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Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. x + 247 pp. Figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-19-538160-3.

Response by Leslie Tuttle, University of Kansas

My thanks to the editors of H-France for the opportunity to discuss my book in *H-France Forum*. First, let me express my deep gratitude to Katherine Crawford, Matthew Gerber, Sarah Hanley and François-Joseph Ruggiu for their generous and thought-provoking responses to *Conceiving the Old Regime*. My colleagues have offered just critiques and posed many insightful questions about the book—more than I can reasonably respond to here. I ask for their understanding if I focus my response on two key areas where their questions seem to converge on issues of broad interest to readers of H-France. These are, first, the gendered implications of pronatalism and state formation and, second, the ever-vexed question of “absolutism.”

Before I launch into this response, though, it may help readers to know how this project started. One of my hopes was that I might find some way to bridge the gap between two historiographic traditions that inspired me as a student: on one side, the history of the family that grew from *Annales*-style family reconstitution and the study of *mentalités*, and, on the other, a new attention to gender, marriage, and the family as factors in the development of the French state, best exemplified by the work of Sarah Hanley and now a thriving conversation among Americans working on early modern French history.[1] As François-Joseph Ruggiu recognizes, these historiographies share an object of study but differ significantly in terms of methodological approach. As an inexperienced dissertation researcher, I plunged in with little plan beyond following pronatalist policy wherever the evidence would take me, from an idea discussed by government ministers to a factor in the most intimate aspects of families' lives, hoping thereby to do some justice both to the theory and practice of government and to the encounters between state and family during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I am gratified if my readers saw some of these aspirations realized in the book, but happy to reflect on its limitations.

One important thread of questioning raised by these reviews relates to the way I characterized the role of gender ideologies in pronatalism and in French state formation more broadly. Matthew Gerber wonders if I may have “ascribe[d] too much ideological coherence to French patriarchalism” in my analysis of the gendered implications of pronatalist law and questions whether the reproductive contributions of women were in fact occluded within it. Katherine Crawford and Sarah Hanley, on the other hand, wished that I had pushed my argument farther by exploring more systematically the ways that pronatalism reflected and helped to sustain a gendered representation of French identity (a domestic “French national fantasy” in Crawford’s words) or by stating more forcefully the argument that pronatalist law was Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s effort to shore up patriarchal power perceived as endangered in the wake of an era of *femmes fortes* (Hanley’s query).

Let me see if I can clarify my thinking. Gerber is correct to observe that the corporate nature of the early modern household helps us understand why pronatalist law addressed benefits for prolific

reproduction to fathers while not mentioning mothers (I treat such questions, perhaps too briefly, on pages 67-8 and 72-4). I stand by my conclusion, however, that the law's relative silence about the repeatedly pregnant female subjects amounts to something more than a mere consequence of the administrative logic of the "corporate household." To explain it that way seems to me to rely on a circular argument that explains away one form of women's subordination by invoking another. For example, the fact that married women were *de jure* exempted from the *taille personnelle*, as Gerber notes, may explain why *mères* or even *femmes* could not figure as the recipients of tax exemptions offered for prolific reproduction. But this is also precisely the point: the fruits of married women's labor, whether productive or reproductive, were credited to their husbands as far as the tax collector was concerned.[2] Crawford's analogy to the Marxist concept of labor alienation seems apt here: if reproduction is the realm of production in which women's labor is most essential and obvious, their lexical separation from the product of that labor seems worthy of some comment.

I should stress here that we are debating matters of representation. The actual contribution of women to households as producers, and of course reproducers, is not in question. If I devoted a fair amount of attention to the language and gendered implications of the 1666 edict, it was because it seemed to me to illustrate a moment when royal lawmakers were choosing how to represent the reproductive process in a legal text that proclaimed procreation to be a critical source of the French state's power. The edict's authors structured the law to represent the vital process of procreation in terms of male heads-of-household, although they knew as well as anyone where babies came from. Though Gerber reads my argument as attributing "coherence" to patriarchalism, I actually intended to foreground in my analysis what Carole Pateman names the central *incoherence* of patriarchal ideology: its elision of conjugal power in the quest to naturalize paternal power.[3] I hoped to show that pronatalist law resonated with contemporary debates about relations between men and women, and to demonstrate that contemporaries (including, and perhaps especially, elite women) interpreted the 1666 edict as an effort to ensure female submission to a particular regime of household production and authority.

A broader aim of my analysis was to suggest that the pronatalist effort reflected contemporary developments in political and economic theory that effectively rendered women's reproductive labor invisible by consigning it to the "corporate household"—certainly not a politics-free zone, as we know that the king's law was increasingly engaged in regulating it. I agree with others who observe that this ideological effacement of women never described reality. In fact, women exercised diverse kinds of authority within households and of course continued to give birth to the babies. Nevertheless, feminist scholars make compelling arguments that the invisibility of female authority and labor within the early modern household as ideologically defined has had long-lasting influence on discourses of citizenship and on the kinds of work deemed to merit pay.[4] This is all to say that I wholeheartedly agree with my reviewers that there is much, much more to say about how the legal and administrative practices of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French state reflected an imagined orderly household as site of production and reproduction. We will also continue to discover, I expect, that the lived reality of women's and men's lives failed to correspond to that ideal. I look forward to continuing fruitful dialogue with other historians, economists, and political theorists on these points.

Insofar as "absolutism" goes, Katherine Crawford reads me as a card-carrying revisionist, and Sarah Hanley interprets *Conceiving the Old Regime* as further evidence that "the concept of 'absolutism,'" as applied to royal power practiced in early modern France, should be "relegated to the dustbin of history." After all, hasn't the notion of a monarch crushing the institutional limits on his authority been effectively dismantled already, replaced with the notion of a "collaborative" enterprise in which various social groups negotiated with the royal government in their own interests?

I harbor no illusions that a study of one relatively obscure royal government policy can resolve this debate, already the bane of graduate students preparing for exams. But let me clarify where I think my evidence points. First, rather than being essentially "backward-looking" or traditional, pronatalist

policy was innovative, representing an attempt to extend governing influence into the realms of licit, reproductive sexuality and family life. In many respects, it seems to illustrate what James B. Collins has recently written about the development of “the state”—a concept that came to have its modern meaning during the seventeenth century. Collins further identifies the birth of “the state” with a situation in which said “state” could be conceptualized as having interests that were distinct from the public good of its households (the *res publica* of prior political thought).^[5] This is, in one sense, the old regime whose conception I was referring to as I wrote about pronatalism as a novel effort to bend fathers’ reproductive calculus to match the perceived interest of the king or as reason of state applied to family and sexuality.

To be sure, in terms of governing *practice*, Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s tools for shaping families were limited by customary law and religious sentiment and by the state’s own problematically divergent needs to maintain its tax base and reward subjects for compliance with its goals. Over the course of the eighteenth century the expanding apparatus of the state, it is clear, developed new ways to inform itself and act regarding population, reproduction, and family life, a situation that is illustrated, among other things, by its efforts to train midwives, studied by Nina Gelbart; by extensive activity in public health and population, documented in the works of Jean-Marc Rohrbasser and Andrea Rusnock that Ruggiu cites, as well as in Sean Quinlan’s recent book; by its efforts to deal with the problems of household poverty and child abandonment; and in the encounters between provincial *intendants* and thousands of hopeful *pères de familles nombreuses* that my book addresses.^[6] In revising its approach, the royal government showed evidence, as Crawford notes, of learning from its failures and rationalizing its practices. In the end, I think that neither the traditional view of “absolutism” nor the hard-line understanding of “revisionism” fits my evidence. Collaboration was a useful model, but I still want to stress the novelty of government programs that, already by the seventeenth century, were experimenting with means to extend royal influence into the household’s most intimate realms. Does this fit our notion of “collaboration”? I will leave my readers to judge.

The capacities of the “state” in terms of population evolved a great deal between 1666 and 1789. Nevertheless, the two ends of this period were not so distinct that no comparison is possible. Both Ruggiu and Gerber question my interpretation of the royal government’s renewed pronatalist effort in the period after 1760, an effort explicitly connected by administrators to the precedent set by the edict of 1666. Without responding individually to each specific critique they offer, I will simply acknowledge that much more could be said about the connections between the royal government’s administrative practices and the evolution of various forms of social knowledge in the Enlightenment era. My last chapter might have expanded to become a whole book; that book, clearly, remains to be written. How provincial *intendants* sought to adapt the laws, institutions, and governing techniques they inherited from the past to make them function more “rationally” and “effectively” (as they saw it) is a problem we need to know more about.

But I do think my reviewers and I all agree on a fundamental point. Whatever language we use to describe the developing state of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is imperative that we integrate into our account the “household” as a fundamental, changing, and gendered social institution in perpetual dialogue with that developing state. The production and reproduction of capital and personnel performed by households was the lifeblood of the state; therefore, it is wrong to pretend that the history of the family belongs in a “private sphere” that historians of the early modern state can safely ignore. Likewise, studies of patronage, or of the “personal” or “dynastic” interests that collaborators with the state may have been pursuing, are enriched by taking into account the ways that women did and did not participate in these activities and the ways that “personal” and “family” interests reflected gendered as well as class- or status-based identities. While I deeply admire the fine-grained studies of family practices in the *Annales* tradition, I join François-Joseph Ruggiu in believing that we stand to learn a great deal about families, and also about the capacities and interests of the French state, as we move definitively beyond methodologies that too long separated the *événementielle* of politics and the history of the family from one another.

NOTES

[1] The work in this vein is now voluminous. Hanley's classic argument can be found in "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (spring 1989): 4-27. A recent published collection that offers fine examples of how scholars integrate her insights is Suzanne Desan and Jeffrey Merrick, eds. *Family, Gender and Law in Early Modern France* (University Park, Penn.: Penn State University Press, 2009). Another exemplary study of family-state relations is Julie Hardwick, *Family Business: Litigation and the Political Economies of Daily Life in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[2] The question of how married women's property was or was not taxed is a complicated one, I recognize. Vieuille's treatise, cited by Gerber, provides yet more evidence of the importance of maintaining the husband's conjugal authority. Explaining married women's *de jure* exemption from the *taille personnelle*, it offers telling legal arguments about why it should extend even to women separated in goods from their husbands. The reason: as long as the marriage endures, the husband is the "master and chief of the household." In other words, case law argued that the principle of a wife's legal subordination to her husband trumped even her *de facto* economic independence. Pierre Vieuille, *Nouveau traité des élections* (Paris, 1753), 540-45. Readers curious enough to read this far will forgive me for clarifying another small point. As Gerber notes, wives *were* mentioned in relation to reproductive awards for bourgeois and nobles, and he pertinently asks, "if the edict intended to ignore [women's] reproductive contribution, why mention them at all?" I am now regretting my editing decision to cut out the paragraph in which I show that the wording "gentlemen and their wives" constituted a revision from the earliest draft of a pronatalist plan in Colbert's hand in which pensions were to be offered to "the wives of gentlemen," implying that the minister was thinking originally about directing rewards to women. This formula was revised in later texts to replace men as the essential mediators of the legitimate marital reproductive process that the king wished to encourage, e.g. "gentlemen and their wives."

[3] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1988).

[4] I very much admire United States historian Nancy Cott's illuminating analysis of marriage's historical role in structuring relations between citizens and government: *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002). For feminist economists' view on the gendering of concepts of work and the market, see Nancy Folbre, *Greed, Lust and Gender: A History of Economic Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Drucilla Barker and Susan Feiner, *Liberating Economics: Feminist Perspectives on Families, Work and Globalization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004). See also Carole Pateman and Mary Lyndon Shanley, eds., *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (University Park, Penn.: Penn State University Press, 1991).

[5] James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*. Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xii-xviii.

[6] Nina Rattner Gelbart, *The King's Midwife: A History and Mystery of Madame du Coudray* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Sean Quinlan, *The Great Nation in Decline: Sex, Modernity and Health Crises in Revolutionary France* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007); André Burguière, "Le déstabilisation de la société française," in Jacques Dupâquier et al., *Histoire de la population française*, volume 2, *De la renaissance à 1789* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988): 475-92; Robert M. Schwartz, *Policing the Poor in Eighteenth Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Thomas McStay Adams, *Bureaucrats and Beggars: French Social Policy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Leslie Tuttle
University of Kansas
ltuttle@ku.edu

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