

## Aristotle on Social Grace

Book IV of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) has three chapters (12-14, 1126b11-28b9) on three virtues to do with "company, social life and the interchange of words and actions" (1126b11: ἐν ταῖς ὁμιλίαις καὶ τῷ συζῆν καὶ λόγων καὶ πραγμάτων κοινωνεῖν). Two of these virtues are concerned with "pleasure" or rather making oneself pleasant to other people, one of them in the context of social life as a whole (the theme of IV 12), the other in the particular case of being amusing (the theme of IV 14). In between comes a chapter on "truth" in the restricted sense of truthful self-presentation (IV 13). All three discussions illustrate Aristotle's principle that virtue is a "mean" between extremes of too much and too little (1127a15-7).

In your social life generally (IV 12), you can be too eager to please, too eager to avoid causing offence – in which case you are "over-ingratiating" (ἄρεσκος) or, if you have ulterior motives, a "flatterer" (κόλαξ). On the other hand, to be unconcerned about causing distress is to be "churlish and contentious" (δύσκολος καὶ δύσερις). Both these extremes are vicious. The good middle state has no specific name;<sup>1</sup> the best English word for it would probably be "aimiability" or "niceness". At any rate, it "most resembles friendship", and the man who has it is "like a decent friend".<sup>2</sup> That is, he behaves like one in various ways, he treats you like one, but without necessarily feeling any affection.<sup>3</sup> Willing on principle to accept and go along with any in whose company he finds himself, though of course reserving a greater degree of consideration for those with the greater claim to it (1126b25-7, 36-27a2), he is eager to give and to share pleasure, so long as it is not positively dishonourable or harmful to do so – if it is, he will prefer to cause distress (1126b33). His desire to please, in other words, is properly regulated.

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<sup>1</sup> Aspasius in *EN* 121.8 suggested ὁμιλιτικὴ "companionability". The *Ad Demonicum* (roughly- contemporary with Aristotle) paraphrases the adjective ὁμιλιτικός, "companionable" – not quarrelsome, hard to please or contentious, slow to answer anger in kind, earnest or jocular at the right moments, swift to give and to return favours, not given to reproach..<sup>1</sup> ([Isoc.] 1.31). Aquinas (*S. Th.* II. ii. 114.1]) used "*affabilitas*".

<sup>2</sup> 1126b21: οἷον βουλόμεθα λέγειν τὸν ἐπεικεῖ φίλον.

<sup>3</sup> As Aquinas (*loc.cit.* ad ii) points out, you can and should show this unemotional friendliness towards total strangers.

Similarly, when it comes to being amusing (IV 14), there are “buffoons” (βωμόλοχοι) who will say anything to raise a laugh and boors (ἄγροικοι καὶ σκληροί) who dislike anything comic. The proper mean lies in a neat turn of “wit” (εὐτραπελία)<sup>4</sup> where the wish to amuse is controlled by considerations of good form (εὐσχημοσύνη) – of what a “decent” (ἐπιεικῆς), “gentlemanly” (ἐλευθέριος), well educated and refined (χαρίεις) person would say and listen to – and of not causing distress to the listener.

The intermediate chapter (IV 13) deals with truth “in words, deeds and pretention” (1127a19), in other words, with honesty in the presentation of your own merits – another virtue with no specific name (1127a14). Between the boaster (ἀλάζων) who claims too much for himself and the “disimulator” (εἴρων) who claims too little stands the “downright” (ἀνυπόκριτος) and truthful man who admits to what he has, “neither more nor less” (1127a25f.).

These topics are also discussed in the other two ethical treatises of the corpus Aristotelicum, in the *EE* (III 7, 1233b30-34a23) and *MM* (I 28, 1192b30-9 and 30-2, 1193a12-39), with the notable difference that both works split the virtue of general social agreeableness into two, speaking of “friendliness” (φιλία) as the mean between “hostility” (ἐχθρα) and “flattery” (κολάκεια), and of “dignity” (σεμνότης) as the mean between αὐθάδεια, “wilfulness”, “pleasing oneself and not giving a damn about pleasing any one else”, and ἀρέσκεια or the excessive desire to please others. It may be added that nearly all Aristotle's exemplars of moral failure in social life have chapters in Theophrastus' *Characters* – the ἄρεσκος (5), the κόλαξ (2), the εἴρων (1), and the ἀλάζων (23), the ἄγροικος (4), though the picture which emerges there of these failings is often rather different from Aristotle's. So much by way of introduction.

Aristotle's account of the social graces in *EN* comes at the end of a long discussion about the moral virtues and the mean. Starting with substantial treatments of two cardinal virtues, courage and temperance, Aristotle has apparently worked his way downwards through various characteristics of a gentleman – liberality, munificence, “greatness of soul” and mildness of temper – before dealing, rather briefly, with general social pleasantness, with truthful self-presentation and ready wit, three qualities which, on some accounts, might seem to have rather little to do with “morality”. They are not an obvious manifestation of excellence in the soul; nor are they a foundation, in the way that justice is, of civic well-being. Aristotle

<sup>4</sup> Note the word-play at 28a10: ... εὐτραπελοὶ ... οἷον εὐτροποὶ.

himself rather suggests that he has come to the bottom of the barrel when he writes of the mean between boastfulness and self-depreciation:

“this one too has no name. But it is not a bad idea to come on to this kind of virtue. We shall know the facts about moral character better if we go through them individually, and we shall be convinced that the virtues are means if we are aware that this is so in all cases” (1127a14-8).

What Aristotle is doing in these chapters – and this explains why he is stuck, more than once, for terminology – is to turn his analytic equipment to an area which has received very little attention from philosophers, ancient or modern. The theme of “company, social life and the interchange of words and actions” brings us to the world of everyday social intercourse with its pleasures and decencies. Aristotle speaks, in a striking phrase, *ὁμιλία τις ἐμμελής*, “a graceful way to get on with people” (1127b39f.). He is taking a look at certain principles of politeness, of good manners, of courtesy.

Here a few general remarks about courtesy may be helpful. Our own concept of it derives from the Middle Ages, though some of its elements are much older. Words like “courtesy” *courtoisie*, or *Höflichkeit* all imply by their etymology something like “manners appropriate to a court” (SOED). Now a court is rather like a hot-house where plants which grow in the wild can grow more luxuriantly. The residence of a country's ruler and at least some of its governing class, it is a place where important people live a highly visible life in close proximity to each other. Such people may well need a more developed sense of decorum than they would in a less conspicuous environment. They may need a greater refinement or sophistication in dealing with one another, a greater skill, for instance, in putting what they have to say obliquely so as not to cause offence. In Greece, where cities rather than royal courts were the centres of culture, this would be appreciated as “urbanity” (*ἀστειότης*), the style of the cultivated city-dweller.

Decorum and refinement are important elements in almost any concept of “good manners”. So, too, are a certain friendliness or benevolence towards the people with whom one is in contact and a certain deference, a certain show of respect. But our ideas of what constitutes courtesy are disorganized and unsystematic. As I said, the topic has not received much attention from theorists. It may, however, help to recall a distinction which we draw in English between “manners” and “morals”, between “having good manners”

and “being good”. The relation between the two is tricky. Both tend to involve respect for others; and the same styles of argument, utilitarian and otherwise, can be applied in support of either.<sup>5</sup> But whereas being good is a matter of respecting the substantive rights of the other person – not stealing his property, not seducing his wife and so forth, politeness means respect for his feelings and dignity. In Greek and Latin, the contrast is that between δίκη and αἰδώς, between *iustitia* or “not violating people’s rights” with *verecundia* or “not offending them”.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle himself has some sense of the distinction between morality and good manners, discussing these from the viewpoint of a moral philosopher. In the chapter on truthfulness, he says, “we are not talking of one who tells the truth in his business arrangements nor in anything that involves justice or injustice – that belongs to a different virtue” (27a33f.). We are simply talking of one who is truthful because it is in his character to be so (b2f.), of one who, though Aristotle does not quite spell this out, is not going to throw his weight about in company on false pretences, being inclined, if anything, to understate his merits, since he knows that this looks “more harmonious” (ἐμμελέστερον) and that exaggerations are “burdensome” (b7-10). Again, the “friendliness” described in IV 12 is a disposition which does not require any “real” feeling of fondness or affection on the part of the agent. He acts in a friendly way “because he is that sort of person” (26b24f.). Nor need the friendliness go beyond agreeable amicability; it does not commit him to acting, in any serious way, like a “real friend” or ally (1126b22). There are numerous cases, as we know, where a friendly gesture can be interpreted either as “real kindness” or “mere politeness”.

A second distinction, which need not concern us for long, is that between courtesy and the rules of *etiquette*, the conventional rituals and ceremonies through which it finds expression. The commonest way, for instance, to show respect for someone is through some conventional, mutually recognisable mark of respect. Such tokens vary in complexity from simple gestures – like a bow, rising for some one, taking off one’s hat – to something very much more complicated. Again, the demands of courtesy leave their mark on language; clarity,

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<sup>5</sup> It might be claimed (though neither of these arguments would have been used by Aristotle) that you should be polite, just as you should be virtuous, because the world will be a happier place if you are, or alternatively that everyone in the community, however you define that, is entitled to a modicum of courtesy from you.

<sup>6</sup> Cic. *Off.* 1.99: *iustitiae partes sunt non violare homines, verecundiae non offendere.*

directness, brevity and precision may in part have to be sacrificed to the other person's feelings. A variety of lexical or syntactic devices designed to convey respect – honorific forms of the address (“master”, “lord”, etc.), the replacement of the second person singular with a *pluralis reverentiae* (“vous”, “Ihr”) or with some abstract expression like “your Highness”, and so forth – may have to be brought in. The frequency and extravagance of such devices vary considerably from one culture to another. Conventions change. Gestures and turns of phrase that count as “good manners” in one society or century may seem unacceptably curt or servile in another. The principles of courtesy, by comparison, are constant and universal; the aim is always, as Cicero put it, to make the other person feel respected and liked.<sup>7</sup> Courtesy always expresses some positive evaluation of a person, of his dignity, of his moral worth. Etiquette is a matter of observing rules and procedures. While in practice inseparable from courtesy, it can thus be distinguished from it. For it is perfectly possible to show the keenest dislike and disrespect to a person without breaking any established rule of good manners.

Cicero speaks of showing respect and liking. Of the two, respect is what most people would emphasize. Courteous behaviour tends to mean deferential behaviour; and questions of courtesy regularly turn into questions about what sort of deference should be shown to which people on what grounds. Aristotle's attention, however, is on friendliness, on being nice to people and making them feel that you like them. Deference is not a theme in our chapters.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere he has rather more to say about deference. We learn, in the *Rhetoric*, that people expect “to be made much of” (πολυωρεῖσθαι) by their inferiors in any respect, and are angry if they are not (1378b35f.). Anger is in fact a response to being “slighted”, to ὀλιγωρία or someone's “active expression of opinion that you are worthless” (1378b11f.), an extreme failure of deference which takes three forms:

<sup>7</sup> *Off.* 1.136: *maxime curandum est, ut eos, quibuscum sermonem conferemus, et vereri et diligere videamur.*

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle touches on it when he observes that the obsequious man tries to please by indiscriminately “praising everything” (26b12f.) and asserts without question that it is “proper” (πρέπον) to respect the differences between persons of rank and ordinary people, close acquaintances and not so close acquaintances (26b35-27a2), that the claims to your consideration of those whom you know and those whom you do not, of those familiar and those unfamiliar to you, are unequal but should equally be respected (26b25-7). But that is about all.

contempt, spite and *hybris* or "being beastly to someone simply for the pleasure of showing your superiority to him" (b15-29). But this range of reflection is conspicuously absent from the final chapters of *EN* IV. One can only speculate why. Aristotle is quite capable of leaving out quite important elements of a virtue that he is discussing. His account of μεγαλοψυχία or "greatness of soul" was about the desire of a great man for great honour, for the recognition of his great virtue. But "greatness of soul", as popularly understood, had a strong element of generosity, of "big-heartedness". The *Rhetoric* speaks of it as "virtue making for great benefactions" (1366b17), a consideration almost entirely ignored in the chapters devoted to it in the ethical treatises. Perhaps Aristotle had already said what he had to say about generosity in his chapters on liberality and magnificence. Something similar may have happened when *EN* got on the virtue which it describes as "like friendship".

Here, though, *EE* had a different story. Followed by *MM* and Didymus Areius (146.8-12 Wachsmuth), it spoke of two middle states, neither of them strictly "virtues" but rather "middle states of emotion" (1233b17: μεσότητες παθητικά). It labelled one of them as φιλία, the mean between "hostility" (ἔχθρα) and flattery (κολάκεια), and the other as σεμνότης or dignity, a mean between αὐθάδεια and ἀρέσκεια. Described elsewhere as "throwing one's weight around in a subdued and seemly manner"<sup>9</sup> σεμνότης is more than once, as it is here, combined and contrasted with αὐθάδεια, a term with connotations of arrogance.<sup>10</sup> A series with these terms in it might very well be about deference, about demanding and showing respect; the αὐθάδης in fact, as Aristotle presents him here, is distinguished by disregard and contempt for others.<sup>11</sup> In the same way, a series with ἔχθρα and φιλία in it would seem to be about "friendliness", it is certainly about accommodating oneself to the desires and pleasures of others. The trouble is that the excess opposed to ἔχθρα is κολάκεια, while that opposed to αὐθάδεια is ἀρέσκεια. It would be better the other way round. To judge from Theophrastus (not that that means very much), the ἀρεσκοῦς is the one who overdoes the friendliness to all and sundry, while it is the flatterer who goes in for exaggerated deference. There is a hint of this in a later book of *EN*; the flatterer appeals to people's vanity, by making himself out to be ὑπερεχόμενος φίλος, "your humble friend" who gets so much more than you do from the friendship that he is bound to love you more than you love him (VIII

<sup>9</sup> *Rhet.* 1391a27: ... μαλακῆ καὶ εὐσχημῶν βαρύτης.

<sup>10</sup> *Aristoph. Ra.* 1020, *Ar. Rhet.* 1368a38f. See Ussher on Theophrastus *Char.* 15.

<sup>11</sup> *EE* 1233b36: ὁ μὲν γὰρ μηδὲν πρὸς ἕτερον ζῶν ἀλλὰ καταφρονητικὸς αὐθάδης.

9 1159a14). At all events, Aristotle abandoned the arrangement when he wrote *EN*, feeling perhaps that the chapter on μεγαλοψυχία had exhausted what he had to say about dignity. He now conflates the two triads, treating ἀρέσκεια and κολάκεια as alternative forms of excess, and describing the virtue as merely “like friendship” which he now sees as a disposition and a virtue distinct from the emotion or feeling of “fondness” (φίλησις).<sup>12</sup>

But what sort of “friendship” will Aristotle’s “niceness” be like? Later in *EN* (VIII 3) he goes on to distinguish three kinds, based on three different grounds for attachment, the good, the advantageous, the pleasant. Friendships, that is, can rest on the “moral worth and personality of the friends”,<sup>13</sup> on advantages to be derived from their association, or on the pleasure which they get from each other’s company; and they will vary accordingly. What the virtue described in *EN* IV 12 resembles is obviously the third kind of friendship. The whole chapter is about making oneself pleasant. Its possessor will be like a good friend of the sort described in the *Rhetoric* as “those who are pleasant to pass time and spend the day with – good tempered people, not given to finding fault with your errors, not contentious or quarrelsome .. tactful in making or taking a joke” (1381a28-33). Enjoyment is of course a *sine qua non* of any real friendship. People who cannot stand one another’s company are not really “friends”, they are simply “well-disposed” to each other (1157b13-9, 1158a1-10). You would not put up with the Good itself for long if you found it distressing (1158a24). And an association for pleasure is authentic and free of ulterior motives in a way that a friendship of convenience is not. It is altogether more “liberal” (1158a21). But it, too, has something “accidental” about it, since the pleasure that you get from someone’s company may have little or nothing to do with what sort of person he really is (1156a12f., 16-19). In associating with people, immediate pleasure should not be the be all and end all. The efforts of the “nice” man to make himself pleasant and “sweeten the atmosphere” (συνηδύνειν) – by praising you, by accepting you, by considering your feelings – have to be regulated; his company will be ὡς δεῖ, “as it ought to be”. It is not simply that some people are entitled to more consideration than others are. His aim of contributing pleasure and not causing distress must be regulated by considera-

<sup>12</sup> 1157b28f.: ἔοικε δ' ἡ μὲν φίλησις πάθει, ἡ δὲ φιλία ἔξει. At 1105b27, φιλία can be cited as one of the πάθη. At 1108a27 (a summary of the classification at IV 6), it is distinguished from the περὶ τὰ πάθη μεσότητες.

<sup>13</sup> H.H. Joachim, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford 1951) 246.

tions of what is expedient (συμφέρον) and of what is honourable, fine and praiseworthy (καλόν). Should these demand it, he will express disapproval and actually choose to cause distress people by so doing (1126a33). Expedience and τὸ καλόν, as we know, are far-reaching considerations, themes of deliberative and epideictic oratory. In the present context, their range is fairly restricted. Regard for expedience may indeed mean avoiding consequences harmful to himself or to the person whom he would rather jolly along; but the principal consequence which the nice man has in mind is simply that of keeping the atmosphere sweet. So he can go in for a little “hedonic calculus”: for the sake of a great pleasure later on, he will cause a little distress here and now (1127a5. Quite what Aristotle has in mind here is an open question. Perhaps the nice man resorts on occasion to a timely and gentle snub so as to avoid a major embarrassment in the future). Against that, the connotations of τὸ καλόν are primarily a matter of following “good form” (εὐσχημοσύνη) and avoiding “bad form” (ἀσχημοσύνη), of behaving in a way that is “appropriate” or “fitting” (ἀπονέμων τὸ πρέπον, ὡς ἀρμόζει) – in short, of observing decorum.

All these words point to an *aesthetic* aspect of courtesy. Good manners are beautiful manners; they “look good”. Aristotle in *EN* IV 12-14 uses a number of words with this sort of resonance – even the adjectives χαρίεις “graceful” and ἐπιεικῆς (originally, “seemly”, “decent” – its contrary is ἀεικῆς) have this sort of ring to them. Our own word “decorum” began life in Latin where it translated the Greek used by Aristotle, τὸ πρέπον or “what is appropriate”. Underlying the expression in both languages was a construction with an impersonal verb and a pronoun: πρέπει μοι, *debet* me, “it befits me”. The concept of “decorum” was thus relative. What befits me may not befit you; and what is “proper” for a bad man may itself be disgusting – the grisly humour of an Atreus for instance: “*natis sepulchro ipse est parens*” (cf. Cic. *Off.* 1.97). To have normative force, the idea of “appropriateness” must be attached, explicitly or implicitly, to some accepted standard of goodness. Which is what Aristotle proceeds to do when, in IV 14, he turns to a special form of amiability, to “wit”. The witty, εὐτράπελοι, are archetypally pleasant company, supreme examples of people liked for the pleasure they give (1156a12). They are the companions whom the powerful seek when they are after enjoyment (1158a31). And the pleasures of wit, in contrast to that of the sexual act where the ἐραστής can be expected to have rather more fun than the ἐρώμενος, provide a model of mutual enjoyment, of something that delights both parties equally (1157a3-5). But here once again, immediate pleasure is not the be all



and end all. Your wish to amuse has be restrained by considerations of good form and of not distressing the butt of one's humour (1128a6f). Only the βωμολόχος, the vulgar buffoon, sticks at nothing to raise a laugh. The trouble is that the funniest jokes tend to be indecent or wounding – the *Rhetoric*, in fact, speaks of wit as “*hybris* refined” (1389b11 f: ὕβρις πεπαιδευμένη), where *hybris* can imply both aggression and sexual wantonness. Aristotle is led to ask whether an acceptable jibe is to be defined as one which observes the proprieties or one which avoids distressing the hearer (1128a2-7). The latter criterion, unfortunately is imprecise, since different people like or dislike different things (1128a27f.). All the same, jokes that wound have serious consequences. A jibe is a form of verbal abuse, of invective: and some forms of invective are banned by law.<sup>14</sup> So, perhaps, should some jibes (1128a31). Not that this would worry a person of liberal refinement (ὁ χαρίεις καὶ ἐλευθέριος) who “will be, as it were a law unto himself”. That is, he has absorbed and internalized the accepted standards of politeness to the point where he can judge, better than any law can prescribe, what will or will not cause offence; and he will act accordingly. But the vital criterion of acceptable humour is that of decency. This too has its social dimension. The virtuous mean between buffoonery and a “boorish” lack of humour is characterized by “adroitness” (ἐπιδεξιότης or “getting it right”<sup>15</sup>) – so much so that it hardly matters whether you call its possessor “adroit” or “witty” (1128a33) – and the mark of adroitness is to say and listen only to “such things as befit a person who is decent and gentlemanly” (1128a18: οἷα τῷ ἐπιεικεῖ καὶ ἐλευθερίῳ ἀρμόττει). As Aristotle goes on to explain (1128a20-2), there is a difference between a gentleman's humour and that of a servant, between that of the educated and uneducated,<sup>16</sup> In other words, decorum is anchored in social class. Respectable humour is the humour accepted, enjoyed and practised by respectable people. The “decent gentleman”, or whatever you want to call him, is himself the standard of decency, in the same way that elsewhere the σπουδαῖος is described as the “measure” (1166a12) and the “mean” in Aristotle's celebrated definition, is “as the φρόνιμος would define it” (1109 a11).

<sup>14</sup> In Rome the crime of *occentatio* or making lampoons carried the death penalty. (Cic. *Rep.* 4.9.12, etc.).

<sup>15</sup> The literal meaning of the term is “righthandedness”.

<sup>16</sup> And also, we might add recalling *EN* I, between that of the “vulgar” (φορτικόν) and the “refined” (χαρίεντες) - it is not only in their choice of ends that they differ (1095b16-22).

That may not itself say anything very substantial about decorum. Good manners were something which people learned in childhood. Instruction in proper deportment and dress, in table manners “meat in the right hand, bread in the left”<sup>17</sup> – and so forth was by parental precept, if it was not left to the *paidagogos* (Plut. *Mor.* 439f.). Aristotle does, however, make a substantive point when he contrasts the coarse humour and crude language, *αἰσχρολογία*, of Old Comedy with the use of innuendo in contemporary comic writers, “an important difference when it comes to *εὐσχημοσύνη*” (1128a25). But innuendo is not only a way of preserving decorum, if it does so at all.<sup>18</sup> It introduces another element of courtesy – that of sophistication. In antiquity, this went by the name of “urbanity”, *ἀστειότης* in Greek. The refinement of the true city-dweller, in contrast to the *ἀγροικία*, the “boorishness” of the country hick, *ἀστειότης*, was also the term for a literary virtue discussed by writers on rhetoric from Aristotle onwards. Expressions admired for their urbanity, he tells us (1410b20f., 35f.), are ones which convey their information swiftly but indirectly, through metaphor, antithesis and animated expression. Instead of boorishly labouring your point, you pay the other person a *compliment* in allowing him to infer it for himself. You put him on your own level of sophistication, suggesting to him that he too is *ἀστεῖος, πεπαιδευμένος, χαρίεις*, one of the group. To speak with urbanity is to hint; and to hint is to take the edge off what may be embarrassing or painful.

The townsman can afford to be subtle, to express himself in nuances and understatement. In this, he resembles the *εἴρων* in *EN* IV 13. As we have seen, the chapter deals with truthful self-presentation as a mean between “boasting” and “ironic” understatement, which is the lesser evil. A truthful person will incline towards it; “this would seem to have a better tone (*ἐμμελέστερον*), since exaggerations are burdensome” (1127b7f.). People who use understatement are less of a social menace than are braggarts. “They would seem to be more refined in character, speaking as they do simply to avoid pomposity, and disclaiming the qualities that bring reputation, as Socrates used to do” (27b23-6). Socrates was notoriously the master of ironic self-deprecation. In Plato’s dialogues, though, this serves a serious purpose. To be cross-examined by Socrates was a disconcerting experience; and it was only by exemplary tact and self-effacement, by avoiding any hint of personal aggrandizement, that he

<sup>17</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 99d. Cf. Augustine *Enn.Ps.* 136. 16

<sup>18</sup> Aspasius says that it does not (125.34f.: *διαφέρει δ' οὐδὲν πρὸς εὐσχημοσύνην ἢ φανερώς αἰσχρολογεῖν ἢ μόνον ἐμφαίνειν*).

could keep the discussion going. Hence the emphasis on his own lack of expertise and the very tentative formulation of his own views (e.g. *Hipp. Ma.* 300c), sometimes put in the mouth of a third party: "But someone may say" ... (*Grg.* 452a), or perhaps in the imperfect: "I used to think ... (but now, of course...)" (*Prt.* 319a, *Symp.* 198d, etc.), or with some phrase like "I fear that...", "it might be that..." (*Crit.* 48a, etc. Cf. Latin *vereor ne, vide ne*), or with a question. The effect of such constructions is to leave things open, to give the listener the final decision about the truth of what is claimed, rather than forcing the claim upon him. They all serve to build up the other person and avoid any impression of bearing down on him. For Cicero (*Off.* 1.134), the Socratic writings were models of decorous conversation – easy-going and accommodating humorous and unassertive, always apposite in tone. And Aristotle grants that a moderate use of irony is graceful enough (27b29-31). His μεγαλόψυχος who is forthright and downright, having far too little regard for people to be anything else, none the less goes in for ironic depreciation towards the common people (1124b29-31). Even so, to deny some trifling or obvious virtue is "coy" (βαυκοπανοῦργος) and "rather contemptible" (27b26). Indeed, it amounts to boasting. To disclaim what you obviously have is to draw attention to the fact that you have it.<sup>19</sup> The Peripatetic Aristo of Ceos was later to class irony as a form of arrogance, a sly way of building people up in order to put them down. He goes some of the tricks – elaborate deference in addressing or talking of people ("Phaedrus the beautiful", "Lysias the wise"), protestation of one's own ignorance and worthlessness, modest ascription of one's own ideas to others (he takes the example of Socrates in the *Menexenus* and Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*), and a heavy use of compliment:

"You are quite right to look down on me, important as you are", "If only I were young, I would put myself to school under you" ... But why go on? Collect people's memoirs of Socrates!" (fr. 14 IX Wehrli).

Such "understatement" amounts to "sneering", to μυκτηρισμός or "mockery disguised but not concealed", as Quintilian defines it<sup>20</sup> which some rhetoricians were to class as a sub-form of irony.<sup>21</sup> That Socrates should be its exemplar was due in part to a physiognomical accident. A sneer finds physical expression in a wrinkling of the nostrils, and his snub nose was the most prominent feature of the

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Aspasius 124.8f.

<sup>20</sup> 8.6.59: *dissimulatus quidem sed non latens derisus*.

<sup>21</sup> See C. Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig 1890) 88 n. 1.

Socratic face.<sup>22</sup> But if irony could turn into a form of arrogance, it was also and originally a form of *evasiveness*, a sin against truth. Traditionally, the εἴρων was a rascal who acted dumb, disclaiming knowledge which he obviously possessed and attitudes which he obviously held, never giving you a straight answer and never letting you get your hands on him. That is what Socrates is accused of being, by Thrasymachus in the *Republic* (337a); and that is how Theophrastus (*Char.* 1) presents the character: a person who never allows his detractors or anyone else to know how he feels, who never owns up to everything, who is always coming out with phrases like “I don’t believe it”, “I don’t understand”, “I am astounded” and so forth. In company, such a person may be more of a pain than a straightforward braggart.

The virtue of honesty lies in controlling even a sociable dislike of being pompous and subordinating it to standards of truth. “In itself, falsehood is vile and culpable, truth is fine and praiseworthy” (1127a28-30). Truth is the higher value. In the same way, there are more important considerations than just trying to please people, and there are times when one has to stop a joke that is going too far. Aristotle’s emphasis – consistently enough with his theory of moral virtue as a mean – is on the limits of courtesy, on not overdoing the friendliness and urbanity. But that still leaves the practical problem of how, in given circumstances, to judge these limits and act accordingly. Later writers, notably Plutarch, turned their attention to the problem. Carried to excess, the wish to please can turn into obsequiousness or flattery; and flattery is the reverse of true friendship. But a good many of the flatterer’s techniques – the feigned agreement, the accommodating manner, etc. – are ploys of everyday courtesy. When should they be abandoned? And how are you to stand up for yourself in company without causing offence? Plutarch tackled such questions in at least three treatises. The bulk of the *De laude ipsius* goes to advice on how to praise yourself inoffensively;<sup>23</sup> the *De vitioso pudore* offers suggestions on how to overcome your bashfulness and say “No”<sup>24</sup> e.g. by lacing the refusal with a joke (534bc); while the last third of the *De adulate* (cc. 25-37, 65e-74e) is virtually an essay on παρρησία or “forthrightness”, on how to speak your mind in an honest but amicable way.

<sup>22</sup> Xen. *Symp.* 5.6.

<sup>23</sup> cc. 4-17, 540c-6b. Under the name of περιαντολογία [Alex. *Rhet.*, p. 4 Sp.], this was a subject in the rhetorical curriculum.

<sup>24</sup> cc. 5-8, 13-6, 530e-2c, 534a-5b; Cf. Tu. *san.* 124b. The *recusatio* or polite refusal [e.g. Horace, *C.* 1.6, *Ep.* 1.7] was a standard poetic exercise.

Manners, for Aristotle, matter because they are an expression of morals. A person who is honest in his social pretensions will be honest in business transactions and other matters of substance too – “since that is the kind of person he is”. In the same way, a man who acts “like a decent friend” because “that is what he is like” can be expected to conduct his real friendships in as decent a manner. Again, his humour, the jokes which he is prepared to make or to hear, are evidence of his moral standards, of how he is likely to behave. That is why the way that a person conducts himself in company, deserves attention from the moral philosopher. If Aristotle was the only major philosopher to give it much attention, others did pay lip service. A prospective guardian in Plato's *Republic*, as well as possessing the cardinal virtues and a good intellect, needs to be “measured and gracious” (486d. Cf. Xen. *Ages.* 8.1f.). The Stoic sage is an unlikely social paragon: “companionable, tactful, a man to arouse and capture good will and friendship by his conversation, as accommodating as possible to the mass of men, besides being lovely, gracious, persuasive, winning in his ways, true in his aim and right in his timing, intelligent, straightforward, uncomplicated, simple and unaffected” (*SVF* 3.630). But it was only Aristotle who discussed the social graces at all systematically. And this accounts for the echoes of his doctrine in a rather unlikely place. Book I of Horace's *Epistles* is avowedly concerned with serious questions of truth and propriety (1.11: *quid verum atque decens curo* ...), though not committed to any one school (1.14: *nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri*). When, however, it comes to questions of manners, principally in *Epistles* 17 and 18,<sup>25</sup> the poet turns to Aristotle: *virtus est medium vitiorum* (18.9), a mean between the vices of obsequious flattery and a harsh, awkward (*inconcinus*), boorish independence of manner. Both epistles are about how to get on in society – or rather how to get on with the great (17.2: *quo tandem pacto deceat maioribus uti*). The advice which Horace gives is fairly pedestrian: don't be too acquisitive (17.44-62), be accommodating (18.39-66), keep secrets (18.37f.) and avoid gossip, don't eye the servants, be careful with recommendations (18.66-85). Into these, however, he interpolates a different kind of prescription. Rid yourself of the major vices – lust, ambition, avarice and the taste for gambling (18.21-36). Acquire true values through

<sup>25</sup> Note also 1.9. Asked to write a letter of recommendation to Tiberius, Horace hesitates between the brazen presumption of doing so and the “greater fault” of pretending that he cannot, *dissimulator opis propriae, mihi commodus uni* (9.9). The recollection here of Aristotle's view on irony (*EN* 1127b22-6) is enriched by a new emphasis on the *selfishness* of such conduct.

the study of philosophy (18.96-103). Horace's ideal is the combination of grace, adaptability and integrity which he found exemplified in Aristippus (*Ep.* 1.17.23f, 26-9). To be that sort of social animal, you need to be a good person. Aristotle, I suspect would have agreed, though he might have added that the mean between obsequiousness and boorish independence is one which one the good man, the "decent gentleman" (*EN* 1128a18) can determine.

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В статье анализируется раздел "Никомаховой этики" Аристотеля (главы 12-14), посвященный качествам, которые относятся не столько к добродетелям и порокам, сколько к свойствам, понимаемым сегодня как хорошие или плохие манеры. Различие между принципами морали и правилами вежливости мы находим *in nuce* уже у самого Аристотеля. Вместе с тем одна из причин, по которым Аристотель, в отличие от других крупных философов, проявляет интерес к хорошим и, соответственно, плохим манерам, заключается в том, что для него плохие манеры являются внешним выражением более глубоких, уже собственно моральных качеств.