

T043

The missing concept of courtesy

I suggest that the characteristic your correspondent Mr Madgwick (29 August 1985) identifies as young hitch-hikers' lack of tact goes wider than hitch-hiking, and further than tactlessness. Tact is a function of politeness or courtesy, along with a free use of 'please' and 'thank you', readiness to apologise when in the wrong, punctilio in answering letters and returning telephone calls, and similar aspects of civil consideration for other people. This concept of civility I find missing in young adults today. Some it is true are naturally agreeable, and that helps a great deal. But the idea of politeness as a *learnt* social value seems to be in decline.

What to do when courtesy fades from the syllabus of those things children are taught at home or school? Why are there no agitators who embrace this cause as others clamour for animal rights or sex equality? But perhaps there is something essentially *discourteous* about such clamouring. Indeed that may be part of the trouble.¹

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¹ *The Times*, 10 September 1985.