

Lecture III: Teaching Good Manners

No work was more important in the history of manners than Desiderius Erasmus's little volume entitled *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium Libellus* (*A Handbook on Good Manners for Children*). Published in 1530, it turned out to be the Dutch humanist's most popular work, translated into numerous languages and reprinted in millions of copies over the next three centuries. Erasmus set out to codify the do's and don't's for young, upper class children. It is a surprisingly frank and (by today's standards) shockingly vivid description of personal hygiene and table manners. The young person (Erasmus is clearly talking to young boys) is counseled in how to behave in social circumstances and also in private. He instructs his readers especially in how to comport themselves among their social equals and superiors, but he does not fail to put in a word on how one should treat people of lower rank.

Elias made good use of this little work in his own study of how Europe came to be "civilized," and spends many pages analyzing the impact of Erasmus's teachings on the literate portion of the European population. Elias notes especially Erasmus's lack of embarrassment in discussing such things as toilet habits, spitting, nose wiping, eating with one's hands, etc. In fact, we can see from the open and matter-of-fact way that Erasmus writes about these things that the inhibitions which by the 1800s in Europe made even the mention of these issues forbidden, had not yet come to govern upper class European society.

While Erasmus, and most of the commentators on manners up to his time, were members of the Catholic clergy, we find with the 18th century Enlightenment in Europe, the education of children takes on an increasingly secular aspect. The Enlightenment belief in the essential goodness of human beings, an idea central to the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the pedagogical reformer Friedrich Pestalozzi, started to replace the notion that people were born bad due to "original sin," and therefore strict discipline was the only way to teach children to behave in a civil fashion.

Even so, most children continued to be taught manners in the old way. George Washington, for instance, famously copied over one hundred precepts from the *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior*, a 16th century handbook intended to train young people in proper behavior. Dating from the same era as Erasmus's handbook cited above, the *Rules of Civility* was written by a Catholic priest and aimed at the training of upper class youth.

In addition to the usual no-no's at the table, such as number 98 --"Drink not nor talk with your mouth full"-- the *Rules* reflect the long-prevalent class distinctions between upper class people and their "inferiors," such as (no. 59) "Never express anything unbecoming nor act against the rules moral before your inferiors." In other words, set a good example. The *Rules* also hark back to the chivalrous behavior of the perfect knight, which are themselves often rooted in Biblical injunctions (No. 22) "Show not yourself glad at the misfortune of another, though he were your enemy." Throughout his life Washington probably hewed closely to these three rules of behavior, although he did reportedly violate another upon occasion (No. 49): "Use no reproachful language against anyone; neither curse nor revile." But then, in the heat of battle, this can be excused.

He certainly did not condone profanity among his troops, however, as is witnessed by his Letter to the Army from his headquarters at New York of August 3, 1776:

The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish and wicked practice of profane cursing and swearing (a vice heretofore little known in an American army) is growing into fashion; he hopes the officers will, by example as well as influence, endeavor to check it, and that both they, and the men will reflect, that we can have little hopes of the blessing of heaven on our arms, if we insult it by our impiety, and folly; added

to this, it is a vice so mean and low, without any temptation, that every man of sense, and character, detests and despises it.

As with Erasmus's summary of good manners for children, the handbook Washington used was meant for the training of upper class youth. It was expected that children from such a background would become society's natural leaders and would therefore be seen in public. The *Rules* are also aimed at children who may find themselves eventually in the company of people of a higher social stratum and lists a number of rules for how one should defer to such people. Both books make clear that persons born into privilege had to take care not to debase their inferiors. Modesty in dress and behavior befitted those born into wealth and position. Erasmus concludes his chapter on "Dress" with the injunction to not flaunt your wealth: "*The greater someone's fortune, the more agreeable is his modesty. We should allow those who are less well off the comfort they take in their own moderate pride. But a rich man who flaunts the quality of his clothing, reminds others of their own pitiful state, and kindles the flame of envy towards himself.*" In other words, showing-off could provoke the common people. Washington took particular pride, it should be noted, in the high quality of his imported military apparel, but he also tried to dress his troops in uniforms befitting a serious army, but without much success due to lack of funding from Congress. Pride in his dress and general appearance certainly played an important role in Washington's image of himself.

Similar emphasis on the importance of social distinctions is found in Jonathan Swift's 18th century work *A Treatise on Good Manners and Good Breeding*. Although best known as the author of *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift rose from humble beginnings in Ireland to become an Anglican Church official in Dublin. In his little *Treatise* he defines "good manners" as "the art of making those people easy with whom we converse." His *Treatise*, however, made a distinction between manners and breeding, which a more democratic age might have found objectionable. Swift wrote:

I make a difference between good manners and good breeding. . . . By the first, I only understand the art of remembering and applying certain settled forms of general behavior. But good breeding is of a much larger extent. . . .

He then goes on to list the qualities of a well-bred person, which reads much like the accomplishments of Castiglione's Renaissance Man: he must be well-read, be able to ride well, dance, fight, play games (probably gamble), have spent time in Italy, speak French and so on.

He concludes that

the difference between good breeding and good manners lies in this, that the former cannot be attained to by the best understanding, without study and labour; whereas a tolerable degree of reason will instruct us in every part of good manners, without other assistance.

While Swift espoused the typical 18th century belief in the "rule of reason," he also firmly believed in the need to observe class distinctions, noting: "One principal point of this art is to suit our behavior to the three several degrees of men; our superiors, our equals, and those below us." Later manners gurus like Emily Post would argue, as we shall see, that we should treat all people we encounter with the same courtesy and consideration, whereas Swift (and probably Washington) would defer to his superiors, be straightforward with his equals, and treat his inferiors with a sort of formal, distant courtesy that did not invite familiarity. In fact, Washington's *Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour* explicitly states, *inter alia*, that when walking with one of your superiors, you should be careful to walk on his left; or if you happen to encounter such a person at a doorway, you should defer to them and let them pass (Rules 29 and 30).

Even more famous than Swift's little essay were the letters of Lord Chesterfield to his (illegitimate) son, published in 1773 in Britain and in 1775 in America. Chesterfield has been criticized for counseling false behavior as a way of advancing in society, but his admirers appreciated his frank approach to the subject of how to be successful. Like Swift, Chesterfield emphasized the importance of good breeding, but also like Swift he acknowledged that one could acquire these qualities through conscious effort. Critics contended that this approach to manners led to artificiality and insincerity rather than actual politeness. Looking at the subject one hundred years later, the humorist Mark Twain observed: "Good breeding consists in concealing how much we think of ourselves and how little we think of the other person." Probably more than in Britain, the "highly polished" individual in America – especially a politician -- ran the risk of alienating the general public, which valued naturalness and straightforward behavior more than elegance, or even dignity. The "well bred" person risked being classified as a snob.

Historians specializing in the 18th century Enlightenment have noted a general softening of manners in 18th century Britain and, similarly, in Britain's American colonies. Looking at the writings of men like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, as well as the sophisticated British essayists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, they have discerned a growing distaste for the sort of brash, authoritarian behavior characteristic of men like Squire Western mentioned in the last lecture. Franklin had experienced such rude treatment at the hands of his older brother when he served him as an apprentice printer in his teens. He resented such behavior for the rest of his life. Although sometimes considered an "old dissembler" by those who knew him, Franklin epitomized the urbane, tolerant spirit of the 18th century Enlightenment. He abjured the common but impolite practice of contradicting the person with whom one was conversing. (I am sure we have all known at one time or another someone who responds to almost everything we say with "No," and then proceeds to elaborate their own take on things.) Franklin epitomized the person who could disagree without being disagreeable. Jefferson listed "politeness" as the single most important attribute of anyone who wished to attain a position in society. He would have agreed with the old maxim: "If you cannot say something pleasant, don't say anything at all." Although these traits might strike us as common sense today, the fact is that for many Americans who had the misfortune to come in contact with British authority figures during the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, being brusquely dismissed as someone not worth talking to was a common experience. George Washington had several such encounters with British generals during the French and Indian War and this experience contributed greatly to his eventual determination to break with the Mother Country and create a new nation where common courtesy among all citizens was the rule.

In America at this time (1760s and 1770s), we see the movement to overthrow British rule having profound effects on the whole question of manners. With the revolutionaries' rejection of England's class society and therefore its pretentious system of manners and breeding, how would people relate to one another? The republican philosophy required a new sort of social interaction, more democratic, but at the same time more responsive to the needs and sensitivities of others. While Americans of the revolutionary period never adopted the communist idea of calling each other "comrade," they did envision a society in which all citizens stood on a footing of equality, regardless of their wealth or political office. How should the citizens of this new republic that was coming into being relate to each other?

A telling example of how Americans should behave in the new, classless society that supposedly emerged from the Revolution came when George Washington became president in 1789. John Adams, a man obsessed by questions of status, who had served as American Minister in London in the 1780s and became Vice President in 1789, raised the issue before the Senate (where the Vice President presided) as to how the new President should be addressed. Should he be called "Your Excellency," or some other honorific? Objections were raised, however, to such inflated titles, and Congress resolved that the President should simply be addressed as "Mr. President," and so it has remained ever since. Respect, but not subservience, should characterize an American's demeanor before persons of authority. While it seems second nature for those of us born into a democratic society to treat our neighbors and strangers

with politeness and respect, it was in fact a totally new fact in Western Civilization for all members of society to exist on the same level, at least in theory. Of course this respect did not extend to enslaved people, nor to native Americans, or in many cases to common laborers, but the equality of people before the law had its counterpart in the interactions of people on a daily basis. This did not mean everyone lived on the same socio-economic level, of course, but differences in wealth did not have the same meaning as the class system of old Europe, which Americans had firmly rejected when they declared their independence of Great Britain.

The period after the American and French Revolutions witnessed a rapid “democratization” of dress and manners. Gone were the knee pants and buckle shoes of Madison and Jefferson. By the end of the 1820s one can readily see the advent of “middle class morality” and the democratization of values. No longer do we find primers on how young aristocrats should behave. But that did not mean that the need for training the younger generation in proper etiquette and manners had disappeared. How to create a “civilized” common citizenry came to be a recognized problem. The solution, for many, was the development of the “common schools” where moral lessons could be imbibed along with reading and writing.

One of the most powerful instruments for such instruction was McGuffey’s Readers. This series of classroom books inculcated moral lessons into young people even as they taught them to read. Over 120 million of the readers were sold between 1830 and 1960 and they are still used by some home school-ers. Although William Holmes McGuffey, the editor of the original edition of the books, came from a strict, Protestant religious background, he was not himself a minister of religion. In fact, as the century passed, later editions of the books, which retained McGuffey’s name, but over which he had no editorial control, became much more secular. By the end of the 19th century the moral lessons had ceased to contain a Protestant religious message and instead sought to instill a sort of civil religion of patriotism and social responsibility. One lesson repeatedly taught was to honor one’s elders and to treat others with kindness. Just choosing at random from the 1900 edition of the *Reader*, we can cite the story of Frank “the little lame boy,” an orphan who lives with his poor grandmother. A little girl named Mary meets Frank when he comes to pick up a basket of food prepared by Mary’s mother for Frank’s grandmother. Frank returns the favor of the food by giving Mary a reed whistle he has made. He shows her how to use it to play a tune to lull her doll to sleep. The Readers went through numerous editions over the years but the essential tone remained the same: treat your elders with respect and your playmates with kindness.

Pupils also could read moral lessons in short poems, such as the following:

Lend a hand to one another
In the daily toil of life
When we meet a weaker brother,
Let us help him in the strife
There is none so rich but may
In his turn, be forced to borrow;
And the poor man's lot to-day
May become our own to-morrow

Lend a hand to one another;
When malicious tongues have thrown
Dark suspicion on your brother,
Be not prompt to cast a stone.
There is none so good but may
Run adrift in shame and sorrow,
And the good man of to-day

May become the bad to-morrow.

Lend a hand to one another:
In the race for Honor's crown;
Should it fall upon your brother,
Let not envy tear it down.
Lend a hand to all, we pray,
In their sunshine or their sorrow;
And the prize they've won today
May become our own to-morrow.

McGuffey's Reader III, p. 26

The same lesson found in the old handbooks on good behavior warning against boasting turns up in the story about a clock and a sundial, with the clock boasting it can announce the time even on cloudy days, but then has to eat its words when the sun comes out and the sundial reveals that the clock is thirty-minutes slow. The moral: “humble modesty is more often right than a proud and boasting spirit.”

The French aristocrat Alexis de Toqueville traveling through America in the early 1830s noted the lack of class distinctions in this country and how that impacted peoples' manners. He noted that unlike the British or other Europeans, when Americans met in a foreign country they did not size each other up to see what social class the other person belonged to, but assumed that their common nationality would make them able to strike up a casual conversation without any trouble. On a somewhat different note, the English writer Frances Trollope, traveling in the U.S. about the same time as de Toqueville, found the Americans uniformly crude and dirty. She was especially put off by the widespread practice of tobacco chewing and resultant spitting. American men were, indeed, some of the world's biggest users of chewing tobacco, a practice that slowly gave way to cigarettes and cigars in the second half of the 19th century. Trollope and de Toqueville traveled widely in rural America of the time and doubtless drew many of their conclusions about American manners based on their contact with the largely rural population. While there is perhaps not a wide class divide in manners in the U.S. compared to Europe of the time, there was and still is -- in some places, at least -- noticeable differences between urban and rural manners. In general, however, American's are used to being greeted by a restaurant or café server with “Hi, Honey,” or some such thing, and learning the server's name. This would be unlikely to happen in a European eating or other service establishment, where the server would be much less familiar with the customer. This may not be true everywhere, such as in a British pub, where the bartender might greet the customer, even if he does not know him, in a more open and friendly manner.

The theme of transforming a person of lower class origins into a member of polite society pervades much of 19th century literature (e.g., Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*), raising the same question that concerned Castiglione's discussion group in Urbino: Did one have to be born into it to live an aristocratic way of life, or could one learn the ways of higher society despite modest birth? One of the most popular and humorous literary works on this theme was George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, which debuted on the London stage in 1914, just before war broke out in Europe. Better known to American audiences from its adaptation in 1956 as the Lerner and Loewe musical *My Fair Lady*, the story centers around the idea that the poor flower girl Eliza Doolittle could be taken off the London streets and transformed into a society lady largely by teaching her to speak “upper class” English. But as the Shaw biographer St. John Ervine noted: “It was not a course in phonetics which made Eliza display good manners in a world which was not a social and intellectual slum, but an inward grace which, like a seed hidden in the soil, germinates only when the conditions are right.” Speaking correct English (or French, or German) hardly qualifies one as a well-mannered person. The attributes of a cultured or “well-bred” individual required a great deal more knowledge of the world than that. But what Ervine calls “inward grace” could not be

taught, even though it could doubtless be found in a person born into humble circumstances, just as it might be totally lacking in someone born into great wealth. The real question is: what program of study will bring out this mysterious gracefulness?

Eliza tells Col. Pickering that the real transformation in her life came not through learning to speak “proper” English, but in a much subtler way: when the Colonel called her “Miss Doolittle” instead of “Eliza” when she first arrived at the home of Henry Higgins on Wimpole Street. Eliza says when he called her Miss Doolittle “that was the beginning of self-respect for me.” Speaking through Eliza, Shaw goes on to say: “the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she’s treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be lady to you, because you [Pickering], always treat me as a lady, and always will.”

The play also highlights another subtle but important change in manners: the growing influence of lower class language and customs upon the middle and upper classes. In other words, the process of “vulgarization” which is an inevitable by-product of increasing democracy is clearly evident earlier in Eliza’s use of the word “bloody” when declaring that she was “not bloody likely” to walk rather than to ride in her carriage across the park. Like the common use of four-letter words by today’s entertainers, the use of the word “bloody” caused the audience to laugh, at first nervously, as though they were hearing a lewd joke, but then quite uproariously, as though the use of the term (at least by Eliza) was a reminder that even a well-mannered person sometimes used bad language. When Shaw first put the word into the script the producer of the play feared the Lord Chancellor (in charge of censorship), would insist it be stricken. But it wasn’t, and “bloody” has now become a commonplace expletive in Britain, used by “all the best people.” Vulgarization did not really become common in the movies until the post-1960s period, when one taboo after another fell by the wayside. What we see and hear on the stage and on the screen either became more realistic, or more sensational, depending on what your base line happens to be. I think it’s safe to say that people born since the 1960s are much more likely to use profanity in their conversation -- with each other, anyhow -- than was the case through the 1950s. In the old days (see George Washington quotation above), such language was considered low class and characteristic of ditch diggers or other manual laborers. But it has migrated up the social scale at perhaps an even greater rate than upper class manners have moved down to influence the less well educated.

One striking change in the old code of honor, both in America and in Europe, was the gradual outlawing of dueling by the end of the 19th century as a way of responding to perceived sully of one’s reputation. Of course this was a strictly male thing and was an ancient rite. Historians cite David and Goliath and Achilles and Hector as early examples of one-on-one combat in which the winner of the contest achieved vindication and satisfaction over his foe. During medieval times the practice became somewhat more controlled, with jousting and other knightly sports replacing in some cases the resort to lethal arms. With the invention of the pistol, dueling took on a new life. One did not have to be an accomplished swordsman to defend one’s honor. Now anyone could pull a trigger and possibly kill his opponent, either by skill or just dumb luck, and escape with a small wound. Most duels through the 19th century did not result in fatality or even serious injury. The weapons were usually so inaccurate that hitting your opponent at all was a rarity. Students at German universities fought duels with fencing swords well into the 19th century. The previously mentioned Franz Boas, who emigrated to the U.S. in his 20’s, carried facial scars through life as evidence of this atavistic practice. Duels were often provoked by disparaging remarks and a young student had to defend his honor or be hounded out of the university. Boas, an assimilated Jew, was the object of numerous slights and insults by his classmates. They fought wearing padded vests and shields over their eyes, and the duel ended after blood was drawn, usually by a slash on the exposed skin of the face or neck. In America’s most famous pistol duel, Aaron Burr managed to mortally wound Alexander Hamilton in 1804. A few years later, a young Andrew Jackson killed a man in a duel and carried at least one bullet in his own body until his death years later. The American South was

particularly taken with the idea of male honor, and dueling in the antebellum era took the lives of many young men. In an 1836 manual entitled *The Art of Dueling*, the anonymous author cited as justification for the practice the notion that the threat of being challenged to a duel prevented gentlemen from insulting each other:

The great gentleness and complacency of modern manners, and those respectful attentions of one man to another, that at present render the social discourses of life far more agreeable and decent than among the most civilized nations of antiquity, must be ascribed, in some degree to this absurd custom

In other words, men treat one another politely because they fear being challenged to a duel if they do not. Of course there is nothing modern about this. In fact, as already noted, the idea of challenging someone to a duel over a perceived slight, or even over a rivalry for a damsel's attentions, has a long and checkered past. Modern civilization, we might say, has invented other, less violent, means to obtain satisfaction for perceived besmirching of one's honor. With the outlawing of dueling, government has provided for libel suits to somewhat lessen the sting of affronts to the male ego. We have found that polite society can be maintained without the threat of physical retaliation for rude or slanderous remarks. We now turn to a more refined way of encouraging mannerly behavior.

Starting with the publication of her first book on "etiquette" in 1922, Americans came to associate mannerly behavior with the name "Emily Post," who lived from 1873 to 1960. Although her books concentrated on telling readers how to behave in rather upper class social situations – making calls, hosting parties, inviting people to weddings – Post actually had a very broad understanding of the importance of manners, or "etiquette," and supposedly said once that "Etiquette is the science of living. It embraces everything. It is ethics. It is honor." One might say that it is the lubricant of life, allowing human interaction with a minimum of friction. She also stressed that proper manners meant: "a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others," and not just knowing which fork to use at the dinner table. Post's definition of good manners was not original, of course.

Like Castiglione during the Renaissance, Emily Post revered the perfect gentleman and the perfect lady. In her 1922 book, after two hundred pages of detailed instructions on how to behave in various social situations, Post concludes with a chapter entitled "The Fundamentals of Good Behavior" in which she lays down the rules for such things as borrowing money: a gentleman does not borrow money from a woman – ever – and only borrows money from another man "in unexpected circumstances." He "never takes advantage of a woman in a business dealing, nor of the poor or the helpless," injunctions that could have come directly from McGuffey's Reader. As in Erasmus's primer on good behavior, Post inveighs against vulgar displays of wealth: "One who is rich does not make a display of his money or his possessions. Only a vulgarian talks ceaselessly about how much this or that cost him." A well-bred man "dislikes the mention of money" and does not talk about it outside of business hours.

Post also echoes the need for a gentleman to keep calm. "A gentleman does not lose control of his temper." His self-control is in fact the reason he is able to maintain his "ascendancy over others who impulsively betray every emotion which animates them." She concludes: "Exhibitions of anger, hatred, embarrassment, ardor or hilarity, are all bad form in public." One can almost see George Washington's stoic visage before one's eyes as Post describes "good form." These same injunctions about poise also are found in Castiglione's description of the perfect courtier.

In an era when poor sportsmanship has become common and (unfortunately) commonly accepted, it is quaint to read Post's rules for how a gentleman conducts himself in sporting competition. She is quite emphatic that: "In no sport or game can any favoritism or evasion of rules be allowed. Sport is based upon impersonal and indiscriminating fairness to every one alike, or it is not 'sport.'" As in all other aspects of his life, the true gentleman maintains his calm while competing: "to be a good sportsman one

must be a stoic and never show rancor in defeat, or triumph in victory, or irritation, no matter what annoyance is encountered. One who can not not help sulking, or explaining, or protesting when the loser, or exulting when the winner, has no right to take part in games and contests.”

Here again we envision an English gentleman with his stiff upper lip and calm competence, perhaps competing on the cricket field or the tennis court. What Post doesn't say is that these rules apply primarily to amateur sports, not to the paid professional, who, by definition, is not a gentleman, because he plays the game for money, something no gentleman would do. Still, some professional sports – such as golf -- do insist on a modicum of good behavior. Tennis used to be in the same category, but many tennis professionals (John McEnroe, for example) brought their ungentlemanly behavior to the court and the game has had to adjust somewhat to outbursts from the high-strung competitors.

Post has much less to say about how a lady should behave, beyond the fact that most of the characteristics of a gentleman are also those of a true lady. Like a true gentleman, a lady should demonstrate naturalness and simplicity in her speech and actions. Of course it is easier said than done. Post would have people totally forget their own egos and seek to cultivate the interests (and egos) of whomever they happen to be in contact with. Living in the years immediately following World War I, Post saw a major upheaval in women's role in society: they gained the right to vote, they entered the work force in large numbers, and they demanded greater equality with men, especially within marriage. Still, Post commands that even “an unhappy wife” should “never show her disapproval of her husband, no matter how publicly he slights or outrages her.” To do so, she writes, would lower her to his own ungentlemanly level. If the marriage is irretrievable, she concludes, the woman should never speak of the causes of the break-up in public. It would be especially “vulgar” to “confide the private details of her life to reporters.”

Post also emphasizes the need for both ladies and gentleman to treat their help with courtesy and consideration. Again and again she demands that the higher class people to whom her book is addressed treat the poor and dependent with kindness. The French call it *noblesse oblige*.

It is widely believed that since the 1960s (which really did not take off as a culturally separate era until about 1964 and lasted into the 1970s) our manners have gone down hill. Formality was replaced increasingly with casual behavior. As late as 1961 (when I graduated from high school), teenagers had to observe a dress code at school: no jeans, girls had to wear skirts, and, of course, no flip-flops. When I went back to the same high school ten years later as a substitute teacher, I was shocked to see the way the students were dressed. Jeans, of course, but also a lot of bare skin that had previously been modestly covered. Many other aspects of the “youth revolution” permeated the society of the time and have more or less become an accepted part of our way of life. Conservatives trace many of the social problems the U.S. suffers from today back to the unbuttoned 60s and something called “liberal secularism”; whereas liberals celebrate the various “liberations” that the decade brought about. The problem became: how do we conduct ourselves politely in a newly casual environment where previously repressed behavior becomes commonly accepted as normal. A somewhat similar situation arose in the 1920s in the U.S. and to a lesser extent in Europe as women moved into the workplace in larger numbers and the mass media – especially motion pictures – depicted a much less inhibited life style. The mania for bootleg liquor and wild parties also broke down many of the old social taboos.

Another point sometimes made is that modern life has been “feminized” by the emergence of women into the public sphere. Both Post and her later imitator Judith Martin or “Miss Manners,” unintentionally exemplify the role of women in the formation and enforcement of modern manners. Whereas the old manners manuals were written by churchmen like Erasmus or the anonymous author of George Washington's primer on good behavior, our modern arbiters of propriety are almost always women authors. I have already noted the role of Renaissance women in softening the medieval roughness of manners, and the female influence seems to have grown over time. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762 in his

book *Emile* noted that women seemed to have a greater sensitivity toward the feelings of others than did men. He cites the example of the society hostess who seems to have an uncanny ability to detect when one of her guests is unsatisfied about the food or feeling awkward at a party where he does not know anyone. She quickly steps in to alleviate the situation.

It is common knowledge, I believe, that the male ego acts as an impediment to empathy. Women, in general, are less likely to suffer from such self-centeredness and as their participation in society has widened they have brought with them their greater sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others. In America today, modern “liberated” women are often accused of selfishness, especially by those who believe they should confine themselves to childbearing and rearing and other domestic activities. But in the office or in public life, the feminine influence has tended to break down many of the old barriers that existed in a world where the male ego tended to interfere with social interaction. The “old boy” network could be rather undemocratic and exclusionary. The “in crowd” was treated one way, and those not part of this power structure could be easily ignored. Women, especially powerful women, have more or less destroyed this old paradigm. Now, along with the requirement that ethnic and racial minorities enjoy equal representation with the white males, we see that women are increasingly determining what constitutes acceptable social conduct. It is not just the recent “MeToo” movement that illustrates this new-found power. Much of modern etiquette found in workplaces and in public life can be traced to the growing influence of women and their insistence on higher standards of politeness than applied when these places were totally dominated by men. We don’t have to look far to find the angry reaction to this new state of affairs.