

A Metaphysic of Manners

by Samuel HUX (August 2015)

A pretentious title, but this is as close as I'll ever come to Immanuel Kant—to whom I apologize most politely for my titular imitation of his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*. And there is, isn't there, something graceful about the alliteration?

It has been my experience that conservatives ("traditionalist" conservatives at any rate) are generally more responsive than liberals to the notion that manners and graciousness, far from being mere secondary considerations, matter profoundly, and indicate to a significant degree the health of a society. I don't necessarily claim that conservatives are really more spiritual, of more refined sensibilities, than liberals, but I have found that their public mythologies better prepare them than liberals theirs to admit that spirit and sensibility *do* have some essential connection to manners and graciousness, whether they themselves possess those virtues or not. Conservatism is stuck, no matter how its adherents may strive to show that they're really regular guys and dames, with a patina of elitism, simply because conservatism has always assumed some truth in the notion of natural hierarchies—and the world, its conservative constituents included, will continue to associate that with a premium on refined behavior. Liberalism is stuck, however much its adherents may protest that merit must be rewarded, with an aura of leveling, simply because its claims have always been that it's the party of *égalité*—and the world, its liberal constituents included, knows that the common denominator is lower than higher. I hasten to add that I take both public mythologies with an ocean of salt, but believe in their powers to compel or endorse modes of behavior; and I add, further, that I have usually distrusted elitism and leveling in about equal measure; or thought I did, although—reason for the reflections that follow—I am beginning to think the latter, in some of its manifestations, the greater danger.

So James Como's essay in the May 2015 issue of *The New English Review* is all the more welcome to me: [here](#).

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