

Etiquette: The Aesthetics of Display and Engagement

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Abstract

This paper explores the concept of grace in etiquette as a social aesthetic. Etiquette is often understood as distinct from ethics because it is perceived as a mere conventional rule following, and a matter of style. Alternatively, it may be understood as a form of civility that has a social and moral basis that is unrelated to aesthetics. This paper argues that the contemporary term ‘gracious’ is both a moral *and* aesthetic evaluation. To do so, I explore the relationship between etiquette, virtue, and ethics through the theoretical frames of Erving Goffman’s concepts of deference and demeanour, and Confucian ethics. Using the example of a disrupted lunch party in Agatha Christie’s *The Hollow* (1946), I show how etiquette expresses social relationships and moral obligations through the sensual qualities of food. Gracious behaviour does not simply involve the observance the codes of socially acceptable behaviour but also requires a mastery of, and improvisation on, them to express attitudes and relationships.

Introduction

There are numerous definitions of etiquette, most of which focus on its nature as social convention, and in particular, in terms of rules or codes of behaviour. Many definitions focus on the fact that such rules are particular to a class or group of people. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, for instance, defines etiquette as:

The conventional rules of personal behaviour in polite society; the prescribed ceremonial of a court; the formalities required in diplomatic discourse; the order of procedure established by custom in the armed services, Parliament, etc; the unwritten code restricting

professionals in what concerns the interests of their colleagues or the dignity of their profession.¹

Other definitions of etiquette emphasise its role in everyday interpersonal relations. Shirley Yeung defines etiquette as “a body of rules concerning proper conduct in everyday encounters”² and Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz as “prescriptions governing comportment in life’s ordinary interactions.”³ In this paper I shall adopt Erving Goffman’s definition of etiquette, because it suggests that codes of behaviour focussed on interpersonal relations are a subset of ceremonial rules. Goffman defines etiquette as ceremonial rules that guide “conduct in matters felt to have secondary or even no significance in their own right,” “having their primary importance ... as a conventionalized means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation.”⁴

Etiquette is a form of social aesthetics. It is ‘social’ in that it is based on shared or conventional codes and concerned with interpersonal or social relations, and ‘aesthetic’ in that the conventions or ceremonies of etiquette have aesthetic qualities. These qualities might include ‘grandeur’, which may be appropriate to a ceremony such as the opening of parliament or a high court; or ‘splendour’, which may be appropriate for a ceremony such as the wedding of a member of a royal family, or a university graduation ceremony; or ‘elegance’, which might be applied to a formal meal. In this paper I intend to explore the quality of graciousness as an ideal of etiquette in interpersonal relations. I focus on the aesthetic quality of graciousness, in part because the majority of the literature on etiquette is focussed on interpersonal behaviour and communications, and in part because an exploration of graciousness provides a counter-example to the suggestion that the observance of etiquette necessarily involves the following of rules. In doing so, this paper contributes to the philosophical literature on aesthetics by showing that etiquette is evaluated in aesthetic terms, and that this aesthetic evaluation is intimately related to ethics.

¹ *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “etiquette.”

² Shirley Yeung, “Natural Manners: Etiquette, Ethics and Sincerity in American Conduct Manuals”, in *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language and Action*, ed. Michael Lambek (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2010), 242.

³ Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, *Etiquette: Reflection on Contemporary Comportment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 2.

⁴ Erving Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” *American Anthropologist* 58:3 (1956): 475-499, 475.

In ancient Greece, virtue was connected with aesthetics through the notion of ‘grace’ or *charis*. Bonnie McLachlan has argued that *charis* was both an aesthetic and a moral concept central to social order. *Charis* was based in favour, gratitude and thanks, repayment, pleasure, and reciprocity. Examples include requesting forgiveness and reconciliation, thanking people, rhetoric, and persuasion.⁵ As such, it should be considered as one element of the ceremonial rituals discussed by Goffman, in particular the element of demeanour, or the manner in which one presents oneself. In contemporary Western societies the term ‘grace’ has both religious and secular meanings. As it is used here, the term describes a secular, aesthetic quality: something that has grace is pleasing, attractive, or charming. The term may be applied to the proportions of a thing, to the ease or refinement of a physical movement, but also to social engagement and a person’s manner, behaviour, or expression. To describe something as graceful or gracious is to suggest that it is beautiful.

The aesthetic qualities of etiquette are generally either completely overlooked or derided in academic literature. A literature search using ‘etiquette’ as a key word throws up a vast amount of text on business and medical etiquette, as well as other manuals of polite behaviour. In philosophy, the term is rarely used except as a counterpoint to definitions of ethics; indeed, the codes of etiquette are often derided as ornamental and superficial, as opposed to (or beyond) ethical considerations.⁶ Judith Martin—the author of the syndicated *Miss Manners* columns—and Gunter S. Stent suggest that contemporary philosophers are contemptuous of etiquette, citing Philippa Foot’s comparison of the imperatives of morality and those of etiquette, in which she dismissed the latter as “silly rules” as if their lack of value was a self-evident truth.⁷ Louis P. Pojman’s introduction to ethics distinguishes ethics from etiquette on the basis that etiquette concerns “form or style” rather than “the essence of social existence,” and determines whether behaviour is polite, rather than right “in a deeper sense.”⁸ A literature search using the keywords of ‘etiquette and aesthetics’ brings up six results, none of which are academic sources. As far as I can establish, the relationship between the concepts of aesthetics and etiquette, and in particular the nature of gracious behaviour, is

⁵ Bonnie McLachlan, *The Age of Grace: Charis in Early Greek Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁶ An exception to this disregard can be found in Scapp and Seitz, *Etiquette*.

⁷ Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,” [1972], cited in Judith Martin and Gunter S. Stent, “I Think; Therefore I Thank: A Philosophy of Etiquette,” *The American Scholar* (2001): 237-254, 238.

⁸ Louis P. Pojman, *Ethical Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 5th edn. (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 2007), 3.

occasionally mentioned in passing in some of the philosophical literature on social aesthetics, but has not been analysed.

I will argue that all observances of the rules of etiquette involve the manipulation of sensory qualities of life such as colour, texture, loudness, and taste as expressive responses. A second, aesthetic aspect of etiquette concerns 'appropriateness' or a kind of fit between the world, other people, and a person's behaviour. Nevertheless—as indicated by the above suggestion that the manner in which codes of etiquette are followed is evaluated aesthetically—gracious behaviour does not simply involve the observance the codes of socially acceptable behaviour but also requires a mastery of, and improvisation on, them. Moreover, the quality of graciousness does not oppose sincerity or ethical concerns, and incorporates them as an intrinsic element of any act. I conclude that, like the ancient Greek use of the word, the contemporary term 'gracious' is both a moral and aesthetic evaluation of an act or person.

The argument proceeds in a circuitous manner. I begin with a customary discussion of some of the key theoretical literature on etiquette and its value. This literature does not concern its aesthetic attributes, but explores its social function and history, and its relationship with morality. As such, it establishes the general theoretical framework through which etiquette is understood. This framework suggests that etiquette is generally associated with class, but also has important social functions as a communicative display. The second section raises questions concerning aesthetics and etiquette, and whether the aesthetics of form and style replace or conflict with ethical considerations. This section introduces discussion from eighteenth century etiquette manuals, as well as some of the points that have been raised in passing by philosophers about the relationship between etiquette and aesthetics. It identifies the quality of grace as a transcendence of rule following, in which the actions have a sincere or genuine moral content.

The third section attempts to give greater substance to this relationship between grace, rule following, and ethics through a discussion of the Confucian concept of *li*, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of a practice. In this section I argue that grace is achieved through a mastery of the codes of etiquette, in which they become a part of a person's character as an ethical virtue. Mastery of the codes enables a person to improvise with them, creating 'an art' of etiquette. The fourth section provides an example of such improvisation, taken from Agatha Christie's detective fiction *The Hollow*. This example shows how food codes are improvised in order to acknowledge that a murder has occurred, and to express regard for the deceased as well as a concern for the living. This section illustrates the nature of improvisation upon

codes of etiquette, highlighting the sensory nature of food and the manner in which it is consumed. The final section of the paper discusses these observations, clarifying the relationship between etiquette as a form of rule following and aesthetic concerns, and distinguishing etiquette as a social norm or form of habitual behaviour from grace, or excellence in the art of etiquette.

Etiquette and Its Value

The focus on etiquette as conventional ‘rule following’ behaviour by a class of people, in particular ‘polite society’, has led many to believe that etiquette is of little value. In moral philosophy, rules of etiquette such as wearing a tie at dinner may be regarded as ‘silly’, but there are people who believe etiquette more sinister than silly because it divides individuals or groups on the basis of class and national differences. Conversely, other people see it as being fundamentally concerned with the maintenance of political and social virtues because it plays important functions in protecting the dignity of individuals and maintaining social relations, while falling short of considering it a genuinely ethical concern. Two of the most detailed texts on etiquette have been a sociological analysis by Norbert Elias and an anthropological analysis by Erving Goffman.

Norbert Elias discusses what is currently termed etiquette—the conventional rules of personal behaviour in polite society and the prescribed ceremonial of a court—in *The Civilising Process: The History of Manners*.⁹ This book argues that ‘civilisation’ is part of an historical process, and, rather than being based on any moral superiority, “bears witness to particular structures of human relations, to a particular social structure, and to the corresponding forms of behaviour.”¹⁰ According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, the term ‘manners’, as an evaluative term (as in the statement that someone has ‘good manners’) refers to “external social behaviour, estimated according to its degree of politeness or conformity to the accepted standards or propriety,” as well as being indicative of a particular social class – “habits indicative of good breeding.”¹¹ As such, it overlaps with concept of etiquette indicating both standards of behaviour, as well as a class.

Nevertheless, according to Elias, the codes now called manners or etiquette can be traced to the concept of civility (*civilitas*) and a short treatise on this topic written by Erasmus in the sixteenth century concerning the

⁹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978 [1939]).

¹⁰ Elias, *The Civilising Process*, 59.

¹¹ *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “manners.”

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behaviour and bodily propriety of people in aristocratic society. It dealt with aspects of comportment from eating to sleeping, and all aspects of daily life. The treatise was initially written as a manual for the education of young men, but quickly became popular throughout Europe.¹² Elias argues that, in eighteenth century Germany, the middle classes associated courtly ‘civilisation’ with superficiality, ceremony, formality, and conformity in contrast to naturalness, depth of feeling and thought, sincerity, and the development of individuality or the German concept of *Kultur*. It was against this distinctive, courtly, behaviour that Immanuel Kant spoke of Germany being civilised to the point of over-burdened by mere “social propriety and decency” and the “similitude of morality in the love of honour.”¹³ In France, Elias reports,

Concepts such as *politesse* or *civilité* had, before the concept *civilisation* was formed and established, practically the same function as the new concept: to express the self-image of the European upper class in relation to others whom its members considered simpler or more primitive, and at the same time to characterise the specific kind of behaviour through which this upper class felt itself different to [and superior to] all simpler and more primitive people.¹⁴

Nevertheless, in contrast with the German middle classes, the French bourgeois intelligentsia adopted the traditional manners of the court in the wake of the revolution, seeing in civilisation a standard for the new society that included social tact and consideration for others, which, along with the constitution, education, and rationality, enabled the liberation of society from what was ‘barbaric’.¹⁵ Part of etiquette’s current disvalue, and its association with class, originates in this historical association with courtly etiquette.

Elias has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the social role of etiquette in showing not only that it was historically associated with the upper classes, but also how the ideas of the importance of courtesy become important in societies’ national identity, and in the manner in which groups distinguish themselves from other groups (and establish their sense of superiority) through their sense of civility. As such, there is ample support for the claim that etiquette is associated with elitism and a particular class structure. At the same time, in developing the comparison between the German

¹² Elias, *The Civilising Process*, 55.

¹³ Elias, *The Civilising Process*, 9.

¹⁴ Elias, *The Civilising Process*, 39.

¹⁵ Elias, *The Civilising Process*, 48.

perspective on etiquette (which contrasts ethics, sincerity and etiquette) and the French perspective (which found in etiquette a means of contributing tact and concern for others within ‘civil society’), Elias developed a useful framework for understanding debates about the value of etiquette.

For instance, many philosophers appear to follow Kant in distinguishing ethics from etiquette, and discount its value because it is culturally relative and fundamentally concerned with ‘mere’ form. Pojman may be considered representative of this perspective, in which there is a sharp contrast between ethics and etiquette. Pojman writes,

Custom represents society’s decisions about how we are to dress, greet one another, eat, celebrate festivals, carry out transactions, and dispose of the dead.

Whether we greet one another with a handshake, a bow, a hug, or a kiss on the cheek differs in different social systems, but none has any moral superiority ...

The observance of custom graces our social existence, but it is not what social existence is about.¹⁶

I assume that by the word ‘graces’ in this context, Pojman is suggesting such codes of etiquette ‘ornament’ social relations, but are not fundamental to them. Nevertheless, other theorists focus on the themes identified in the French reinterpretation of etiquette as a contribution to ‘civil society’. According to these authors, cultural relativism and ornamentation does not necessarily undermine its social value. Indeed, as Erving Goffman’s seminal work “The Nature of Deference and Demeanour” argued, such ornamentation may be fundamental to our sense of self, and, contrary to Pojman’s suggestion, fundamental to our social existence.

Goffman highlighted the manner in which rules of etiquette emphasise a concern for others, and ritualise forms of respect and value. Like Elias, he discussed etiquette in terms of a body of socially-determined, conventional ceremonial rules, pointing out that a “ceremonial rule is one which guides conduct in matters felt to have secondary or even no significance in their own right.”¹⁷ But rather than emphasising the function etiquette played in the maintenance of the group (a social class or the state) and its boundaries, Goffman saw etiquette’s primary importance in the way in which the codes of etiquette structure individuals’ social identity, and the way “in which the

¹⁶ Pojman, *Ethical Theory*, 3-4.

¹⁷ Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 476.

person in our urban secular world is allotted a kind of sacredness that is displayed and confirmed by symbolic acts.”¹⁸

According to Goffman, social rules create obligations on behaviour, as well as expectations in others. Such rules are internalised and, when they are side stepped or ignored, may be sanctioned or a cause of anxiety, or be responded to with indignation. When a person internalises these rules, they come to understand themselves as the kind of person who is treated in a particular manner, or the kind of person who behaves in a particular manner; being a ‘certain kind of person’ becomes an element of their identity. The identity we form and present to others may change in different contexts, depending on the role we play in specific situations, for instance, as a family member, or a professional, or as an acquaintance, or as a stranger, and these situations and scenes create a relativity concerning our ceremonial behaviours and identity.

Goffman analyses these ceremonial behaviours in terms of rituals of deference and demeanour. Deference involves rituals of presentation or avoidance through which an individual displays appreciation of others, while demeanour concerns acts of self-presentation of dress, deportment, and bearing, which display that a person considers themselves worthy of respect. Goffman writes,

The gestures which we sometimes call empty are perhaps in fact the fullest things of all. It is therefore important to see that the self is in part a ceremonial thing, a sacred object which must be treated with proper ritual care and in turn must be presented in a proper light to others. As a means through which this self is established, the individual acts with proper demeanor while in contact with others and is treated by others with deference.¹⁹

The social function and value of etiquette is that it provides opportunities for these ritualised displays through small ‘inconsequential’ gestures that require little effort, but through which we acknowledge respect for other people and their membership of the social group.

Similarly, a few philosophers have explored the social function of civility and concluded that it has important moral and political functions. Cheshire Calhoun argues that the display of civility signals a person’s willingness to contribute in social practices such as political dialogue, funerals and driving; and, for those people in different societies who are not coerced

¹⁸ Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 473.

¹⁹ Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 497.

into sharing social life, civility may be a precondition to enter into cooperative ventures.²⁰ Among the moral virtues of civility, she includes the way in which it supports self-esteem “by offering token reminders that we are regarded as worth respecting, tolerating, and considering” as well as the protection of socially disesteemed groups against “the emotional exhaustion of having to cope with others’ displays of hatred, aversion, and disapproval.”²¹ This raises a question of whether there is a difference between the etiquette of civility and substantive moral virtues such as tolerance and respect. Calhoun has argued that civility must be considered a distinct virtue rather than an example of tolerance or respect, because civility is fundamentally a form of communicative display:

[W]hat makes being civil different from being respectful, considerate, or tolerant, is that civility always involves a display of respect, tolerance, or considerateness. Thus civility is an essentially *communicative* form of moral conduct. In addition, because communicating our moral attitudes is central to civility, being genuinely civil—unlike, say, being genuinely considerate or genuinely tolerant—requires that we follow whatever the socially established norms are for showing people considerateness, tolerance, or respect. Only because there are such generally agreed upon, often codified, social rules for what counts as respectful, considerate, and tolerant behavior can we successfully communicate our moral attitudes toward others. Those rules create a common language for conveying the attitudes of respect, willingness to tolerate differences, and consideration.²²

Goffman also explores the manner in which these codes or rules of conduct create communicative codes that display our attitudes towards others, arguing that the deference codes represent the way in which identities are confirmed – both for the person who expects certain kinds of deference, and the person for whom acting in a certain way is an obligation.²³ Deference codes include rituals such as salutations, invitations, compliments, and minor services. Through these, “the recipient is told that ... others are, or seek to be, involved with him and with his personal ... concerns.”²⁴ Such behaviour, Goffman

²⁰ Cheshire Calhoun, “The Virtue of Civility,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (2000): 251-275, 266.

²¹ Calhoun, “The Virtue of Civility,” 260.

²² Calhoun, “The Virtue of Civility,” 260.

²³ Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 475.

²⁴ Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 486.

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argues, contains a kind of pledge to treat others in a certain way in the future, affirming “that the expectations and obligations of the recipient, both substantive and ceremonial, will be allowed and supported by the actor”²⁵ and that they will be enabled to maintain dignity or face. The deference codes, which are generally honorific and politely toned, may convey appreciation of the person to whom they are addressed in ways that are more complimentary than the actor’s true sentiment might warrant. Low regard for a person may be concealed by extra punctiliousness of the observance of the defence codes, and it is generally recognised that the recipient should not take the actor literally, and should rest content with the show of appreciation.²⁶

Yet Goffman also argues that rules of etiquette are not merely a form of facade, but also a means of self-expression. He provides one way in which character may be expressed is through codes of demeanour:

In our society, the “well” or “properly” demeaned individual displays such attributes as: discretion and sincerity; modesty in claims regarding self; sportsmanship; command of speech and physical movements; self-control over his emotions, his appetites, and his desires; poise under pressure; and so forth. When we attempt to analyze the qualities conveyed through demeanor, certain themes become apparent. The well-demeaned individual possesses the attributes popularly associated with “character training” or “socialization,” these being implanted when a neophyte of any kind is housebroken.²⁷

The character presented through an individual’s demeanour and how they observe (or do not observe) of codes of etiquette may also be evaluated with descriptors that indicate aesthetic qualities such as the terms gracious, simple, modest, gruff, wild, or grand. Such descriptions may be considered to be ‘thick’ in the sense that describe not only character, but also double as aesthetic descriptors and moral evaluations.

In summary, the vast majority of the literature on etiquette is concerned with its relationship with ethics and social class. Etiquette is historically associated with the upper classes and used as a form of social distinction. But this is not its only function, nor should we undermine its importance in our lives. We construct our identities and develop our character in relation to rituals of demeanour and deference. The codes of etiquette that enforce civility are a form of egalitarianism that can be understood as ‘levelling up’, protecting

²⁵ Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 480.

²⁶ Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 479.

²⁷ Goffman, “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 489.

individuals against indignity and humiliation. But in addition, how the codes are expressed is communicative of character, which may be described in aesthetic terms.

There is also a third perspective on the value of etiquette that is worth noting in this context. The writers of manuals of manners may not understand etiquette as mere displays of respect or civility, but may believe etiquette to have substantive moral value. For instance, Martin and Stent place ethics and etiquette on a continuum of social rules that create order. They point out that in situations where conflict is greatest, such as in legal disputes, the structures of etiquette are at their most formal in order to constrain passion and disagreement. In addition, they emphasise that the codes of etiquette do not necessarily exclude others, and that some rules of etiquette act to protect the disadvantaged. Rules of etiquette such as *noblesse oblige* exist in order to alleviate the vulnerability of the poor to exploitation and general disregard.²⁸ Such writers of manuals of manners and etiquette, however, are of primary interest because in this tradition of writing a contrast may be drawn between ‘true’ manners, which are based on ethical principles, or on virtues, and etiquette as a form of display. This tradition directly discusses the relationship between etiquette and aesthetics, and disvalues etiquette for that reason. In the following section I will explore this literature and the relationship between aesthetics and etiquette.

Etiquette and Aesthetics

The anthropologist Shirley Yeung’s survey of American manuals from the nineteenth century showed that most writers associated ethics with ‘manners’, and etiquette with superficial aesthetic concerns. “In the ideal, the practice of manners was aimed at cultivating habitual social graces that would become natural and authentic with time.”²⁹ As Yeung comments in relation to the manual writers, “[t]his was a vision in which speech could infiltrate the heart and where sincerity was as much a perfectable capacity as it was a characteristic of the already virtuous.”³⁰ This is a fundamental element of virtue ethics. A virtue is not simply an isolated act, it is a character trait or disposition that is well entrenched. It is the way a person habitually behaves.³¹

²⁸ Martin and Stent, “I Think; Therefore I Thank.”

²⁹ Yeung, “Natural Manners,” 236.

³⁰ Yeung, “Natural Manners,” 248.

³¹ Rosalind Hurthouse, “Virtue Ethics,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/ethics-virtue/>.

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Those people who are more concerned with display than good manners were described as ‘posers’ in the 1852 manual *The Principles of Courtesy*. A poser’s

concern is not whether an action be right, but whether it be gracefully performed; not whether a remark be true, but whether it be elegantly expressed ... Since manners consist much in appearance, those who are anxious to preserve their place in the good opinion of others are tempted to exhibit symbol when they cannot show the substance ... But manners can never be divorced from morals.³²

Another manual, *Laws and ByLaws* (1869) points out the absurdity of social interactions in which

a regard for formal mannerism takes the place of the easy grace that is the mark of true politeness which [is] habitual [and] never offensively prominent ... The mere form over-riding and hiding the spirit which should control and guide it ... must inevitably produce discomfort ... Nature is made the slave of Art, instead of Art taking its proper place as the handmaid to Nature.³³

On the one hand, such writers can be seen as exemplars of Elias’ suggestion that social classes distinguish themselves from other groups on the basis of their manners, as the writers in this tradition identify manners with morality rather than courtly behaviour, but they are also exemplars of the sharp distinction that some theorists draw between ethics and etiquette. Ethics, or manners, are ‘natural’, while etiquette is primarily concerned with display, and aesthetics.

Despite the sharp distinction drawn between aesthetics—represented by etiquette—and true morality, such authors also think that the aesthetics of etiquette may be compatible with ‘true morality’. For instance, one author advises to his readers, “Do not look upon the rules of etiquette as deceptions. They are just as often vehicles for expression of sincere feelings as they are the mask to conceal the want of it,” and another observes that while etiquette may “cloak what is hollow, unmeaning and false” it may “also drape gracefully what is true and important.”³⁴

A stronger claim for the role of aesthetics and etiquette in ethical life is made by Friedrich von Schiller in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of*

³² Cited in Yeung, “Natural Manners”, 242.

³³ Cited in Yeung, “Natural Manners,” 243.

³⁴ Cited in Yeung, “Natural Manners,” 243.

Man (1794). For Schiller, a concern with beauty brings harmony into society by fostering harmony in the individual. Schiller suggests that aesthetics must be considered the foundation of society, as only beauty can unite individuals in their rational moral freedom and the sensual world, and create harmony in the state. While Schiller's main focus is on art and design, he includes manners and politeness in the category of aesthetics, and focuses on demeanour and the importance of presentation. On the matter of the aesthetics of etiquette Schiller writes:

Nothing is more common than to hear depreciators of the times utter these paltry complaints – that all solidity has disappeared from the world, and that essence is neglected for semblance. Though I feel by no means called upon to defend this age against these reproaches, I must say that the wide application of these criticisms shows that they attach blame to the age, not only on the score of the false, but also of the frank appearance ... Not only do they attack the artificial colouring that hides truth and replaces reality, but also the beneficent appearance that fills a vacuum and clothes poverty; and they even attack the ideal appearance that ennobles a vulgar reality. Their strict sense of truth is rightly offended by the falsity of manners; unfortunately, they class politeness in this category. It displeases them that the noisy and showy so often eclipse true merit, but they are no less shocked that appearance is also demanded from merit, and that a real substance does not dispense with an agreeable form. They regret the cordiality, the energy, and solidity of ancient times; they would restore with them ancient coarseness, heaviness, and the old Gothic profusion.³⁵

In this passage, Schiller speaks of the possibility for etiquette to act as a cloak over reality, or a form of insincerity. Yet, he suggests that an aesthetic demeanour may also be demanded of actors. He praises manners that are artful, while not overtaken by aesthetic considerations. Aesthetics is appropriate in the moral realm,

in proportion as this appearance will be æsthetical, that is, an appearance that does not try to make up for reality, nor requires to be made up for by it. The æsthetical appearance can never endanger the truth of morals: wherever it seems to do so the appearance is not æsthetical.³⁶

³⁵ Friedrich von Schiller, *Letters upon the Æsthetic Education of Man*, 1794, Letter XXVII, accessed October 3, 2012, <http://www.bartleby.com/32/505.html>.

³⁶ von Schiller, *Letters upon the Æsthetic Education of Man*.

This suggests that he thinks that a genuine concern for aesthetics does not mask or hide sincere feeling as such behaviour itself would be unaesthetic, or ugly.

More recently, the aesthetic quality of etiquette has been commented on by Arnold Berleant in an essay, "Ideas for a Social Aesthetic". In this essay, Berleant follows Schiller's thought that it is a concern with beauty that gives people their social character. Berleant observes,

Proper etiquette is ordinarily interpreted as rule-governed behaviour, as conventions that are devoid of any real content but that serve to facilitate social interactions by establishing regular patterns. Yet there are occasions when the cultivation of such behaviour assumes a certain grace, when the participants delight in the skills involved and at the same time manage to introduce genuine human content into what is usually empty ritual. When this occurs, discovery, perception, reciprocity and other aesthetic features overcome the sterile formalism often associated with etiquette.³⁷

In this passage, Berleant suggests that etiquette or ritual is not necessarily aesthetic, in that it may remain at the level of formal rule-governed behaviour. Yet there seems no reason to suggest that rule-governed behaviour, such as protocol and ceremony, is not also aesthetic. For instance, my earlier examples of formal ceremonies such as the opening of parliament, or a royal wedding (which are contained within Goffman's definition of etiquette) follow rules and are also aesthetic events in terms of being grand or splendid. Berleant also suggests that social aesthetics, like the appreciation of beauty in the arts, involves a selective, restricted attention while judgement is suspended.³⁸ This approach to social aesthetics must be incorrect however, as aesthetic appearances do not merely adorn experience but also structure our understanding of our situation.³⁹ One does not 'appreciate' grandeur by withholding judgement; one is awed by it. The 'splendid' wedding is 'glorious'; a person is uplifted by it. In such rituals and events, an observer is engaged in the ritual, and emotionally swept up by its aesthetic structure. Despite these criticisms, Berleant intuitively appears correct in his suggestion that the

³⁷ Arnold Berleant, "Ideas for a Social Aesthetic," in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds Andrew Light and Jonathon M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 31-32.

³⁸ Berleant, "Ideas for a Social Aesthetic," 26.

³⁹ Elizabeth Burns Coleman, "Aesthetics as a Cross-Cultural Concept," *Literature & Aesthetics* 15:1 (2005): 57-78.

aesthetic quality of grace is an achievement of interpersonal relations that transcends mere rule following and introduces genuine feeling and content.

While Schiller and Berleant note the connection between aesthetics and etiquette, and recognise grace as an accomplishment, such casual observances do little to increase our understanding of the nature of graciousness and its relationship to ethics and etiquette. What needs to be explored is the difference between what Schiller referred to as ‘aesthetical appearance’ and hollow or insincere posing, and the relationship between ethics and aesthetics within etiquette. If the rules of etiquette can be followed by anyone, and not all rule following is gracious, then we need to go deeper than these observations about the relationship between etiquette and aesthetics to give the concept of graciousness any substance. Berleant’s conception of grace is suggestive of a way forward here because it focusses on the skills of etiquette, and yet transcends rule following. This idea is explored in the next section by a detour through Confucian ethics, in which social rules and spontaneous behaviour are not seen as necessarily in conflict. What this exploration will show is that graciousness is concerned not with the observance of rules, but a mastery of and creative improvisation on them. Moreover, it becomes apparent that the genuine human content Berleant discusses is a characteristic of virtue ethics and of gracious behaviour.

***Li*, Grace, and Improvisation**

In Confucian ethics, *li* (禮) is generally connected with the rules governing ceremonial and ritual behaviour, but in the *Analects* it also sets out principles of personal behaviour and social interactions including rules of etiquette such as the relation between subject and ruler, which ceremonial cap to wear, and when to prostrate oneself. According to Jiyuan Yu, “*Li* is ... the totality of socially acceptable behaviour patterns and lifestyles, including both moral and non-moral norms. It corresponds to Aristotle’s *ethos* (social custom), that is, the traditional social mores and cultural settings.”⁴⁰ *Li* should be followed in rules of deference, as well as one’s demeanour, in looking, speaking, listening, and moving. *Li* is also an aesthetic concept. In Book I of the *Analects*, this connection is made explicit within a speech by Yu Tzu who says, “Of all the things brought about by the rites, harmony is the most valuable. Of all the ways of the Former Kings, this is the most beautiful.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Jiyuan Yu, “Virtue: Confucius and Aristotle,” *Philosophy East and West* 48:2 (1988): 323-347, 326.

⁴¹ Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin, 1979), 61 [Book I XII].

The nature of *li*, however, presents a puzzle, as also in the *Analects*, Confucius' disciple Yu suggests, "In uses of decorum, it is naturalness that is of value."⁴² Joel Kupperman explores how to interpret this idea of naturalness, for it is not simply sincerity of feeling, or of expressing one's emotions. The form of self-expression is through the use of decorum and conventional codes of behaviour. His clue in interpreting the term 'naturalness' in this context arises from a conversation in *Analects* XII, VIII, in which Chi Tzu-Ch'eng, an official, remarks, "For a man of high character to be natural is quite sufficient; what need is there of art to make him such?" The reply from one of Confucius' disciples, Tzu Kung, is that "Art, as it were, is nature, as nature, so to speak, is art."⁴³ Kupperman argues that the paradox of saying that nature is art can be solved when we stop thinking of education as placing a veneer over nature, but rather as transforming people, and changing what comes naturally to them.⁴⁴ He explains this through an analogy with musical composition, and the skill of a composer such as Beethoven. Despite the popular opinions that such people express their emotions spontaneously through their art, such expression cannot be achieved without rigorous training and practice. This, he argues is true of any discipline, whether it is music, history, philosophy, or literary criticism. Once a discipline is mastered, performance in the discipline 'comes naturally' despite the fact that the training requires constraint. What is developed through education is a new nature, and a different kind of naturalness.⁴⁵ The difference between this analogy and the Confucian master is that we think of education in terms of discrete aspects of one's life, while, for Confucius, education concerned a person's character and the whole of life.⁴⁶

Kupperman argues that excellence in *li* should not be understood as a matter of mere rule following, as while *li* is concerned with tradition, it also needs to be adapted as circumstances require. The 'correct' or 'right' solution in a difficult moral situation is often not covered by rules, and a person with mastery of *li* will behave naturally, and appropriately, in these circumstances as mastery of *li* involves harmony of thoughts, words, and actions.⁴⁷ Kupperman argues that the person with such mastery will display as much individuality as the works of an artist such as Beethoven, and be identifiable by their behaviour, "Just as almost any composition by Beethoven has that in it which enables the

⁴² Cited in Joel Kupperman, "Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness," *Philosophy East and West* 18:3 (1968): 175-185, 176.

⁴³ Cited in Kupperman, "Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness," 179.

⁴⁴ Kupperman, "Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness," 180.

⁴⁵ Kupperman, "Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness," 180.

⁴⁶ Kupperman, "Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness," 181.

⁴⁷ Kupperman, "Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness," 184.

listener to recognise it as something by Beethoven, so ideally any word or action on the part of an accomplished Confucian worthy should have in it which makes it recognizably related to his entire character.”⁴⁸ This description of the relationship of the mastery of *li* and naturalness seems apt, although it over-emphasises the relationship with character, for a habitual demeanour provides (even to those people with poor skills) character, as this simply concerns how one applies the codes of civility. As was argued in relation to Goffman’s idea of demeanour, when we say a person is simple or grand or wild or gruff, these descriptors refer to a person’s presentation of self through the codes.

Yet the description of the mastery of *li* is similar to the idea presented by writers of manuals that through practice of etiquette a person will develop consideration and respect for others. A completely virtuous person does not struggle to do what they should do, or do it only when others are watching, but rather chooses actions that accord with their values.⁴⁹ It requires practice to develop a demeanour that displays these concerns, and mastery of this practice affects one’s character in that the codes become ‘natural’. A person with greatness has both internalised the conventional codes, and displays mastery of them through spontaneous moral behaviour that is appropriate to a given situation.

One way of redescribing how naturalness is consistent with conventionality that may be more acceptable to social scientists is through Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of a practice. A practice is something of which we are not wholly conscious, but are governed by practical logic.⁵⁰ In his text *In Other Words*, Bourdieu explains this idea of a practical logic as something like the feel of a game:

The practical mastery of the logic or of the imminent necessity of a game – a mastery acquired of experience of the game, and one which works outside conscious control or discourse (in the way that, for instance, techniques of the body do).⁵¹

Richard Jenkins remarks on the similarity between this idea and Goffman’s ideas about the presentation of the self in social life as a kind of theatre.⁵² An important characteristic of practical logic is its fluidity and indeterminacy, in

⁴⁸ Kupperman, “Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness,” 184.

⁴⁹ Hurthouse, “Virtue Ethics.”

⁵⁰ Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London: Routledge, 1992), 69-70.

⁵¹ Cited in Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 70.

⁵² Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 70.

Bourdieu's words, "the "art" of *necessary improvisation* which defines excellence."⁵³ Social life, according to Bourdieu, is not accomplished on the basis of rules, recipes, and normative models. This is not possible, as one cannot have a rule for every occasion; it is not that people choose to improvise, they have no other choice.⁵⁴ Just as in the example of Confucian ethics above, Bourdieu describes the accomplishment of social interaction as a kind of "second nature."⁵⁵

Jenkins raises a number of important objections to this characterisation of a practice, pointing out that games do have rules that make certain actions permissible while others are not, and that, like games, the rules of social life are often explicitly taught as well as implicitly learnt. He criticises Bourdieu of overemphasising the idea of competence at the expense of understanding the rules, stating that "most people, most of the time, exhibit, at best, competence rather than excellence in their dealing with others. Bourdieu does not help us understand the absence of excellence in social interaction, let alone the ubiquity of incompetence."⁵⁶ These criticisms of Bourdieu's claims about excellence appear well justified, explaining, as they do, the need for manuals of etiquette.

But the relationship between improvisation and social rules is important here as mastery of the rules, and improvisation with them as a form of self-expression, is fundamental to understanding excellence in relation to etiquette. In order to illustrate this point, it is worthwhile considering situations in which formal ceremonies involving etiquette are disrupted, and improvisation is necessary. My example for this is taken from Agatha Christie's 1946 novel, *The Hollow*.

A Disruption of the Luncheon Code

It was the habit of the Angkatells to invite guests for one o'clock, and on fine days they had cocktails and sherry in the small pavilion by the swimming pool. Lunch itself was scheduled for one-thirty, by which time the most unpunctual of guests should have managed to arrive, which permitted Lady Angkatell's excellent cook to embark on soufflés and such accurately-timed delicacies without too much trepidation.⁵⁷

⁵³ Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 71.

⁵⁴ Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 71.

⁵⁵ Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 72.

⁵⁶ Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 71.

⁵⁷ Agatha Christie, *The Hollow* [1946] (Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1963), 69.

Hercule Poirot had “dressed” for the occasion, and entered by the front gate, as was “appropriate to guests from outside the family.” He arrived at The Hollow to find a man lying by the pool bleeding to death, with a woman standing over him holding a gun. A number of other participants in the lunch party stood around, each having approached the pool from different directions. Sir Henry Angkatell (the host) arrived just as the man died. Taking charge of the situation, Sir Henry asked the butler to call the police. The dying man was John, and it was his wife Gerda who held the gun. The group of people cleared as Gerda was taken to the house to lie down, and others retired from the scene. Poirot, who had not been introduced to the other people at the party, inquired about John and Gerda’s identities.

“Oh, of course,” Lady Angkatell turned to him in a quick apology.
“One forgets—but then one doesn’t exactly introduce people—not when somebody has just been killed ...”⁵⁸

In this exchange it is clear that a rule of etiquette has been broken, in particular, a deference ritual. Lady Angkatell has forgotten to introduce her guest on his arrival. But, on reflection, it seems to her that the situation actually demands that the protocol should be put aside. Introducing the guest to the party, over the body of a dying man, would be inappropriate. Lady Angkatell’s main concern is that appropriate behaviour should be followed at all times.

A more significant issue arises in terms of the question of what, and whether, the party should eat.

“Half past two,” said Lady Angkatell ...

“You know, Midge, I still feel one ought to do something about lunch. It seems, of course, quite heartless to sit down around the table as if nothing had happened. But afterall, M. Poirot was asked to lunch – and he is probably hungry ... And I must say that though I really do not feel like eating myself, Henry and Edward must be extremely hungry after being out shooting all morning.”

...

“What does one do about Gerda, do you think? Something on a tray? A little strong soup, perhaps?”

⁵⁸ Christie, *The Hollow*, 73-74.

....

Gudgeon [the butler] entered, inclined himself confidentially and spoke in a suitably muted voice. "I have placed sandwiches and some coffee in the dining room, my lady."

...

"Really," said Lady Angkatell as Gudgeon left the room. "Gudgeon is wonderful... He always knows the right thing to do. Some really substantial sandwiches are as good as lunch – and nothing *heartless* about them, if you know what I mean."⁵⁹

In the following chapter, the household must manage the evening meal.

They had the cold ducks for supper. After the cold ducks there was a caramel custard which, Lady Angkatell said, showed just the right feeling on the part of Mrs Medway [the cook], and showed great delicacy.

"We are only, as she knows, moderately fond of caramel custard. There would be something very gross, just after the death of a friend, to eat one's favourite pudding. But caramel custard is so easy—slippery if you know what I mean—and then one leaves a little on one's plate."⁶⁰

Agatha Christie's novels are self-consciously full of the detail of people's lives, of what they eat and wear, and how they deport themselves. At times, as with her description of Lady Angkatell, the characters themselves display astute self-consciousness. Lady Angkatell lives her life as if there were always an observer of it. Every action is ritualistic and formal, and follows a code of etiquette. The living of life as if there were an observer suggests that this code of etiquette is fully internalised. At the same time, she is conscious that these codes must be improvised upon where there is no precedent. Their behaviour must match the gravity of the event in which they find themselves, and failure to behave appropriately would be met by moral censure for their want of feeling by that imaginary observer.

Food codes become the main means through which their response to the murder is expressed. Food, as Mary Douglas has pointed out, is "a practice"

⁵⁹ Christie, *The Hollow*, 76-77.

⁶⁰ Christie, *The Hollow*, 84.

with a series of events throughout the day, but also throughout the year.⁶¹ There are special events, such as birthdays; as well as religious events with feasts and fasts; and special food, such as that for weddings or funerals. Each meal and event has its own structure. The meal Mrs Angaktell had planned followed a formal dinner code. Douglas would describe this meal in terms of a primary code as F (first) S (second) M (main) W (sweets) Z (savoury), and as a secondary code as Fb:1.2 (*hors d'oeuvres*) S (soufflé), and Mb:3.2 (duck). Christie did not mention what the sweets or savoury dishes were to be. Alcohol and drinks were presumably similarly structured, with cocktails followed perhaps with wine, desert wine, coffee, and port. Glasses and cutlery would be structured for each course, and then there would be a seating plan. Generally, at a formal dinner, the guests are ordered in a structured pattern with the most important sitting close to the host. There must be a mix of males and females, and the seating plan must also allow for personalities and interests. Guests are expected to speak to the people seated on both sides of them during the meal. As Bourdieu suggests, this practice or code is not necessarily explicit, or fully described. Douglas states that her grammar of the family meal structure shows how “long and tedious the exhaustive analysis would be to read,” let alone how “taxing to record and observe.”⁶² At the same time, most people implicitly understand the patterns and codes for food, even though the codes they use may be less elaborate than the one in this example.

After the murder, the code for the planned meal is no longer appropriate. There is no precedent. They cannot go to an etiquette book, or even personal experience, in order to know what to do. Mrs Angatell’s servants improvise. The new arrangements need to acknowledge the gravity of the event, accommodate the needs of the guests and the family members, as well as accommodating the needs of the person accused of his murder (who is also the bereaved). The food served is now informal, to be taken from the coffee table as people require. As it was lunchtime, the meal is light – sandwiches and coffee (in Douglas’s complex taxonomy, La3.1), and there is no seating plan. The meal is eaten informally, by hand. The accused/bereaved is provided with soup (Fa:1.1 according to the secondary code) and the evening meal is simplified to a primary code of MZ, or maybe FMZ.

This event can also be described in Goffman’s terms of deference and demeanour. Here it is the situation, the murder of a friend, which requires deference. It is this fact that means Mrs Ankatell’s failure to introduce Poirot is

⁶¹ Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁶² Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” 235.

not merely excused, but that introductions themselves at that point would have been inexcusable. Moreover, the participants in the situation must display a particular demeanour; they should not enjoy food too much, or eat too heartily. The sensuousness of the food, such as its temperature, consistency, and delicacy is also important. The meal is simplified and food is eaten cold, other dishes as leftovers. The desert of the evening meal is slippery. The accused/bereaved, who presumably is in shock on either account, receives food that can be swallowed easily (soup), and is at the same time nourishing and comforting. The demeanour of the act of eating becomes important. Heartily enjoying one's favourite desert after a murder would be uncaring; satisfying bodily requirements and displaying moderation, both in enjoyment and consumption, is not. One is reminded of the withdrawal of sensation at specific times. For instance, the renunciation of something desired in Lent, and the denial of colour and gaiety in bereavement as an expression of sorrow. Clearly, the aesthetic properties of the environment, and of the self, are manipulated in order to express the sentiments or response to the situation in which the participants are acting. In the next, final, section, these ideas will be formalised into an analysis of the relationship between etiquette, aesthetics, and ethics, and the achievement of grace.

Etiquette and Grace: Appropriateness and Fit

There are several important points to be drawn from this example of the lunch. First, before the codes of the lunch were disrupted, there were clear codes of etiquette that were being followed. These codes or rules had aesthetic dimensions and goals, as well as social ones. Poirot had “dressed”—presumably he was in a suit (and tie) and his shoes were clean—so one may assume other participants at the lunch were similarly attired formally. He arrived through the front gate to express his social distance from the party. The Angkatells had paid attention to the context in which the various elements of the meal were to be taken. Cocktails were consumed by the pool in a secluded garden. The order of events had been organised so that the cook could prepare numerous delicacies that required great skill and perfect timing. There were numerous dishes to be served that had been planned with great care in relation to texture and taste, and which were to be consumed in a certain order. Poirot would have been introduced, but for the murder (the other members of the party knew each other), and introductions would have been made only between those people who were eating together – there was no suggestion, for example, that Poirot would have been introduced to the butler or to the cook.

Hence, the introductions produced both social inclusion and exclusion of the group, as did the act of eating. As we know these behaviours followed rules

or codes, we can safely say that it was ‘normal’ or everyday rule-following that aimed at achieving a specific aesthetic quality. No doubt, the Ankatells had intended to organise an ‘elegant’ lunch. Its elegance would have consisted in the dress, the food, the context, the table settings, the manner in which people held their knives and forks. All of these concern physical and sensory characteristics. Failure, or inelegance, would involve the cook’s skills failing, people not dressing or not eating correctly, or participants refusing to make conversation or sulking – that is, refusing to act in a manner that was appropriate.

And clearly, in this example, we are discussing a certain social class – a class that has a cook and a butler and a swimming pool. Any participants who had not been trained how to comport themselves would have been able to consult a manual – a guide to etiquette no doubt. But I imagine that the participants would have sufficient skills to do without these manuals, and would regularly or habitually engage in the practice of a weekend lunch. This is consistent with everyone at the lunch behaving with a great deal of insincerity. They might express delight in food they hated, find each-others’ conversation boring but feign interest, display hospitality while secretly wishing the guest go away. And this disingenuity might also be habitual. So it appears that Calhoun and Goffman are correct in discussing this as a form of performance or display. But at the same time, a degree of sincerity or warmth would be necessary for the lunch to be delightful, or convivial. The degree to which it was this would depend on the extent to which all the participants willingly engaged in their various roles, and engaged in them skilfully. So we can conclude, against Berleant, that normal etiquette always has an aesthetic dimension, even if its aesthetic aims are not always entirely successful; and that part of the achievement of this aim involves a degree of sincerity on the part of the actors. Good manners appear to require the internalisation of codes so that behaviour is practiced and performed ‘easily’. This involves a capacity to improvise on social codes as the situation requires. The aim of such improvisation is to ensure that the actions fit the situation. The concept of fit or appropriateness is a complex aesthetic quality, not dissimilar to the complex aesthetic qualities of proportion or symmetry. The capacity to improvise does not mean that major improvisation is always necessary. It is not every day that one’s lunch party is disrupted by a murder.

The difference between gracious behaviour and mere observance of the codes of etiquette (or even good manners) is that graciousness not only achieves this ‘fit’ with the situation, but that it sincerely expresses the moral values of the actor. Social grace is the achievement of excellence in this regard. The actor expresses themselves through the adaptation of the codes and their

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aesthetic qualities in a manner that others recognise as skilful and morally appropriate, while at the same time recognising that the sentiments expressed are not ‘an act’ or performance. Schiller may have been exaggerating when he suggests that aesthetic considerations can never eclipse the truth of morality, but he is correct in saying that failure to fit the aesthetics to the occasion will be a form of moral failure. The description of an act as graceful or gracious therefore suggests that it is both morally appropriate and aesthetically accomplished. It is a complex term on the borders of aesthetics and ethics, implying that an action that is moral is also expressed aesthetically, and that an aesthetic display contains sincere or truthful content.

In conclusion, etiquette is not only a mechanism through which we communicate our attitudes to others, but, through the moderation of ourselves, may become the kind of person we wish to be. As a communicative display, etiquette involves learning (implicitly or explicitly) and following social norms concerning deference and demeanour. Expression of one’s attitudes is a learnt skill that involves the manipulation of the aesthetic qualities not only of the self but also of the environment. Nevertheless, the character training involved in this process of forming habits and in the moderation of the self also a means of achieving genuine moral virtue. A person may on occasion act graciously, without, on the whole, being a gracious person. Similarly, a gracious person may occasionally accidentally fail. An act that is gracious suggests not only that the social codes have been internalised, and that their mastery enables a person to improvise with them as a means of self-expression in response to a situation, but that their behaviour is both morally responsive and sincere. In this respect, the evaluation that someone, or a particular act, is gracious in both a moral and an aesthetic evaluation. Etiquette is one means through which we may express ourselves as social ‘actors’, but it is also a means by which we may create for ourselves an aesthetic and moral life, in which, at least sometimes, we may achieve grace.