**Essay 2**

Item B: Some sociologists claim that the small, home centred nuclear family is ideal for socialising children into the norms and values of society and provides a stable background for both children and their parents. Some politicians go further and argue that the increasing breakdown of such family units is at least partly responsible for such social ills as delinquency and other forms of anti-social behaviour, together with rising rates of depression. [Garrod revision book]

**Applying material from Item B and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the traditional nuclear family best serves the interests of its members and of society as a whole [20]** [Advice: this question needs you to use functionalist and new right approaches to argue if the nuclear family is best vs. opposing views of Marxists, feminists (family doesn’t help all of its members) and perhaps postmodernists]

Answer:

As item B suggests, sociologists, such as Functionalists, argue that the nuclear family best serves the interests of its members and society. This is due to factors such as socialisation and stability. New Right thinkers are concerned with how these families have broken down. However, other sociologists, including Marxists and feminists would disagree and see the nuclear family as problematic.

The nuclear family consists of two parents and children. Murdock, as a functionalist, argues that this type of universal, which means it is found in all societies throughout time. He believes that it best serves the interests of society and its members by carrying out four essential functions: sexual, reproductive, educational (primary socialisation) and economic. Parsons disagrees that the nuclear family is universal, yet he also believes that the nuclear family is essential seeing it as the ‘best fit’ for society. One way is through its function as the key agent of primary socialisation that helps bring children up into the norms and values of society. Marxists, such as Zaretksy however, do not see this as benefiting the children as it only benefits wider society by socialising children into a ‘false class consciousness’. This forces them to accept the ideals and inequalities of capitalism without understanding the impact on their lives.

Parsons would not agree with this as he sees primary socialisation as helping to contribute to the value consensus in wider society. His second, basic and irreducible function of the family is the stabilisation of adult personalities. This is because he thinks men and women are naturally suited to different roles, with the man taking on the instrumental role and the woman the expressive. This both benefits them as individuals as they are fulfilled in this role and society by making the nuclear family economically viable. Feminists, would disagree arguing this type of family structure of the breadwinner and homemaker leads to the perpetuation of patriarchy in society and the dominance of men over women in the home. Firestone, for example, sees women’s oppression as due to the biological dominance men hold over women. Bernard also argues married women are more likely to experience depression than husbands.

In contrast to this, in modern society women no longer have to stay in relationships that are dissatisfying or abusive. Postmodernists like Alan and Crow would argue women have a choice and that families more generally are now based on individual decisions. This has led to the formation of many different family structures, such as lone parent. The fact that ¼ of children live in such families demonstrates that the functions Murdock and Parsons stated only the nuclear family can do are now redundant with other family types bringing up children effectively. However, New Right thinkers believe this break down of the nuclear family has led to deviance and problems in society. Murray argues a generous welfare state has resulted in problems with socialisation and wider issues in society. He would argue that the nuclear family is the best place to bring up children as it provides stability.

In conclusion, to say the nuclear family is the best for its members and society does not take account of the many differences between families. Not all nuclear families benefit the individuals in them, in regards to abuse or general dissatisfaction. Many people grow up in a variety of family types today and as the personal life perspective indicates, we would need to look at the personal circumstances of a family to determine whether it’s good for its members or society.

20/20