

History of Private Life

Mid-term essay. Deadline: November 8, 2018

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. Discuss its context, its preconceptions, its theoretical and religious underpinnings, and its cultural significance (for eg., what does it say that went on in the city and in the countryside on a daily basis?).

THE PRAISE OF PRIVATE LIFE

- It seems to me that the happiness of private life and the trouble[s] which accompany business, shall best appear, if we lay before us the commodities and discommodities of either, the one causing quiet and rest, the other offence and laboursome care. [...] And though casually it comes to pass, that some man busied does prosper (which rarely and as a wonder happens), yet will I not exchange the pleasure and content which I
- 5 find in solitary life, for any comfort or commodity that business can bring. I do not only commend the name of solitariness, but also highly praise those good things wherewith it is accompanied: because retiring does much delight me, and quiet conjoined with liberty makes my life pleasing. Yet am I not so inhumane as to hate the company of Men (whom by God's law I am bound to love as myself) but I abhor their Sins (and chiefly my own) together with those cares and vexations wherewith Worldly Men are molested. [...]
- 10 Now let us presuppose two Men of these contrary dispositions and beholding them with the eyes of our mind, it shall plainly appear which of them leads a happier life. The busied man dwells most commonly in Court, City or Borough Town. He is often, even at midnight awaked with his own cares, or the call of Magistrates. He is likewise by dreaming affrighted, and sometimes terrified with night visions. His sleep also
- 15 often times disturbed by ambition, covetousness, or contriving how to oppress other Men: which cogitations are proper to courtiers. The Merchant muses how to sell his wares for greatest gain, how to compass the inheritance of some young heir, or defraud the prince of his custom [*i.e.* taxes]. Thus publicly or privately he baits his brain, by all sinister means to bring to pass that which he had projected. Sometimes he thinks to adventure to this or that Country, overjoyed with hope; and sometimes by misadventure dejected. In the end (as an unskillful Weaver) he works such a web as entangles himself and many others.
- 20 But the Solitary Man rises in the Morning, having no business and contents himself with moderate sleeps not broken nor troubled with fearful and fond dreams, but sometimes at his waking is saluted with a sweet song of the Nightingale. Then opens he his lips and either by prayers or godly psalms, devoutly desires the Almighty to be his defender, or as one diffident of his own deserts implores the aid of his Creator, giving unto his celestial Majesty all glory and praise. During these doings, with a trembling hope and secret fear,
- 25 remembering his Sins, he sheds abundant tears whereby is expressed the sorrows of his Soul, comforted by hope. Such is his Estate, wherewith no pleasure of the City, nor pomp of the Prince's Courts can compare. [...] After these cogitations he sets himself to study in some good book, or pass the time in virtuous exercise, and that done, eats his meal with good appetite, and a quiet mind.

Source: *Letters and Epigrams of Sir John Harington, with the Prayse of Private Life* (1605-1606), ed. Norman Egbert McClure, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1930, pp. 327-28.

Reminders: please write legibly and leave a margin for comments. Also, please abstain from plagiarism. Plagiarism will be systematically prosecuted, and you risk permanent expulsion from all French universities.