



Politeness in Anne Sophie Swetchine (1782-1857)

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A prominent salonnier, Mme Swetchine praises the virtue of politeness as essential for maintaining civility in philosophical, political, and theological disputes. She diagnoses why such controversies often deteriorate into invective: "the incompatibility of character, the deep and radical division that often emerges from principles drawn from antipathetic sources, the passionate pursuit of opposed ends, all the elements of discord put into play by the persistent irritability of self-love, of wounded pride, or of contradictory interests" (1875: 31). Polite speech and conduct are the only antidote to this tendency to eviscerate one's intellectual opponents. Politeness can restore a measure of respect and decorum in philosophical disputes. Under its influence, "the most passionate opinions appear on the exterior to be stripped of all bitterness (...) the expressions lose what is most wounding in them" (1875: 32).

Primary Sources:

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