

15 Feb 74 ✓ "Wealth" & "Status" in Anc Regime.

Taylor on Wealth in anc reg. notes diff between economic & juridical definitions of the "aristocracy" which goes along with Reinhard, et al. on the blending of upper bourg & nobility in terms of power.

What seems to show is that "Status" in anc regime is a cross of econ & juridical, and that to comprehend the quest that was always there, the juridical tells you as much about the sociology of the situation as does the economic.

Q. Is it more important that a hobeau is impecunious or that a millionaire bourgeois lacks noble status?

A. Unanswerable [but who carried whom?]

Q. Is it so that the French social scene had become so anomalous that ~~to~~ ^{one can} ask the previous question with some seriousness?

A. I do believe. ~~The juridical by defo~~

Q. If true, what might one expect would "give"?

A. The juridical; it describes the past, the traditional, and when it does so, it "gives." The law is a post-facto justification of a dynamic econ-social situation.

Q. If we see this as true in past - French Rev. 30 - why not be able to see it today?

A. One never sees his own paradigm easily. But this

— may be why sociologists today show how our system fulfills its "legal" dictates — for to describe modern society sociologically without assuming that the laws controlling succession, etc., are givens that must be ~~go~~ accepted — would be to deal in fantasy.

So, Sociology assumes the juridical rules & dabbles with the economic variables as they resolve themselves within the law.

Q. Taylor says (ATR 72, p 471) that the key question is whether ~~economic~~ ^{wealth} factors differentiated upper bourgeois & nobility; but if not so (and we may believe his proof that it was not so), can we believe that the bourgeois were blindly striving to get past the juridical barrier, always, and developed no ethic of worth as un-noble?

A. I believe not. If we consider the accelerating rate of the parvenu riche, who could see that even with a quick secrétaire du roi ennoblement their progeny would not be really nobles in dignity for several generations, then I believe they must have been developing some scorn for the whole system. Our evidence of the striving for ennoblement is powerful in the 17th & ~~to~~ early 18th centuries, but I sense from all I read that one cannot prove this feeling nearly as strong in the later 18th cent. Somewhere in Taylor (if not in others) the vast number of the old on the way to ennoblement in later 18th c — or the nobles of recent vintage

taken as if not noble — is disturbing. If there was a sudden upurge of such people in later 18th c., then I say that they couldn't have had the same awe of the status their forebears had had. Could all of these on the verge in 1788 have been 100% convinced that their world was to have given their progeny the chance after a few generations to be indistinguishable from most nobility?

Is there perhaps not some chart that could be established of the rate of ennoblement which would show an accelerating rate? If so, those in older times could believe it was a tremendous accomplishment, those in later times would wonder about its meaning?

Take the 900 secrétaires en surroi slots, imagine each bought by a grandfather near death, so that when he died all his progeny noble (because he died in office) and have that office sold at once to another grandfather, with the same thing happening; give each grandfather 5 year from purchase to death, and you have 4,500 new noble families every five years (average, let us say, of 25,000 male nobles each of generations) and in 50 years, 250,000 new (plus whatever descended from the progeny of the earliest ennobled in that 50-year span — which moves us into the millions) and we see that the theoretical potential of ennobling all Frenchmen,

on the financial side is much greater than the economical potential of the country to produce enough nobles to live nobly in the same span. Of course, turning it around, if living nobly was a fine qua non of getting the status — ~~and so~~ even assuming the cost of sec'y de roi should sink to zero — then there would be no buyers.

One might wonder then whether the criterion of ability to live nobly — a purely economic one — had not overtaken the availability of ennobling offices, so that the offices went begging not because one couldn't afford the price but because one couldn't afford to fulfil the status once acquired.

Introduce here the low return on proprietary wealth, 2-3%, which was almost forced upon nobles, compared to the 5-10% the bourgeois could get by commerce & non-noble activity, and ~~then~~ allow that the actual style of life ~~was~~ of the rich ~~at 5%~~ bourgeois at 5% was as good as the noble at 2%, the doubling of wealth necessary for the bourgeois in order to be able to convert to proprietary and still have no better standard of life, becomes a real problem. Could the economy carry those 1/2 millionaire bourgeois all the way to a million, in any large numbers? But if the economy was bringing many up to the

half-way point, and they constituted a class in towns which had a comfortable and cultivated life, would they not develop an attitude of self-esteem even though they weren't noble?

It would not be necessary - indeed, it might be impossible - to show a spirit of rich-but-not-noble (or just barely or newly noble and still for some generations not having really made it) which bred an indifference to the question of juridical nobility. Not even hostility towards it - for one selects his plans and judges his happiness according to his ~~reasonable~~ given status in society, comparing himself with equals & not superiors - just an indifference. But this indifference is not based upon protection of his ego by avoiding envy, but an indifference genuinely based on regarding his "superiors" as not really that superior; not wealthier (most of them), and not really more powerful (offices were held by middling types, too) as a class.

Every non-noble family that kept its high status over time also had a greater sense of talent and personal accomplishment: the was not protected by the law as the nobleman was, but had to make it by judicious handling of family estates and "internal" family ~~and~~ will to be preeminent. This could be the dominant drive even if noble status got: for during the early

generations after ennoblement, The recollection of Family's mobility might ~~be~~ be as much a question of ~~the~~ pride as trying to forget the past (which most think is the case.) Savary, quoted by Taylor in ARR, speaks of négociant children not associating with noble's children because they'll get a sense of self-esteem that will hurt them in business; that's a snotty way of putting the truth that they must be doers and not be-ers, and assuming that doing is not as fulfilling psychologically as being.

Brief, the key may be in the satiation of the noble-working ~~part~~ chances because economic development ~~so~~ didn't generate enough millionaires, but it did generate a large $\frac{1}{2}$ millionaire class. One would have to generate a statistical curve of ~~the~~ what one economy ~~could~~ ^{could} produce, and see when the point of diminishing returns arrived. At that moment, the end-all of noble status becomes less determining, and the development of some ~~less~~ rich-but-not-noble psychology must have begun to exist, absorbing the drives of the socially mobile as the striving for nobility once had. To repeat, something new appears, not just a frustration about ~~not~~ being closed off from the old goal; but the effect is even greater upon the value of the old goal, for it loses value more rapidly when it is ignored than when it is ~~not~~ ~~unattainable~~ but envied.

(FIN)