

Name

Professor

Course

Date

**“A Modest Proposal For Preventing The Children Of Poor People In Ireland, From Being A Burden On Their Parents Or Country, And For Making Them Beneficial To The Public”: Classism And The Consent Of The Poor.**

In order to give justice to an analysis of Jonathan Swift’s ‘modest proposal’, it is important to regard the time in which it was composed and the prevailing circumstances then. The 18<sup>TH</sup> Century was an overwhelmingly tumultuous period for the Kingdom of Ireland which suffered a myriad of problems including significant interference by England, incompetent leadership and religious wrangles which had more impact than they should on the state. On the first issue, England practically clawed its way to leadership of Ireland in the 18<sup>TH</sup> Century which would end in them colonizing the hitherto independent and functioning territory (Www-personal.k-state.edu, 2019). Ireland also had corrupt officials who, Swift notes, did more prancing around and social calls than they actually served the people . The religious regime of the nation was also in jeopardy as protestant immigrants had upset the order set by the dominant Catholics in Ireland leading to a new legal regime that favored their own accumulation of land. Jonathan Swift, an economist and vocal activist at the time, was thus a lone voice in condemning the slow but sure colonization by England, the incompetent and often corrupt leadership that led

a lot of Irish citizens to abject poverty and the unnecessarily strong bond between church and state which in his proposal he adequately addresses (Swift, par. 80).

An example of functional satirical writing, Swift's proposal begins with observation of the deplorable conditions of Ireland's poor. The people barely have enough food to survive, they live from hand to mouth and only have pitiable work available to them such as sewing, making furniture or agriculture (Swift, par 40), all of which have also become scarce for this very poor people.

The author presents the problem of the self-replication of poverty and destitution from the example of the young mothers who are beggars and who have several children with them but are without means to provide for them except by begging. Since the women were also probably born into abject poverty and lack, they are uneducated and not enlightened enough to only have children in the context of marriage and only such a number that they can provide for. These mothers therefore fail to plan their families and the illegitimate children who they raise on the streets are likely to amount to as little as their own mothers have amounted to since they too have no opportunities to advance to better prospects.

The desperate acts that the poor usually have to undertake in such situations as adding another mouth to feed in their desperate situation are then presented. Swift sheds light on such social ills as abortion, child labor and the crime of theft which is normally associated with the poor. He categorically condemns the act of murdering unborn children which he says even the "most savage and inhuman breast" (Swift, par. 34) would term as savage but is quite sympathetic to the plight of the already destitute families having to care for yet another person. Such child

would surely end up in the same terrible situation as its parents and probably propagate the bad circumstances to its own off springs. It is clear that such a situation most undesirable and must be avoided at all means in a bid to achieve a more organized society devoid of perpetuated rot.

The desirable goals of any action against the situation in Ireland are laid out in the advantages of the proposal which are precluded even before it is coined. Perhaps in a bid to first cushion the effect of the outrageous proposal that is about to be made, the writer is informed that the coming proposal will, among other things, allow for the unplanned and many children who are being born to be a means of profit and contribute to the feeding of others instead of themselves being a burden to be fed and prevent the cruelty that is the abortion of children due to the prospective expenses they presumably come with (Swift, par. 34). With this, the writer clearly outlines the service that any action against the current situation should ideally give to the people and also the importance there is for such action to be taken.

When Jonathan Swift finally presents his proposal, it is a radical call for radical action which matches the desperate time in the place of the modest one which he had previously suggested. This is a representation of the sheer thirst that the poor no doubt experience for swift and deliberate action toward alleviating their suffering at the time. It is a pronouncement of the crude situation on the ground and of the fact that while politicians may comfortably sit and deliberate on matters of basic needs, their lack is a daily reality to the poor who do not have the luxury of taking a break from their harsh realities or finding any considerably 'good' reprieve whatsoever. In the radical and boldly outrageous proposition to eat children who are now a burden in Ireland, the author is presenting the urgent cry for help from the have-nots in the

particular society who may not resort to eating their own children but are in need of urgent and swift response to their situations.

Just like any society the world over, Ireland is a society which is organized based on the social-contract theory, a theory of leadership which posits that government is a result of an agreement between the leaders and the governed, the former opting to give up some of their right in exchange for the protection of the state (Sterba, 1981). In such a setting, the government or leadership is supposed to limit some of the rights of its citizens and impose sanctions on them while securing their rights as against the rights and duties of others. Thus order and harmony is achieved in the system.

The satirical tone in ‘A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland, From Being a Burden on Their Parents or Country, And for Making Them Beneficial to the Public’ seems to suggest that there is a breakdown in the society’s general order and that there exists a fundamental disconnect between the leaders and the led. In the hypothetical scenario, the politicians in the country are clearly out of touch with the suffering of the common citizens who they serve and Swift expects that they will be among those who condemn his idea (Swift, par. 225). In preemptory response he says he will ask them to speak to the poor of the poor in Irish society and ask them whether or not it would have been better had they been eaten at the age of one year instead of living a life where they are completely unable to sustain themselves let alone pay rent which is required of them by landlords or even get employment to cater for their food and some warm clothing for the cold weather. This is perhaps a call for the

leaders to reach out to their subjects and get to know the challenges that accost them and therefore the solutions that are available and appropriate for their circumstances.

It is impossible to miss Mr. Swift's widely-known dislike for England, its interference in the matters of the governing of Ireland as he brings out the subject of the influence of outside forces and regimes on a country's despondency. While he acknowledges that his country is facing tough times to which his own countrymen have significantly contributed, the author is worried about the continued influence of England in Ireland. He makes this concern known first by alluding to their interference in paragraph 215, "I could name a country, which would be glad to eat up our whole nation..." (Swift, 1729) then pointing out that his proposal can be solely carried out by the Irish and they would not have to consider the wishes of England as it has no international importations. With this he points out the crucial need for countries to be self-sufficient and independent of external influence which may cause more derailment than any good.

Lastly and in conclusion, Swift decries the poor's own consent to be unfairly exploited since they are silent as leaders lead a life of luxury living them to a destitute existence and without any solutions in sight. By his outrageous proposal, the author in truth suggests a revolution of sorts by the oppressed that is bound to emancipate them and lead to achievement of social order.

Works Cited.

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