

No Cant in Immanuel

by Theodore Dalrymple (April 2013)

My late friend, the development economist Peter Bauer, had the most beautiful manners: so beautiful that I took them for my model. Alas, I could never equal them for, though not particularly ill-mannered, I have always to *remember* to behave well. Just as style in prose should be imperceptible, as the uniquely perfect vehicle for *what* is said and indissoluble therefrom, so manners should be unconscious, not added to conduct but intrinsic to it. They should not arise from reflection but from a habit so deeply ingrained that, however much they might once have been instilled or learned, they are now entirely natural and normal to the person who has them. And since their purpose is to ease social intercourse and make it agreeable, they should not be carried to the point of making anyone uncomfortable, turning them into mere etiquette in order to distinguish those who know how to behave from those who do not.