

History of Private Life

Mid-term essay. Deadline: November 7, 2019

Essay (2 pages, or 1200 words maximum):

What were the consequences of evolving conceptions of patriarchal authority between 1600 and 1800 on 'family life' in urban and rural England? Use precise examples to illustrate your argument.

Hints: compare the different lifestyles available to families in urban and rural settings; compare the evolution of what a 'family' represented during this period; compare different thinkers' positions on the notion of 'patriarchal authority'.

Commentary (2 pages, or 1200 words maximum):

Please comment on the following document.

(Hints: How did newspapers influence sociability in early modern England? What was the specificity of the Spectator? Why do the authors mean when they wish "to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality").

It is with much Satisfaction that I hear this great City inquiring Day by Day after these my Papers, and receiving my Morning Lectures with a becoming Seriousness and Attention. My Publisher tells me, that there are already Three Thousand of them distributed every Day: So that if I allow Twenty Readers to every Paper, which I look
5 upon as a modest Computation, I may reckon about Threescore thousand Disciples in London and Westminster, who I hope will take care to distinguish themselves from the thoughtless Herd of their ignorant and unattentive Brethren. Since I have raised to myself so great an Audience, I shall spare no Pains to make their Instruction agreeable, and their Diversion useful. For which Reasons I shall endeavour to enliven Morality
10 with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality, that my Readers may, if possible, both Ways find their account in the Speculation of the Day. And to the End that their Virtue and Discretion may not be short transient intermitting Starts of Thought, I have resolved to refresh their Memories from Day to Day, till I have recovered them out of that desperate State of Vice and Folly, into which the Age is fallen. The Mind that lies
15 fallow but a single Day, sprouts up in Follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous Culture. It was said of *Socrates*, that he brought Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-tables, and in Coffee-houses.

20 I would therefore in a very particular Manner recommend these my Speculations to all well-regulated Families, that set apart an Hour in every Morning for Tea and Bread and Butter; and would earnestly advise them for their Good to order this Paper to be punctually served up, and to be looked upon as a Part of the Tea Equipage.

Sir *Francis Bacon* observes, that a well-written Book, compared with its Rivals and
25 Antagonists, is like *Moses's* Serpent, that immediately swallow'd up and devoured those of the *Aegyptians*. I shall not be so vain as to think, that where the **Spectator** appears, the other publick Prints will vanish; but shall leave it to my Readers Consideration, whether, Is it not much better to be let into the Knowledge of ones-self, than to hear what passes in *Muscovy* or *Poland*; and to amuse our selves with such
30 Writings as tend to the wearing out of Ignorance, Passion, and Prejudice, than such as naturally conduce to inflame Hatreds, and make Enmities irreconcilable. [...]

There is another Set of Men that I must likewise lay a Claim to, whom I have lately called the Blanks of Society, as being altogether unfurnish'd with Ideas, till the

Business and Conversation of the Day has supplied them. I have often considered these
35 poor Souls with an Eye of great Commiseration, when I have heard them asking the
first Man they have met with, whether there was any News stirring? and by that Means
gathering together Materials for thinking. These needy Persons do not know what to
talk of, till about twelve a Clock in the Morning; for by that Time they are pretty good
Judges of the Weather, know which Way the Wind sits, and whether the Dutch Mail be
40 come in. [...]

But there are none to whom this Paper will be more useful than to the female World. I
have often thought there has not been sufficient Pains taken in finding out proper
Employments and Diversions for the Fair ones. Their Amusements seem contrived for
them rather as they are Women, than as they are reasonable Creatures; and are more
45 adapted to the Sex, than to the Species. The Toilet is their great Scene of Business, and
the right adjusting of their Hair the principal Employment of their Lives. The sorting of
a Suit of Ribbons is reckoned a very good Morning's Work; and if they make an
Excursion to a Mercer's or a Toy-shop, so great a Fatigue makes them unfit for any
thing else all the Day after. Their more serious Occupations are Sowing and
50 Embroidery, and their greatest Drudgery the Preparation of Jellies and Sweetmeats.
This, I say, is the State of ordinary Women; tho' I know there are Multitudes of those
of a more elevated Life and Conversation, that move in an exalted Sphere of
Knowledge and Virtue, that join all the Beauties of the Mind to the Ornaments of
Dress, and inspire a kind of Awe and Respect, as well as Love, into their Male-
55 Beholders. I hope to encrease the Number of these by publishing this daily Paper,
which I shall always endeavour to make an innocent if not an improving
Entertainment, and by that Means at least divert the Minds of my female Readers from
greater Trifles. [...]

I know several of my Friends and Well-wishers are in great Pain for me, lest I should
not be able to keep up the Spirit of a Paper which I oblige myself to furnish every Day:
But to make them easy in this Particular, I will promise them faithfully to give it over
as soon as I grow dull. This I know will be Matter of great Raillery to the small Wits;
who will frequently put me in mind of my Promise, desire me to keep my Word, assure
me that it is high Time to give over, with many other little Pleasantries of the like
Nature, which men of a little smart Genius cannot forbear throwing out against their
best Friends, when they have such a Handle given them of being witty. But let them
remember, that I do hereby enter my Caveat against this Piece of Raillery.

Source: Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, London, n. 10, Monday, March 12, 1711

Reminder: please write legibly and leave a margin for comments. Also, please abstain from plagiarism as it will be <u>systematically</u> prosecuted, and you risk permanent expulsion from the French university system.
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