

Carl Friedrich Bahrdt Defines Middle-Class Culture (1789)

Abstract

Carl Friedrich Bahrdt (1740–1792) was a Protestant theologian and Enlightenment author. He was removed from office multiple times because he offended people with his radical theological reflections. In his *Handbuch der Moral für den Bürgerstand* [*Handbook of Morals for the Middle Class*], he outlined the so-called middle-class virtues: order, moderation, and diligence. He argued paradigmatically for internalizing them as a new and universally conceivable identity for the—male—middle-class citizen.

Source

Fifth Chapter

Middle Class Métier

452.) Besides the domestic economy of the middle-class citizen, a large part of his prosperity and his happiness is based on his *métier* or professional field, which he has taken up in the best interest of the state (394). We no longer observe here just the economist but at the same time the merchant, the manufacturer, and the craftsman in him. And you, dear fellow citizens, have to seek, and to use, the following sources of your prosperity here.

453.) I. The first is diligence and industriousness in general. For you owe it not only to yourselves to use your best hours and your greatest energies to work by which you contribute to the common good (just as your remaining fellow citizens in turn work for you and provide for your needs), because you earn food and a living for yourself and your children, and the means which you need to happily enjoy life. Instead, you owe it to your honor, because you make up the earning class of people, and therefore would be the worst members of the nation, if you did not want to be the most diligent. And finally, you also owe it to God, who endowed you with life, health, and strength so that you would use them to participate in the purposes of God, so that you should become useful people, and live and work for your fellow men.

454.) II. But the moral doctrine, which shows you the way to happiness, does not only distinguish diligence, but also the kind of diligence that makes your fellow men, who work for you or buy from you, happy and satisfied with you. [...]

460.) III. The moral doctrine likewise demands your kindness towards those who help you earn your bread, who collect, fetch, hand over the raw materials with which the merchant trades or which the manufacturer and craftsman work, and that you do not pressure such poor people and do not require them to work more cheaply for you than they can survive on—but grant them their bread, and treat them in such a way that they can become happy with their lives in the process.

461.) IV. Take for that purpose everything that we said to you above about order and punctuality in businesses (416.ff.), about necessary control of the supplies (428.), about petitions, precise invoices, and preservation of all records (429.), and especially add to it that you meticulously and conscientiously enter and write off immediately all payments received for your work and wares so that you do not bring upon yourselves the disgrace of being accused of demanding money [in payment] twice, or of having your heirs someday make claims and prove them from your books, which do not belong to them, thus harming their fellow human beings.

462.) V. Do not forget your important obligations to your apprentice, servants, and subordinates. Here, too, you can, as true friends of mankind, bring about much good and promote happiness.

[...]

Source: Carl Friedrich Bahrdt, *Handbuch der Moral für den Bürgerstand*. Tübingen: Balz; Reutlingen: Fleischhauer, 1789, pp. 210–13. Available online at:
<https://digitale.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/vd18/content/titleinfo/6341558>

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