

# Modest proposal

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



A modest proposal by Jonathan Swift is a satirical essay written in 1729. It was written in protest of the English treatment of the catholic people in Ireland. During the late 17th century, political pamphlets were distributed throughout Ireland to promote the ideas of various intellectuals and laymen. Jonathan Swift took advantage of the overlooked pamphlets, and constructs a ridiculous proposal. He does this to illustrate how backwards and bad the state of Ireland is and the social classes. " A Modest Proposal" also reveals to the reader a senses of resentment towards Roman Catholics, often referred to as " papists" within the essay. As we can see from his essay, Swift want the people of Ireland to take a stand against English opposition, work towards Irish " self determination, " and have an overall sense of national pride to solve Ireland's economic situation. Not only does Swift blame other for the state of the poverty in Ireland; he also exaggerates how horrible it is to amplify how poor and disgusting Ireland was. He first does this by making his " proposal" unserious. One way he makes his argument unserious when he starts to become insincere. However, he uses the dishonesty and insincerity to his advantage in his underlying thought of the essay. Jonathan Swift also uses irony to satirizes what is going on in Ireland. For instance, Swift says to " sacrifice the poor innocent babes" to " prevent... voluntary abortions and [the] horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children". He is telling the reader that women are performing abortion because they were not financially stable to support their children and that children are actually stealing at the age of six, just to survive. Swift incorporates a diverse system of rhetoric in " A Modest Proposal" that gives the reader a " love-hate" relationship with the speaker. In the 1st paragraph

of the essay, Swift uses language to show that he is very sympathetic toward the poor women and their children. It creates a strong bond between the speaker and the reader but once the strong bond has been built, Jonathan Swift quickly get rid of it by employing several terms and phrase that dehumanize humans through his choice of word, but also make them seem insignificant. Another way Jonathan Swift uses rhetoric to make his proposal less serious is when, he describes infants meat as assort of delicacy and that certain parts of a child's body is particularly good to eat, especially for special occasion. Jonathan Swift not only uses rhetoric to dehumanize the children throughout the proposal, but he employs his sarcastic tone, his insincerity, and idea of how ridiculous the proposal is to make his argument not serious. At one point in the course of the proposal Swift directly assures the " politicians who dislike [his] overture" that the poor people of Ireland, if given the option, would rather give up their life than experience the " perpetual scene of misfortunes as they have since gone through." While Swift is making this point to the ruling class, he sarcastically represents the misfortunes as being the sole fault of the poor. Swift is addressing the politicians who have cheated the Irish Catholics from some of their rights, yet he claims that the Irish are oppressing their landlords by not paying rent on time. The irony, of course, was the massive economic oppression levied on the Irish by the English, via agricultural protectionism, among other things. Swift's use of satire here serves to expose the English rulers to the reality of the conditions to which they are subjecting the citizens of Ireland. Nonetheless, despite Swift's noticeable contempt for the English, he at no moment ceases to also partially blame the Irish for the circumstances being

confronted. Swift asserts that his proposal will "greatly lessen the number of papists, with whom [they] are yearly overrun, being the principle breeders of the nation as well as [their] most dangerous enemies; and who stay at home on purpose with a design to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender." It is evident that Swift does not actually believe that the papists are overrunning the Protestants; instead, he is attacking the Irish Catholics for their lack of effort to take back their country from them. Swift believes that the Irish have willingly handed their country over to the English, making them the most dangerous enemies to Ireland. Throughout the proposal, Swift, when describing the Irish newborns he recommends be consumed, uses terminology as if he were applying the description to farm animals. Words and phrases such as "stock," "pigs," "cattle," "flesh," "carcass," "fatten them up," and "tough and lean flesh" all allude to Swift's analogy between people and livestock. This not only implies that the Irish stand around idly and submit to the authority of some higher power, but also that the English treat the Irish as worthless workers. In turn, this implies that the Irish are only valuable through their function as laborers to make the English money, similar to livestock whose only purpose is the financial well-being of their owners. Swift also often criticizes the lifestyle of the Irish and their intentions when it comes to addressing the issues of family life and religion. He makes it clear that he disapproves of both the Irish view and the English view of the Irish. In one passage, Swift states that the most births occur nine months after Lent and therefore his proposal will "lessen the number of papists among us." This statement not only implies that some Irish cheat in the period of self-denial and take pleasure in sex, but also that the English would

favor a lesser amount of Irish Catholics in the population. As the proposal progresses, Swift's intentions seem to surface. He increasingly makes an effort to shock the readers by coming up with numerous controversial suggestions which can do nothing but rouse the audience. His ironic portrayals are not meant only to simply to criticize the social composition of Ireland, but also to mobilize the readers to take action in repairing the damage that Ireland has endured. Swift places the blame on all parties involved in the decline of Ireland, although he does have sympathy for the misfortune of the Irish. Indeed, his proposal of the consumption of infants is his last resort in trying to gain the attention of a disheartened group of people. Consequently, what seems like an immoral and preposterous request becomes a means of attempting to achieve positive changes amid discouraging circumstances in Ireland. Exploiting the attention he draws with his satirical antics, Swift in fact does suggest serious solutions to Ireland's ills toward the end of A Modest Proposal. The power of this infamous piece lies, of course, not in the particular solutions he offers, but in the satirical method he used to get there.