

1974-02-02: [INHERITANCE , General] Changing function of hereditary right.

The disappearance of hereditary political power was achieved when the function of government became so specialized and diversified that it had to fall to the operation of professionally trained managers--i.e., a bureaucracy. The old seignorial form of one-man possession and exercise of rulership in a given territory was simply outmoded by the rise of the modern state. When it couldn't function, it disappeared.

The contemporary situation with regard to the exercise of economic power by hereditary right is quite similar. As long as families both owned and exercised the economic power, economic development might be argued to have been dependent upon them. When, however, the operation of the economy fell into the operation of a managerial class specialized and diversified in abilities, familial control of wealth becomes unnecessary and so could easily disappear.

In both cases, it is a matter of hereditary control being functional within the paradigm of society at a given time; when it no longer functions, it might as well be abandoned. Indeed, if the good of society as a whole is the rationale for any form of privilege should persist only as long as it can be shown to be functional.