enslaved to animal appetite; avoiding rude behavior such as burping, farting, chewing with one’s mouth open, talking with food in one’s mouth, making offensive comments, etc. – and the purpose of these manners is to foster human communion around a meal, to avoid things that disgust or put off one’s fellow diners, and to ennoble, dignify, and beautify our animal necessity and give expression to human virtues such as temperance, liberality, good taste, tact, grace, and gratitude.

Such a ‘civilized’ or ‘mannerly’ form of eating enables the possibility of fine dining (exemplified in the dinner party) and, on some occasions, feasting. While both are ennobled forms of eating, feasting also involves the ‘sanctification of eating’, where customs or rituals such as saying a prayer or a blessing over the meal are especially important. Here – again in an activity that has its basis in our animal necessity – we reach the heights of human self-consciousness as feasting involves a celebration of our place within the larger whole (i.e., the cosmos). Kass adds that here ‘one can speak also about piety and reverence, and the human impulse toward transcendence, beginning in awe and fear and, sometimes encouraged by wine, moving through feelings of gratitude and songs of praise in the direction of encountering the divine’.<sup>32</sup> In short,

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<sup>32</sup> *The Hungry Soul*, 163. Kass goes on to discuss ‘Babette’s Feast’, a short story by Isak Dinesen, which – as the title suggests – centers on a feast prepared by Babette, a former chef at the famous Café Anglais in Paris who fled to Norway because of civil wars and is now working as a maid for two ascetic, unmarried Lutheran sisters. Babette’s exquisite feast (which spared no expense) inspires the following speech from the one person at the party capable of fully appreciating it: “‘Man, my friends,” said General Loewenhielm, “is frail and foolish. We have all of us been told that grace is to be found in the universe. But in our human foolishness and short-sightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite. For this reason we tremble [...]. We tremble before making our choice in life, and after having made it again tremble in fear of having chosen wrong. But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude. Grace, brothers, makes no conditions and singles out none of us in particular; grace takes us all to its bosom and proclaims general amnesty. See! that which we have chosen is given us, and that which we have refused is, also and at the same time, granted us. Ay, that which we have rejected is poured on us abundantly. For mercy and truth have met together, and righteousness and bliss have kissed one another!’” (Isak Dinesen, *Babette’s Feast and Other Anecdotes of Destiny* [New York: Vintage, 1988 (1958)], 16; quoted in *The Hungry Soul*, 188–9).

when the 'hungry soul' comes to the table he or she desires not only bodily nourishment but also spiritual nourishment: the hungry soul yearns for beauty, nobility, conviviality, and even sanctity, which, as we have seen, requires 'rearing in customs [or manners] that bring out and complete what is best in [our] nature'.

If we turn now to sexual desire, we can see how a similar transformation can occur through 'rearing in customs [or manners] that bring out and complete what is best in [our] nature'. Like human omnivorousness, human sexual desire can also been seen as representative of our troublesome 'broad, open, and undetermined appetites'.<sup>33</sup> In order to ennoble and thereby humanize sexual desire, we must transform mere *lust* (a bodily appetite that other animals also possess) into *erotic love* (a distinctively human desire), which, at its best, can be one of the highest modes of human experience, and where again the categories of the noble and the sacred find expression.

The sense of the sacred (or profoundly precious) in human sexuality can perhaps be most clearly seen in cases where there is a violation of what should be inviolable in this domain. Consider the wrong of rape and other forms of sexual violence. According to the liberal, consent-only model of sexual ethics, rape and other forms of sexual violence are wrong because they violate consent.<sup>34</sup> While this is certainly true, what the liberal sexual ethic cannot explain – due to its view that human sexuality has no inherent moral significance – is why rape is *so* wrong, indeed, why it is one of the worst kinds of wrongs that one human being can do to another.<sup>35</sup> What we need here is the

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<sup>33</sup> In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dmitri Karamazov gives memorable expression to this human reality: 'I want to tell you now about the insects to whom God gave 'sensual lust.' To insects—sensual lust. I am that insect, brother, and it is said of me especially of me. All we Karamazovs are such insects, and, angel as you are, that insect lives in you, too, and will stir up a tempest in your blood. Tempests, because sensual lust is a tempest—worse than a tempest! Beauty is a terrible and awful thing! It is terrible because it has not been fathomed and never can be fathomed, for God sets us nothing but riddles. Here the boundaries meet and all contradictions exist side by side. [...] It's terrible what mysteries there are! Too many riddles weigh men down on earth. We must solve them as we can [...]. Beauty! I can't endure the thought that a man of lofty mind and heart begins with the ideal of the Madonna and ends with the ideal of Sodom. What's still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna, and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in his days of youth and innocence. *Yes, man is broad, too broad, indeed. I'd have him narrower.* The devil only knows what to make of it! What to the mind is shameful is beauty and nothing else to the heart. Is there beauty in Sodom? Believe me, that for the immense mass of mankind beauty is found in Sodom. Did you know that secret? The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man' (96–7; my emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> For representatives of the liberal sexual ethic see Alan Goldman, 'Plain Sex', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6:3 (1977): 267–87; and Igor Primoratz, 'Sexual Morality: Is Consent Enough?', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 4 (2001): 201–18.

<sup>35</sup> See Roger Scruton, 'Sex', in *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Philosophy* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 133; and David Benatar, 'Two Views of Sexual Ethics: Promiscuity, Pedophilia, and Rape', *Public Affairs Quarterly* 16:3 (2002): 191–201.



language of the sacred (or something like it) in order to articulate our experience of the wrong of rape and other forms of sexual violence, since there is rightly a sense of desecration or defilement of something sacred in such cases. In other words, it seems that we need something like the traditional sexual ethic – even if we don't embrace everything that has fallen under that heading – as such an ethic involves certain strong taboos that are meant to recognize and protect what is sacred and profoundly significant in human sexuality and to prevent it from becoming a mere object of use.<sup>36</sup>

The sacred in human sexuality is seen not only in what is worst in human sexual relations but also in what is best: viz., the vow of erotic love, as ritually expressed in marriage vows. As Roger Scruton puts it: 'A vow of marriage creates an existential tie, not a set of specifiable obligations. [...] [The] world of vows is a world of sacred things, in which holy and indefeasible obligations stand athwart our lives and command us along certain paths, whether we will or not. [...] [The] theory of marriage as a sacrament captures a prior sense that something similar is true of erotic love'.<sup>37</sup> Unlike lust, erotic love involves a loving intention towards a particular person with whom one desires to be sexually united in an intimate bond and where the beloved is regarded as irreplaceable. Because persons are sacred (or profoundly precious) and sexuality is deeply connected to our personhood, the intimate bond of erotic love is properly seen as a sacred (or profoundly precious) bond.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, such erotic love has an inherent 'nuptiality': it tends towards permanence and exclusivity, as there is a 'concentration upon the embodied existence of the other, leading through tenderness to the 'vow' of erotic love'.<sup>39</sup> In other words, when we really *love* someone erotically we do not want to live without them, indeed we want to bind our lives together, and this also demands exclusivity as proper to the profound intimacy of the erotic loving relationship (and

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<sup>36</sup> For representatives of the traditional sexual ethic see Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Continuum, 1986), chs. 10–12; and David Carr, 'On the Prospects of Chastity as a Contemporary Virtue', in Raja Halwani (ed.), *Sex and Ethics: Essays on Sexuality, Virtue and the Good Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> 'Meaningful Marriage', in Scruton, *A Political Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 88

<sup>38</sup> It might be added that the link between sexuality and the generation of new life also imbues human sexuality with a sense of the sacred or the profoundly significant. Elizabeth Anscombe emphasizes this point in 'Contraception and Chastity' and it leads her to say: 'There is no such thing as a casual, non-significant sexual act. [...] Those who try to make room for sex as mere casual enjoyment pay the penalty: they become shallow. [...] They dishonour their own bodies; holding cheap what is naturally connected with the origination of human life' (*Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics* by G.E.M. Anscombe, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally [Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2008], 186; cf. 172). She says that the perception of dishonour here involves a 'mystical perception' (187), which I would call a sense of the sacred. I should note that Anscombe tends to neglect or under-emphasize that there is also profound significance in the unitive aspect of erotic love.

<sup>39</sup> *Sexual Desire*, 339. Similarly, Plato writes: 'love is wanting to possess the good forever' (*Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997 (c. 375 BC)], 206a).



hence jealousy can be an appropriate emotional response to threats to this intimate relationship). Thus, erotic love finds its proper fulfillment in the vow of marriage.

In addition to affirming strong taboos with regard to human sexuality, the traditional sexual ethic – even though it has been overly restrictive at times – has rightly recognized the importance of cultivating certain virtues that ennoble and thereby humanize sexual desire by transforming mere lust into erotic love. These virtues include chastity (understood as right intention with regard to sexual desire), fidelity, modesty, and erotic love itself. Once again teaching good manners has an important role to play here both in cultivating and then expressing virtue. These manners have traditionally fallen under particular ideals of *gentlemanliness* and *ladylikeness*, as seen, e.g., in Jane Austen's novels. We also see these 'mannerly' or 'civilized' ideals expressed in Walker Percy's novel *The Moviegoer*, which is set in and around New Orleans and centers on the life of Binx Bolling, a soon-to-be-thirty-year-old World War II veteran who primarily spends his time making money (as a stock broker), going to movies, and philandering. This 'aesthetic' mode of existence (in the Kierkegaardian sense of seeking the novel, the interesting, and the pleasant) is symptomatic of Binx's underlying sense of 'existential dislocation'. As Binx's wayward existence plays out over the course of the novel it leads him to receiving the following stern lecture from his Aunt Emily, a principled, caring, and noble woman:

All these years I have been assuming that between us words mean roughly the same thing, that among certain people, gentlefolk I don't mind calling them, there exists a set of meanings held in common, that a certain manner and a certain grace come as naturally as breathing. At the great moments of life—success, failure, marriage, death—our kind of folks have always possessed a native instinct for behavior, a natural piety or grace, I don't mind calling it. Whatever else we did or failed to do, we always had that. I'll make you a little confession. I am not ashamed to use the word class. I will also plead guilty to another charge. The charge is that people belonging to my class think they're better than other people. You're damn right we're better. We're better because we do not shirk our obligations either to ourselves or to others. We do not whine. We do not organize a minority group and blackmail the government. We do not prize mediocrity for mediocrity's sake. [...] Our civilization has achieved a distinction of sorts. It will be remembered not for its technology nor even its wars but for its novel ethos. Ours is the only civilization in history which has enshrined mediocrity as its national ideal. Others have been corrupt, but leave it to us to invent the most undistinguished of corruptions. [...] We are the most sincere Laodiceans who ever got flushed down the sinkhole of history. No, my friend, I am not ashamed to use the word class. They say out there we think we're better. You're damn right we're better. And don't think they don't know it. [...] I did my best for you, son. I gave you all I had. More than anything I wanted to pass on to you the one heritage of the men of our family, a certain quality of spirit, a gaiety, a sense of duty, a nobility worn lightly, a sweetness, a gentleness with women—the only

things the South ever had and the only things that really matter in this life. [...] What has been going on in your mind during all the years when we listened to music together, read the *Crito*, and spoke together [...] of goodness and truth and beauty and nobility? [...] What do you think is the purpose of life—to go to the movies and dally with every girl that comes along?<sup>40</sup>

When Aunt Emily refers here to our ‘civilization’, it is clear that she does not think it is in fact much of a civilization; i.e., it is a long ways from the heights of ‘civility’ and the ‘civilizing process’. This comes across in her remarks about ‘class’, which is not so much about economic class as moral class.

Now, there is certainly much that is good about the ideal of civility expressed in Aunt Emily’s notion of class; however, these remarks also return us to the worry about the tension between the role of manners in building up a conception of human beings as worthy of equal respect and their role in ennobling our animal nature. The worry is that the latter may lead to a kind of elitism that causes one to lose the former concern with equal respect. Aunt Emily seems to perhaps go in this direction when she says: ‘people belonging to my class think they’re better than other people. You’re damn right we’re better. We’re better because we do not shirk out obligations either to ourselves or to others’.<sup>41</sup> There is certainly nothing wrong with an honest assessment that one is more morally developed than others, though one should be mindful of the human tendency overrate one’s own moral development and underrate that of others. Proper pride here needs to be combined with proper humility. Moreover, the display of a ‘holier-than-thou’ attitude is itself bad manners. Indeed, it seems that – in light of what has been said about good manners building up a conception of human beings as worthy of equal respect – any adequate normative ideal of civility and the civilizing process would have to include the demand for respect for the equal intrinsic dignity of all human beings. Thus, any kind of elitism that prevented one from recognizing the equal dignity of others would be lacking in genuine civility. While in some cases it might be appropriate to describe certain behavior or attitudes as rude or barbarous, this should always be combined with an affirmation of the human being behind the behavior or attitude as having the same intrinsic human dignity and thus as simply failing to live up to what is most admirable in our humanity. In other word, though one may lack in *achieved*

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<sup>40</sup> Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (New York: Vintage, 1960), 222–6.

<sup>41</sup> From the above passage it is not entirely clear whether Aunt Emily thinks that this moral superiority is not just a second nature (i.e., cultivated) superiority but also a first nature (i.e., native) superiority. For instance, she speaks of ‘a native instinct for behavior, a natural piety or grace’, though perhaps this is understood in a second nature sense. Later the second nature dimension comes out when she speaks about passing on a ‘heritage’ of ‘a certain quality of spirit, a gaiety, a sense of duty, a nobility worn lightly, a sweetness, a gentleness with women’.

dignity or respect-worthiness he or she still has the more fundamental *intrinsic* dignity that all human beings possess equally.

#### IV

In the foregoing we have explored three key functions of good manners: viz., (1) they help social life to go well; (2) they often involve ways of showing respect or reverence for that which is respect-worthy or reverence-worthy; and (3) they elevate (i.e., ennoble) our animal nature via an acquired second nature. In this final section we can now return to consider the two main objections to manners that were mentioned at the outset: viz., (1) the charge that manners are arbitrary (and potentially oppressive) social conventions; and (2) the charge that manners involve dishonesty (or inauthenticity).

I will begin with the second one first, since I think it can be fairly quickly set aside. It is certainly true that manners can be practiced as a mere outward show and in a way that conceals one's real feelings: e.g., one may 'appear respectful' towards another person but in fact feel only contempt. However, there is nothing dishonest about manners when they are practiced with the right intention: viz., when they themselves express virtue or when they are practiced with an aim to cultivating virtue.

So what about the charge that manners are arbitrary (and potentially oppressive) social conventions? The charge here is that manners are merely relative to particular societies (and perhaps defined by the interests of the powerful) and thus they do not have any rational justification. I have tried to show the integral role of good manners in cultivating and then expressing virtue and thereby achieving true human fulfillment, and if manners indeed have this role then it seems that the charge of arbitrariness can be overcome. Moreover, the fact that we distinguish between 'good manners' and 'bad manners' suggests that there is a way of 'getting it right' with respect to manners. Of course, the exact specifics of manners are often culturally variable, but the idea here is that they have a general point that is applicable to all human beings insofar as such manners promote human fulfillment: e.g., the exact details of table manners, including what utensils are used, may vary from culture to culture, but almost all cultures have some basic rules of etiquette with regard to eating that aim to transform mere animal feeding into our distinctively human mode of eating around a table (or some similar sort of surface) with others, which allows for the higher forms of human experience in fine dining and feasting and also fosters conversation, family life, friendship, conviviality, refinement, and the virtues associated with human eating.

However, the account that I have given of how good manners cultivate and then express virtue and thereby achieve human fulfillment depends upon a specific understanding of the virtues and human fulfillment. Indeed, I am operating with a morally-loaded notion of human fulfillment where it is seen as normatively higher,

nobler, more meaningful mode of life (i.e., 'the good life'), which we ought to desire and pursue, and where a specific conception of the virtues is thought to be constitutive of such fulfillment. I have also put forward a number of presumed virtues: viz., friendship; justice (including respect for all human beings in virtue of their equal intrinsic dignity); temperance; generosity (or liberality); kindness; forgiveness; proper pride; humility; docility (i.e., teachability); good taste; tact; hospitality; gratitude; reverence or piety (including filial piety); chastity (i.e., right intention in sexual desire); modesty; fidelity; and erotic love. The whole picture, as it has developed, is open to being contested. Of course, one might disagree with some of these presumed virtues and/or the details of some of the associated manners but still leave intact the general claim about the integral role of good manners in cultivating and then expressing virtue and thereby achieving true human fulfillment. But some such account of manners, virtues, and human fulfillment must be seen as rationally defensible in order to respond to the charge of arbitrariness. How might this be done?

It can only be done by our first being initiated and brought up within a particular tradition-informed cultural form of life. As Aristotle says, mere argument is not enough to convince someone of what is good and that he or she should pursue it; rather:

[The] soul of the audience must be prepared beforehand through habits to enjoy and hate in a noble way, like earth that is to nourish seed. For someone who lives in accord with feelings will not listen to—or, what is more, comprehend—argument that encourages him to turn away. And in a state like that how is it possible to persuade him to change his ways? Moreover, feeling generally seems to yield not to argument but to force. Character, then, must in some way be there before and properly suited for virtue, liking what is noble and repelled by what is shameful.<sup>42</sup>

We become virtuous by repeatedly doing virtuous actions (i.e., through the practice of manners understood broadly as patterns of behavior): e.g., we become just by doing just actions, generous by doing generous actions, and so on, and the sign that we are acquiring the virtue in each case is that these actions begin to come 'naturally' and we have a sense of fulfillment in performing these actions for their own sake as inherently noble and worthwhile activities, and we would feel ashamed if we did not perform these actions in appropriate situations. Of course, we also become vicious by repeatedly doing vicious actions, such as acting unjustly, selfishly, and so on. Thus, Aristotle remarks: 'it makes no small difference whether people are habituated in one way or in another way straight from childhood; on the contrary, it makes a huge one—or rather, *all* the difference'.<sup>43</sup> Earlier he says: 'A nobly brought up person, then, either has the

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<sup>42</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.9, 1179b23–33.

<sup>43</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1, 1103b23–5.

starting-points or can easily get hold of them'.<sup>44</sup>

It is important to see that this process of ethical formation always takes place within a particular cultural form of life that one does not initially choose but rather finds oneself within. The needed sort of upbringing is provided first of all by parents and then often also by other family members and teachers and by the laws and customs of the larger community. This social situatedness provides us with our moral 'starting-points', but this does not mean that a particular acquired ethical outlook is to be uncritically accepted and that our end-point will be the same as the starting-point. Here we have what John McDowell describes as a 'Neurathian' predicament. Drawing on the metaphor of Neurath's ship, which has to be rebuilt while at sea, he writes:

[One] can reflect only from the midst of the way of thinking one is reflecting about. So if one entertains the thought that bringing one's current ethical outlook to bear on a situation alerts one to demands that are real, one need not be envisaging any sort of validation other than a Neurathian one. The thought is that this application of one's ethical outlook would stand up to the outlook's own reflective self-scrutiny.<sup>45</sup>

What is needed in order to recognize such ethical demands – 'which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them' – is to acquire the conceptual capacities that can open our eyes to 'the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons'.<sup>46</sup> The rational demands of ethics, McDowell says, 'are not alien to the contingencies of our life as human beings. [...] [Ordinary] upbringing can shape the actions and thoughts of human beings in a way that brings these demands into view'.<sup>47</sup> The resulting habits of action and thought are part of our second nature.<sup>48</sup> McDowell concludes:

Now it is not even clearly intelligible to suppose a creature might be born at home in the space of reasons. Human beings are not: they are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity. This transformation risks looking mysterious. But we can take it in our stride if, in our conception of the *Bildung* [i.e., self-formation] that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language. In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene. This is a picture of initiation into the space of reasons as an already going concern. [...] [A] natural

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<sup>44</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.4, 1095b7–8.

<sup>45</sup> *Mind and World*, 81.

<sup>46</sup> *Mind and World*, 82.

<sup>47</sup> *Mind and World*, 83.

<sup>48</sup> *Mind and World*, 84.

language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what. The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it. Indeed, a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance. [...] But if an individual human being is to realize her potential of taking her place in that succession, which is the same thing as acquiring a mind, the capacity to think and act intentionally, at all, the first thing that needs to happen is for her to be initiated into a tradition as its stands.<sup>49</sup>

A key part of this initiation into a tradition as its stands, I have contended, is the practice-based learning of good manners and the virtues to which they point us. Moreover, the starting-points of ethical formation here require a significant degree of ‘docility’, i.e., teachability, where we are dispositionally open to learning from the ‘store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what’, as this comes to us from parents and other family members, teachers, elders, ancestors, and our community and its laws and customs. We do not begin by trying to reinvent the wheel but instead by learning from ‘the best which has been thought and said’, as Matthew Arnold put it.<sup>50</sup> However, this is not the end of the story: although we begin from a certain degree of passivity, as we learn and mature we become active participations in our tradition-informed cultural form of life – as a living tradition<sup>51</sup> – and we may come to criticize and seek to reform parts of this inherited form of life that seem defective: e.g., when certain of our manners serve to blind us to the equal dignity of all humanity rather than to reveal this to us, or when they serve to cultivate vice rather than virtue. The test for any such form of life is whether it can coherently be seen – by our best lights when we are engaged within that form of life – as best revealing our ethical demands and thereby as best enabling us to live well and to do well. What we cannot do is completely throw off all tradition and culture since these provide the lens by which ethical demands come into view in the first place. As Flannery O’Connor once put it (echoing the epigraph from Cormac McCarthy): ‘Somewhere is better than anywhere. And traditional manners, however unbalanced, are better than no manners at all’.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Mind and World*, 125–6.

<sup>50</sup> *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [1869]), 5. Cf. Edmund Burke: ‘The individual is foolish [...] but the species is wise’ (quoted in Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 7<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. [Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1986 (1953)], 57). Also cf. Martha Nussbaum, ‘Saving Aristotle’s appearances’, in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Updated Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [1986]).

<sup>51</sup> On the idea of a *living* moral tradition, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007 [1984]), 220–2.

<sup>52</sup> See n. 23. I would like to thank Richard Kim for very helpful comments that helped me to improve this essay.

