

1976-01-26 [FAMILY, General] Family vs. State [Daumard]

Daumard, p. 73: "Saving..is narrowly tied to the spirit of the family, to the conviction that inheritance and the possibility to transmit one's possessions [*avoir*] is one of the foundations of society, that which makes sense only in a world which, asking little of the state, will accept only relatively feeble fiscal *prélèvements*."

Thus viewed, the 19th-century family mentality regarding the prospects of descendants is somewhat like that of the 18th century and earlier, but there is a singular difference in the juridical aspect of it: after the Code, each generation is freed from laws enforcing maintenance of the inalienable family fortunes, and so must accomplish this as an act of individual will.

Also, there is something much more nuclear about its operation: a concentration chiefly upon the immediately following generation rather than upon the whole series of generations to follow. The fear of recurrent subsistence crises having faded, so that each generation will survive no matter what, the main concern is that the next generation be loaded with as many advantages as possible in a fiercely competitive world. The danger of skidding into physical oblivion has gone, and there remains only the question of how high up the social ladder the family can go. by the law and by the psychology of family strategy, the next generation gets all the attention.

In this state of affairs, inheritance taxes are a threat from the narrow familial point of view, since they inhibit the next generation's advantages, although in principle they serve the family interest over the long run as being the basis on which the state will guarantee subsistence of all members of future generations. In other words, the state as heir is moving into the place of the distant generations' heir-ship.

The old family notion of "caring for one's own" thus has narrowed in its synchronic scope to limited blood relationship and in its diachronic scope to just the next generation (this, in effect, is what bourgeois individualism seems to embrace): a "petering out" perhaps, but also a "hardening up" of the family's conception of itself; the role of the state, on the other hand, is just now "petering in" and is difficult to assess. We are, around 1900, at a critical moment in the evolution of the family's self-conception on one hand, and of the individual's recognition of the state's function on the other.

Socialists and liberals (like Vallier) were aware of this development around 1900, in a general way, since each looked to a stronger role of the state. But the extreme socialist (i.e., communist) resolve **to end private ownership of real property** had a "baby with the bath water" effect in so far as the individual freedoms which had been won politically in the effort of Western nations to achieve equality were subordinated: eliminating the privileged few saw also the elimination of the privileges of the many. The liberal solution, "socialist legislation", on the other hand, had to move by baby steps (as it still does), trying to preserve individual freedoms while roaming the common good of society advance by means of small, but steady, tax incursions upon individual wealth.