

ARTHUR E. IMHOF. — *Die gewonnenen Jahre: Von der Zunahme unserer Lebensspanne seit dreihundert Jahren oder von der Notwendigkeit einer neuen Einstellung zu Leben und Sterben*. Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1981. Pp. 279.

Arthur Imhof has led the rebirth of historical demography in Germany after many years of neglect. Now that the study of past population is firmly established among German academics, Imhof turns his attention in *Die gewonnenen Jahre* toward a larger audience. By writing in non-technical terms about everyday people (*Alltagsmenschen*), Imhof uses the mirror of historical demography to urge the educated public to reflect on its own history. Footnotes are reduced to a minimum, historiographical controversies are avoided, and artful graphic displays make large quantities of data easy to grasp. After explaining how parish registers are converted into sources of data through family reconstitution, with much assistance from the computer, Imhof describes the broad changes in demographic behaviour over the past three hundred years. By focusing on the increase in life expectancy, he attempts to explain how the attitudes of common people toward life and death have changed.

Imhof catalogues the major transformations which are usually gathered under the heading of the "demographic transition". While there is little new here for the specialist, the emphasis on daily life and the high quality of the data highlight less obvious aspects of this momentous evolution. For example, the volume's title refers to the lengthening of life expectancy at birth from under thirty years in the sixteenth century to about seventy at present. Imhof demonstrates that the major cause has been the virtual elimination of infant and child mortality. In the late eighteenth century, one fifth of the infants died in their first year in Sweden, one of Europe's healthiest countries. This proportion then fell rapidly and continuously: by 1900 infant mortality had been halved, nearly to disappear by the 1960s. In Germany, major gains began much later, after 1870. But the struggle against death has been less successful for adult ages. In 1900, fifteen-year-olds had approximately the same life expectancy as in 1600. For this age group, improvements are a twentieth-century phenomenon. Those who reach fifty have reaped the least benefit as yet. Such hardy souls could expect another fifteen or twenty years of life in the seventeenth century; since then only seven or eight years have been added. The virtual elimination of serious infectious diseases leave cancer and heart ailments as the major causes of death. Attacking these problems may be even more difficult, in medical terms, than making the fundamental improvements in sanitation, nutrition, and basic medical care which have been so successful in the past.

As mortality has dropped, so has fertility. Average births per woman who remains married through her fertile years have fallen from six to below two. Imhof is at his best in showing how German women have reshaped their life course since 1750. While life expectancy is twenty years longer than in the eighteenth century, an earlier age at marriage and much briefer span of childbearing years have pushed average age at birth of last child from forty to below thirty. These opposite tendencies have created in the twentieth century an entirely new phase of life for German females, which Imhof terms the period of "post-parental companionship". Before the demographic transition, children reached adulthood approximately when their parents died. Now the average couple lives together twenty years after the youngest child has left the parental home. Nearly another decade of widowhood awaits the typical woman. A female life centred on motherhood is no longer appropriate, since childrearing occupies less than half of her adult life. Thus a major problem before modern society is how effectively to fill these *gewonnenen Jahre* with productive work.

The clear presentation of laboriously collected demographic data, emphasizing major changes and new problems, is the greatest virtue of *Die gewonnenen*

*Jahre*. The interpretative framework is less convincing. Imhof sets himself an impossible task by announcing his intention "to reconstruct collective mentalities" (p. 73). While charts and tables can tell us much about typical experiences of Germans in recent centuries, demographic data cannot by themselves lead us to attitudes toward life and death. Imhof's speculations about reactions of people in the past to their family circumstances need supporting evidence. His search for motives for the beginning of family planning leads him to a mainly psychological explanation for the fall in fertility: a strengthened sense of responsibility toward children, in reaction to high infant mortality, led to increased use of birth control. This new attitude toward children, in turn, helped to lower mortality. Yet Imhof's reasoning seems circular: he seeks attitudes from his demographic data, while simultaneously explaining demographic change as the result of new attitudes. Imhof recognizes that intervention from outside the nexus of demography and psychology was required to break the customary pattern and prepare a new one; his possible candidates, however, are too vague (population pressure) or too narrow (the French Revolution). Certainly the question of causality remains open: the fullest study of the fertility decline in Germany, by John E. Knodel, *The Decline of Fertility in Germany, 1871-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), could find no set of social and economic indicators which explained the onset of decline.

We cannot derive the consciousness of our historical subjects from quantitative data about their demographic behaviour. Perhaps one could combine the literary approach of Philippe Ariès in *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Random House, 1982) with demographic data to determine whether attitudes and behaviour actually moved in tandem. In the meantime, historical demographers need to continue casting their "objective" evidence in forms relevant to daily life. Arthur Imhof's efforts in this direction should interest both an academic and a public audience.

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ANN KUSSMAUL. — *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Pp. ix, 233.

Agriculture was the largest single employer of labour in early modern England, yet a substantial segment of its labour force has remained shadowy. The day labourer has been the subject of a number of studies; but the farm servant, hired by the year and boarded under the farmer's own roof, has been neglected. Ann Kussmaul's short book (a mere 131 pages of text) admirably comes to grips with the problems of sparse documentation and throws light upon this important sector of the rural economy.

The character of service in itself contributed to its scanty representation in the record. Servants were typically youthful, between fourteen and twenty-five years old, and service was a transitional episode between childhood and adult status. Unmarried and subservient to the farmer in whose family they resided, servants were politically invisible. Service offered them an opportunity to save money for future independence, but at this stage they were propertyless and paid few taxes. Coming from the healthiest age group, they left few testamentary records. Low levels of literacy mean that few journals or letters survive. Moreover, the