

future of the humanities in general and seventeenth-century studies in particular, Höfer's study reaffirms the centrality of the *grand siècle* through a timely return to a larger concept of the humanities, before that other dualistic split: between science and art. This book highlights the important role of early modern thought in how we understand and express our psychic selves today. In a nearly transparent translation by Jane Marie Todd...

Keith Thomas. *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. xvi + 393 pp. + 14 illus. \$60.00. Review by CATHERINE PATTERSON, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

In this wide-ranging and engaging book, Keith Thomas brings to bear his deep knowledge of early modern English society and culture to reflect upon the fundamental ends of life for the people he has studied during his long career. A revised version of Thomas's Ford Lectures at Oxford in 2000, *The Ends of Life* asks how early modern people found meaning in their existence and explores the ways that those meanings found expression through prescriptive literature and lived experience. The result is a rich tapestry that illuminates the changing and sometimes contradictory mental world of early modern English people.

Thomas identifies six major "roads to fulfillment": military prowess; work and vocation; wealth and possessions; honor and reputation; friendship and sociability; and fame and the afterlife. These serve as focal points for the thematic chapters of the book. While fully acknowledging that these were not the only means through which people might find fulfillment, Thomas convincingly suggests that these categories incorporate important themes running through early modern life. Interestingly, he chooses not to define religion *per se*, or spiritual fulfillment, as one of his main categories. This is somewhat counter-intuitive, given the significance of religion to every aspect of early modern society. Religious ideals, however, permeate the book and inform Thomas's treatment of nearly every topic.

Before moving into his main themes, Thomas examines the idea of fulfillment itself. What did it mean to be “fulfilled” in a world where only the very wealthy had much latitude to shape their own futures, and even they were enmeshed in a society which abhorred “singularity” and often stressed communal rather than individual good? Looking at classical, Christian, and medieval influences, Thomas shows the many ways in which things that we in the modern world value as elements of fulfillment or personhood were constrained. Early modern youth could not expect to choose their own spouses, their own occupations, or to a significant extent their own beliefs. For many, the daily grind of subsistence occupied the majority of time and energy. Yet for all the prescriptions promoting rigidity and subordination of self, Thomas also points out growing trends toward the expression of individuality and personal choice. Even the poor had their own sense of reputation and personal worth. As Thomas notes, despite an “unequal and tradition-bound world, there were innumerable individuals who carved out their own destinies, unimpeded by the social and economic barriers in their way” (43).

Thomas uses a similar juxtaposition of prescription and experience to flesh out his main pathways toward fulfillment. Early modern attitudes toward such things as military attainment, work, and wealth were often deeply contradictory. To be a soldier was a manifestation of masculinity and honor, but at the same time society increasingly valued service to the state and crown that did not involve the sword. By the late seventeenth century, soldiering had come to be seen as a special occupation for a few professionals, rather than the responsibility of all gentlemen. At the same time, neo-classical and Christian views of the evils of warfare and aggression made fulfillment through military prowess a complicated proposition. Similarly, attitudes to work and labor varied widely. One discourse emphasized labor as the legacy of the punishment of Adam, a curse humankind must simply endure until death. Another stressed real enjoyment of one’s work and the notion that workers could be fulfilled by their callings. Status mattered—wage-earning manual laborers may have felt less fulfilled in their work than professionals. Yet they, too, might take pride in a job well done. Regarding honor and reputation, Thomas shows convincingly that while honor was meant to be the private commodity of

the elite, in fact people across the social spectrum valued and sought reputation and personal honor. Credit, as understood both personally and commercially, formed a crucial element of early modern identity. In the end, people wanted to be known and remembered for their attainments on earth, whether reputational, familial, military, or otherwise. Thomas highlights the tension between the church's teaching that the only true fulfillment must be found beyond the earthly sphere and the practical fact that people hoped for fulfillment here in this world. Certainly people wished to be memorialized, through elaborate funeral monuments or works of literature or simply the memories of children and friends. And not everyone was convinced about the glories of paradise, either, as in the old lady from Lewes who, on her sick bed, declared that she had no acquaintance with Jesus or the angels, so she would rather live here on earth with friends than to live in heaven with strangers (230). Even if Christian prescription told them to look to the next life for fulfillment, most people took a more worldly perspective and "cherished life for its own sake, not merely as a preliminary to some future state" (267).

The recurrent theme of *The Ends of Life* is that early modern people carved out spaces for expression of personal identity and individual choice, even within structures that militated against it. The trend toward greater emphasis on individual expression and modern ideas of identity and self-realization comes through clearly. Exactly why that change happened is not systematically explored, and one might have wished for greater analysis of the causes of that change. But the greatest value of this book lies in the rich material that it synthesizes and brings to life. Thomas's command of a vast array of source material is on display throughout the work. Thomas acknowledges from the start that there is some danger in pulling together a series of anecdotes from disparate sources across a broad stretch of time. An extended case study of an individual to two would have been welcome. Yet he weaves his material together with such authority that the reader trusts Thomas's judgment on maintaining the context of his evidence. *The Ends of Life* paints a nuanced, complex, and at times poignant portrait of the mental world of early modern Englishmen and Englishwomen and the ways they found value in their daily lives. It is a pleasure to walk the "roads to fulfilment" along with them.