# Kinship and Capitalism

## Marriage, Family, and Business in the English-Speaking World, 1580–1740

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# Introduction: Models and Myths

England is often described as the first modern society—a classic manifestation of the modernization model. Whether the great discontinuity is identified with industrialization or with capitalism, it is assumed that England during the seventeenth century made a qualitative transition from an organic, natural order to an artificial, monetary civilization, from gemeinschaft to gesellschaft. An agrarian, immobile, self-sufficient, traditionalist, fully integrated, regional society, based on custom, reciprocity, hierarchy, and status, is alleged to have been replaced by an individualistic, rational, impersonal, mobile, heterogeneous, literate, urbanized, profit-maximizing, national society within a large-scale market economy, based on the division of labor, specific roles, contract, competition, and private property rights.[1]

In the modernization model of the "big ditch," which employs the classic rhetorical device of bipolarization, relationships formulated on historical experience and cultural norms are juxtaposed with those based on the exercise of rational will and anticipation of the future.[2] It is both descriptive and prescriptive; since change is institutionalized as the norm and regarded as irreversible, any regressions are treated as irrational aberrations. By postulating a fundamental and universal break in human

[1] The original theory is usually attributed to F. Toennies, *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, ed. C. P. Loomis (East Lansing, 1957), 165. Both concepts were ideal types: see R. Heberle, "Ferdinand Toennies" in *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, ed. H. E. Barnes (1965), 151. Emile Durkheim argued that the division of labor made society more complex but rejected the idea of gesellschaft, that a society could exist solely on contract and self-interest: see A. Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1971), 77. The most persistent advocate of the premarket economy is K. Polyani, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, 1985), 53–4, 70.

[2] J. A. Hall and J. C. Jarvie, eds., Introduction to *Transition to Modernity* (Cambridge, 1992), 4.



evolution, the model in effect invents the very concept of modernity. It is so simple, convenient, and comprehensive that it has been borrowed, extended, and adapted by theorists with widely different agendas. It was even acknowledged in principle by theorists of social equilibrium; Parsonian models, for example, are both synchronic and diachronic. Historians preoccupied with dividing the past into periods and obsessed with categorizing changes of mentality as well as changes in the economy and society have adopted and merged it with the Whig concept of history as progress.

The original reason why Ferdinand Toennies developed his famous dichotomy was his belief and concern that both the family and the community in which it was embedded had been transmuted into civil society. At the core of the modernization model lies the assumption that the self-sufficiency and intimacy of the traditional family, which was extended and supported by a network of kin, was superseded by the nuclear family, based on the conjugal couple, individualism, and domesticity. At the same time, the traditional community, based on homogeneity, conformity, commensality, and consensus, is assumed to have been destroyed by the division of labor, the market economy, industrialization, and urbanization.

Empirical historians have, of course, queried both the chronology of the great transition and the reality of sudden and irreversible change. It has been argued that individualism and affection emerged in England long before the major economic changes of the early modern period.[3] Family historians have emphasized the continuity of communal forms, that the nuclear family had a long history and coexisted with kinship, and that the household was different from the family.[4] A substantial literature has emerged on the demography and structure of county families and provincial urban elites; a few monographs have even explored kinship networks in business.

[3] A. MacFarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1987), 133.

[4] D. B. Smith, "The Study of the Family," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 39 (1982): 18–19; J. Demos, "Images of the American Family" in *Changing Images of the Family*, ed. V. Tufte and B. Myerhoff (New Haven, 1979), 59; T. K. Haveren, "The History of the Family," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 95–124; R. Wheaton, "Observations on Kinship History" in *Family History at the Crossroads*, ed. T. K. Haveren and A. Plakans (Princeton, 1987), 285–301; K. Wrightson, "Household and Kinship," *History Workshop* 12 (1981): 156; J. J. Hurwich, "Lineage and Kin" in *The First Modern Society*, ed. A. L. Beier et al. (Cambridge, 1989), 60; J. D. Faubion, "Kinship is Dead," *Comparative Studies in Social History* 38 (1996): 67–91. The contributions of many other historians of the family will become evident in the course of this book.

A wide gulf still persists, however, between the generality of current theory and the particularism of the research into family and kinship at different social and occupational levels. It is not surprising that theorists rarely cite concrete archival documents because they believe that the past has to be imagined and cannot be distilled from vast numbers of facts. But historians have also sinned by displaying an eagerness to generalize casually about hundreds of thousands of people on the basis of a handful of indiscriminately selected examples.[5] This is tantamount to writing fiction, a task that novelists are far better equipped to perform. Other historians openly admit the inadequacy of their sources as scholarly insurance but then proceed to ignore their own caveats.[6]

The hypothetical relationship between the family and capitalism has never been systematically tested in the urban business community, where it should be most visible. There has been much speculation about the "bourgeois" family as the harbinger and pacemaker of change but no satisfactory or comprehensive research into the business family. The primary purpose of this book is to remedy that omission by studying in depth business families and their kinship networks throughout the English-speaking world, during a period when England emerged as a global economic power. It will both describe and analyze the history of the business family over four generations: what happened to it, how it functioned and responded to events, when and where it changed or failed to change, and why and in what directions it developed. At the very least, this study will provide empirical data either to validate or disprove prior theories of how the modern family developed. At most, it will make the evolution of modern society more intelligible.

## MAX WEBER AND KARL MARX

Most theories of the family follow the modernization thesis but emphasize different catalysts. Max Weber, for example, rejected the

[5] M. R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort* (Berkeley, 1996), 47, claims somewhat recklessly that there are no records of "non elite" family life before 1650. Those who do not seek do not find. Although it is not clear what proportion of the population would have been adult members of the "middling sort" between 1680–1780, a guesstimate would be at least 750,000. Largely ignoring statistics compiled by other historians, the author generalizes instead from a minute number of random examples drawn from completely different occupations and often a generation apart.

[6] L. Stone, *Family Sex and Marriage* (1977) and "Family History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12 (1981): 76. The Stone model is still widely used by literary critics, even though it has been totally discredited by historians: see D. Cressy, "Foucault, Stone," *English Literary Renaissance* 21 (1991): 130.

evolutionary approach and did not believe that the logical antecedents of any event constituted a causal explanation.[7] Instead of searching for historical laws, like Karl Marx, he followed Heinrich Rickert and preferred to construct ideal types that were essentially historical models designed to illustrate secular change by analysis of particular events and actions.[8] Weber thought that explaining the origins of any change in terms of that change was tautological; in his view a change of norms had to precede changes in behavior and any change of ethos required an external agent.[9] For Weber, a culture could only be displaced by prior intellectual shifts. The market needed a concept of capitalism before it could become capitalist; therefore, its emergence could not be explained in terms of postcapitalist values.[10]

Weber nonetheless incorporated much of the modernist thesis. He thought that the family had evolved from clans and that it acquired its bourgeois character from Puritanism.[11] The concept of the "calling" depersonalized the family and the neighborhood and created emotional detachment, though in England the feudal and the patrimonial were combined.[12] In the seventeenth century the notion of private property emerged and was guaranteed by the state; the isolation of the household satisfied an essential prerequisite of capitalism.[13] Romantic love, which he considered both irrational and uncontrolled (just like capital accumulation), emerged as a necessary antidote to individual alienation. On the other hand, Weber believed that the extended family stifled economic

[7] R. Bendix and G. Roth, eds., *Scholarship and Partisanship* (Berkeley, 1971), 38.

[8] G. Roth, "History and Sociology," *British Journal of Sociology* 27 (1976): 316; T. Burger, *Max Weber's Theory of Concept Formation* (Durham, N.C., 1987), 210, 227; F. Ringer, *Max Weber's Methodology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), chap. 2. T. Parsons, *The Early Essays*, ed. C. Camic (1991), 22, 208, found two kinds of ideal type in Weber and treated Werner Sombart's categories as ideal types. Few sociologists have in fact adopted Weber's methodology because it formulated no laws and required empirical research. The category of "real types" as described by A. Spiethoff, "Pure Theory and Economic Gestalt Theory" in *Enterprise and Social Change*, ed. F. C. Lande and J. C. Riemersma (Homewood, Ill., 1953), 453, has been totally ignored.

[9] G. Marshall, *In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, 1982), 133.

[10] D. I. Kertzer, "Anthropology and Family History," *Journal of Family History* 9 (1984): 209.

[11] M. Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. F. H. Knight (New York, 1961), 50. Schumpeter, on the other hand, thought that the bourgeois family was ultimately destroyed by capitalism: see J. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1976), 157.

[12] R. Bendix, *Max Weber* (1960), 70, 375; L. D. Blustone, *Max Weber's Theory of the Family* (Port Washington, 1987), 162.

[13] R. Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge, 1987), 291.

development because it put the group before the individual.[14] He considered nepotism, for example, to be a crime, because it impeded the emergence of a universalistic, meritocratic bureaucracy, whereas to kin selection theorists nepotism is a necessary genetic trait.[15]

Karl Marx and his followers identified the great divide with the triumph of the capitalist mode of production that separated work from the household; the family evolved in stages parallel to the stages of capitalism.[16] In the seventeenth century ownership was divorced from use, and labor rather than patrimony became the basis of familial life. The antifeudal family became a unit of consumption, education, and procreation instead of production; external institutions operating in an impersonal market took over its economic functions.[17] Any exceptions in the historical record were treated as abnormalities. The inability of the neofeudal English theater to realize the contradictions within the forces of production has been attributed, for example, to bourgeois "historical immaturity" and the "ideological resistance of feudalism" dismissed as "anachronistic."[18]

To Marxists, rational profit-seeking and individual thrift were emphasized above collective responsibility in a capitalist society. To Crawford MacPherson, the introduction of private property and a free market for land and labor destroyed blood ties and enhanced individual autonomy. Free, equal, and randomly associated individuals now exchanged their labor and competed in an open marketplace. England became a society of possessive individuals who maximized their utility and were bound by contract rather than defined by status.[19] John Locke, and to a lesser extent Thomas Hobbes, are credited with having provided an

[14] Weber argued that the corporate kin group (the sib) throttled capitalism: see Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory*, 267–9.

[15] R. Fox, *Kinship and Marriage* (1983), 6.

[16] B. Fine and E. Leopold, *Women's Employment and the Capitalist Family* (1992), 8; M. McKeon, "Historicizing Patriarchy," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 28 (1995): 295–322.

[17] E. Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (1976), xi, 16–7; A. Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, 2d ed. (Stanford, 1995), 166; J. de Vries, "The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution," *Journal of Economic History* 44 (1994): 265. Since Marxist histories follow the same script and cite the same secondary sources, one or two examples serves for all.

[18] W. Cohen, *Drama of a Nation* (Ithaca, 1985), 3; S. Bercovitch, "New England's Errand Reappraised" in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, ed. J. Higham and P. Conkin (Baltimore, 1979), 93.

[19] C. B. MacPherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1964), 53–4, 64.

intellectual justification for this demise of the cooperative, moral economy by privileging private property rights over communal ownership in civil society.[20] The "critical theory" of Jürgen Habermas postulates that capitalism separated the private from the public sphere and the family from the economy.[21]

Some contemporary Marxists have reacted to the worldwide rejection of their doctrines by roping themselves to the mast: "by grace of bourgeois culture in decline, Marxism has emerged as the last bastion of historical thinking."[22] Others in a desperate attempt to cling to their faith have downplayed structuralism and the modernization model and clutched at any new and seemingly popular radical theory that might reverse their decline, producing some strange hybrids.[23] Elite groups have been credited with the ability to create an ideology, which served their interests, and then by fixing the terms of the discussion and through their control of access to knowledge, persuade their inferiors to accept it as valid. The concept of mentalities, though treated as an inert force, has been gingerly accepted as a dialectic between the objective conditions of human life and the way that people narrate it. Ideologies are still considered the product of social forces, but it is now conceded that the egotistic ideology of the bourgeoisie was gender specific, that women in the household might have contributed to primitive accumulation, that reproduction of the species was a mode of production, and that the term *culture* could be employed as a shorthand for the activities of a class.[24]

[20] N. Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, trans. D. Gobetti (Chicago, 1993), 14; R. Holton and B. Turner, *Max Weber on Economy and Society* (1984), 166.

[21] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 19, 24; D. Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory* (Cambridge, 1980), 41. The idea that value is objectified by exchange is most brilliantly argued by G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. T. Bottomore and D. Frisby, 2d ed. (1990).

[22] E. Fox Genovese, "Literary Criticism" in *The New Historicism*, ed. A. Veeser (1989), 213.

[23] R. Hamilton, *The Liberation of Women* (1978), 98.

[24] G. Therborn, *The Ideology of Power* (1980), 6, 57, 158; C. Middleton, "Patriarchal Exploitation" in *Gender Class and Work*, ed. E. Gamarnikow et al. (1983), 19; W. Seccombe, *A Millennium of Family Change* (New York, 1992), 4; M. Pereleman, *Classical Political Economy* (Totowa, 1984), 26–7; C. Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal, and Money* (Cambridge, 1981), xiii. Marxism has, like all religions, spawned many heresies; the Frankfurt School jettisoned both economic and class determination, while continuing to denounce patriarchialism and the bourgeois family. Marxists argue heatedly among themselves about internal inconsistencies in their theory: see, for example, C. Mooers, *The Making of Bourgeois Europe* (1994). But this is equivalent to debating the color and shape of a unicorn's horn without questioning whether unicorns exist.

## GENDER THEORY

The central preoccupation of gender theorists has been the exclusion of women from power, often neglecting the family and economic dimensions.[25] The family nonetheless is at least an uninvited guest because it constituted the core of patriarchy. Marxism was linked to feminism through Friedrich Engels, who advanced the proposition that the victory of private over communal property had created patriarchy and the monogamous marriage—the exclusion of the wife from social production and the "subjugation of the one sex by the other."[26] Passion could only occur in bourgeois social relations after the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The capitalist mode of production then divided women into either idle bourgeois, economically and emotionally dependent on their husbands, or into proletarians. By reducing wage earners to a proletariat, the bourgeoisie indirectly created subjectivity and therefore romantic love as well as boosting illegitimacy. Bourgeois civilization made the bourgeois woman.[27]

These views, which were in fact based on the discredited theories of American anthropologist Lewis Morgan, had considerable influence on early gender models of the family.[28] Capitalism was blamed for regulating women's reproduction and their access to economic power.[29] The market economy was credited with responsibility for converting property from a means of exchange between families into capital.[30] Capitalism is also alleged to have marginalized wives by divorcing them from the means of production and forcing them to lead pointless, idle lives in order to fortify the status of their husbands who paid the bills. The bourgeois individual is categorized not as economic man but as domestic woman.[31] The bourgeois public sphere developed the conjugal family as

[25] P. Thompson, "Life Histories" in *Biography and Society*, ed. D. Bertaux (1982), 300.
[26] F. Engels, *The Origins of the Family*, trans. A. West and D. Torr (1940), 69; M. George, *Women in the First Capitalist Society* (Urbana, 1988), 4–5.
[27] K. Sacks, "Engels Revisited" in *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Stanford, 1974), 222. Elements of this model have also been adopted by A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England* (Oxford, 1986) and by E. Shorter, *Making of the Modern Family* (1976). It also features in general surveys such as M. Mascuch, "Social Mobility and Middling Self-Identity," *Social History* 20 (1995): 55, and in an awkward and somewhat outdated form in D. C. Quinlan and J. A. Shackleford, "Economy and English Families," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24 (1994): 431–63.
[28] Hamilton, *Liberation of Women*, 92–3.
[29] G. Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford, 1986), 171.
[30] C. Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism* (Ithaca, 1990), 16.
[31] N. Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (Oxford, 1987), 66.

the site of a new form of subjectivity distinct from society.[32] Women now had value in use and men value in exchange.

Gender theorists have also drawn, however, on the modernization model. One popular thesis has been that of Alice Clark who advanced the argument that capitalism marginalized women, but she also argued that they had enjoyed a productive role in an earlier "Golden Age" before the seventeenth century.[33] Followers of this school of thought were prepared to concede that the position of women had evolved, though not necessarily in one or the right direction.[34] Historians have argued, based on the evidence of literary sources and legal texts, that the vocational choices and property rights of women were deliberately narrowed by men in the early modern period.[35] The ideology of family love emerged to endorse male authority and female sacrifice—to control women and conceal their economic contribution.[36] Sexuality and companionate marriage were invoked to legitimate the class and gender hierarchy; the Renaissance woman with her spirit of rational equality became the subordinate wife of later centuries.[37] Traditional paternal patriarchy was converted into modern fraternal patriarchy.[38]

Other theorists have chosen to regard patriarchal repression as omnipresent and changeless over time. Complex debates have occurred over whether or not patriarchy preceded capitalism and over the significance of contract.[39] The idealization of the family as a sanctuary of

[32] T. Lovell, "Subjective Powers" in *The Consumption of Culture*, ed. J. Brewer and A. Bermingham (1995), 30.

[33] B. A. Hanawalt, ed., *Women and Work in Pre-industrial Europe* (Bloomington, 1986), xv, and "The Widow's Mite" in *Upon My Husband's Death*, ed. L. Mirrer (Ann Arbor, 1992), 40; M. K. McIntosh, *A Community Transformed* (New York, 1991), 289–90; S. O. Rose, "Proto Industry," *Journal of Family History* 13 (1988): 192.

[34] A. J. Vickers, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres," *Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 383–414.

[35] A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property* (1993), 227; R. E. Archer, "Women as Landholders" in *Woman Is a Worthy Wight*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg (1992), 162; S. Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property* (Cambridge, 1990), 35, chap. 4; E. Spring, *Law, Land, and Family* (Chapel Hill, 1993), passim; M. Berg, "Women's Property," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24 (1993): 243.

[36] L. S. Robinson, *Sex, Class, and Culture* (1978), 174.

[37] V. Wayne, introduction to A. Tilney, *A Brief Discourse* (Ithaca, 1992), 4.

[38] C. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (Stanford, 1989), 35.

[39] C. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, 1988), 25–7, 37–8; S. Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford, 1991), passim; H. Hartman, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation," *Signs* 1 (1976): 137–69; R. Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents* (1983), 88; H. Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage" in *Women and Revolution*, ed. L. Sargent (1981), 1–41; J. S. Jaquette, "Contract and Coercion" in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. H. L. Smith (1998), 216. R. MacKonough and R. Harrison, "Patriarchy and Relations of Production" in *Feminism and Materialism*, ed. A. Kuhn and A. M. Wolpe (1978), 40, advocate a dual notion of patriarchy.

sentiment is interpreted as a reinforcement of patriarchy. Men have been accused of criticizing women for participating in a system that was designed to entrap them by making marriage and consumption the only outlets for their energies.[40] Historians who argue that women enjoyed power in the household have been dismissed as "duped by the hierarchizing rhetoric of a gendered division of economic labor."[41]

Other gender theorists have mixed economic with cultural determinism. To them, men conquer by internalizing norms and expectations rather than by enforcing obedience. They construct ideals to "uphold the developing apparatus of male bourgeois power"; the character of motherhood therefore has to be reconstructed by imagination, not from "actual material behavior."[42] Male authors have been accused of deliberately defining women's power in terms of sex and their status in terms of desexualized idleness.[43] The importance of the family and kinship is rejected on the grounds that culture and not biology differentiate men from women.[44]

## FAMILY MODELS

The family can be regarded as a psychological, biological, social, economic, or political construct. It can be extended upward, downward, and laterally through intermarriage or by incorporating household servants. It can be restricted to male descendants who share the same surname (a house) or expanded to include offspring through daughters. It can consist of solitary bachelors, spinsters, widowers and widows, childless couples, single parents with young children, and coresident siblings. It has never been a rigid institution, and its structure has changed continuously with the life cycle, as its members move in and out, marry, age, and die. Any individual belongs to two families—the family of orientation into which he was born and the family of procreation created by marriage. The family is therefore a moving target and is best defined in terms of what it is not, as occupying all the space not filled by other social institutions.

Historians of the family have devised an elaborate classification

[40] L. T. Fitz, "What Says the Married Woman," *Mosaic* 13 (1980): 10.
[41] L. Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter* (1994), 23.
[42] T. Bowers, *Politics of Motherhood* (Cambridge, 1996), 20.
[43] J. Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power* (Charlottesville, 1992), 257.
[44] J. F. Collier and S. J. Yanagisako, eds., *Gender and Kinship* (Stanford, 1983), 49.

system to distinguish different forms and combinations of forms.[45] For analytical purposes these have been reduced here to three categories: the nuclear family, the extended family, and the household. The nuclear consists of parents, stepparents, or substitute parents, children, and stepchildren. The extended embraces all relations by blood (consanguinial) or marriage (affinal). There was no sharp line of differentiation in the early modern period between agnatic and affinal; the family was an entirety of persons connected by marriage or along filiation lines rather than a dynasty or succession of individuals.

The household was, however, separate from the family. The household was a unit of coresidence that might not include some family members but did include nonfamily members such as servants, apprentices, and lodgers. Grown sons and daughters might live temporarily or permanently in the parental household before and after marriage or move back to assist or replace a parent. From the point of view of the tax-collecting state, the family was a cluster of dependents living under the authority of a household.[46]

Some family models are variations of modernization models. The Parsonian model is ahistorical and predicates a shift from universal to particular, from ascription to achievement, from diffuse to specific roles; the kinship system has to be destroyed and this is effected by industrialization.[47] The Stone model of change is historical but is still based on the proposition that the extended family was superseded by the nuclear family. It also incorporates an assumed psychological revolution in attitudes and sentiments, an idea originally propounded by Philippe Aries. A similar argument has been advanced by Shorter who surmised that the new capitalist society promoted egotism in the emotional sphere as well as in the market.[48] The emergence of sentimentalism in the family has also been interpreted as a mirror image of rationalism and the work ethic—dreaminess is associated with mothers and rational capitalism

[45] P. Laslett, "Family and Household" in *Social and Economic Aspects of the Family*, ed. R. Wall and S. Osamu (Cambridge, 1993), table 17.1.

[46] K. Wrightson, "The Policy of the Parish" in *The Experience of Authority*, ed. P. Griffiths, A. Fox, and S. Hindle (1996), 13.

[47] T. Parsons, *Family Socialization and Interactive Process* (Glencoe, 1955), 16, 20. Parsons had no "nostalgic conceptualization of gemeinschaft": see R. J. Holton and B. S. Turner, *Talcott Parsons on Economy and Society* (1986), 23, 218.

[48] Shorter, *Making of the Modern Family*, 259. The views of most academics are determined not by current events but by the political and personal traumas of their youth: see D. Chinot, "Changing Fashion" in *The State of Sociology*, ed. J. F. Short (Beverley Hills, 1981), 260.

with fathers.[49] Yet another approach is to regard the family not as a separate entity but as one component of a whole way of life.

The concept of the development cycle is an influential analytical device introduced as a dynamic alternative to static, demographic, and household models of the family. The family is seen in continuous transition following the life course of its individual members, whose roles and mutual interaction vary with each stage. Three principal stages are envisaged: first the conjugal couple, then dispersion of the children by marriage, and then replacement of parents by their children.[50] The development cycle is studied longitudinally through a succession of cohorts; a distinction is made between individual time, family time, and social time, the latter equated either with age or with the calendar.[51] Families do not necessarily pass through all stages; changes in the configuration of kin over the life course also differ from the family cycle because the stages of parenthood are fixed. The life course approach allows for greater fluidity in family structure and it can be combined with family reconstitution, though it does not explain behavior.[52] It represents more of a strategy than a theory or methodology, and it has been criticized as purely descriptive because the criteria for phases differ.[53]

The family can also be structured as an economic model. Although some economists are willing to concede that the market is not the only determinant, most usually ignore social factors and assume that all humans are motivated by utility; subject to adequate information, families allocate their time and money to maximize satisfaction.[54] A rational choice economic model has been constructed to explain the behavior of families in terms of exchange theory and multiple calculations,

[49] C. Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic* (Oxford, 1989), 226.

[50] M. Fortis, introduction to J. Goody, ed., *The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups* (Cambridge, 1958), 4–5.

[51] T. K. Haveren, "The Family Cycle" in *The Family Life Cycle in European Societies*, ed. J. Cuisenier (Mouton, 1977), 347; G. H. Elder, "Families and Lives" in *Family History at the Crossroads*, ed. T. K. Haveren and A. Plakans (Princeton, 1987), 182, 196.

[52] T. K. Haveren, "Cycles, Courses, and Cohorts," *Journal of Social History* 12 (1978): 107; M. P. Guttmann, "Family Reconstitutions as Event-History Analysis" in *Old and New Methods in Historical Demography*, ed. D. S. Reher and R. S. Schofield (Oxford, 1993), 159–77.

[53] T. K. Haveren, "Family History at the Crossroads," *Journal of Family History* 12 (1987): xiv.

[54] P. S. Cohen, "Economic Analysis and Economic Man" in *Themes in Economic Anthropology*, ed. R. Firth (1967), 94; H. Coase, *The Firm, the Market, and the Law* (Chicago, 1988), 3.

ignoring the free-rider problem.[55] In such a model the family does not function according to prescription or routine but proceeds by a series of bargains.

Kinship models are standard devices in social anthropology. To Claude Levi-Strauss it was kinship systems that originally created culture.[56] Martine Segalen has argued that kinship should be studied rather than the family.[57] There are, however, important differences between the perceptual categories and definitions of kinship in early societies and the analytical categories of social scientists.[58] Stuart England had no formal system of kinship with sanctions of the kind described by anthropologists. Kinship, like language, had its own grammar and was governed by a largely unknown but still applicable body of rules.[59] Network theory, based on functional mapping and the measurement of clusters, also has some applications to the study of kinship and its influence on individual behavior.[60] A useful distinction can be made between egocentric and sociocentric networks and between the individual actor and all actors in a social system.[61]

Finally, as an extension of family networks, there are models of the community—the gemeinschaft. The holistic concept of the tightly integrated community, which is greater than the sum of its parts, is really a myth; although an organizing concept in sociology, it is an invention that became a method.[62] There are numerous variations of the model; sometimes the community is simply defined as experience, sometimes as an end in itself, sometimes as the opposite of self-interest, sometimes as a totality of common values.[63] There is little consensus as to whether it

[55] M. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971), 197. The defects of rational choice theory are outlined in J. Elster, *Rational Choice* (New York, 1986), 23–5. In classical theory, moreover, women are regarded as selfless and the family as moral and altruistic: see N. Folbre and H. Hartmann, "The Rhetoric of Self Interest" in *The Consequences of Economic Rhetoric*, ed. A. Klamer et al. (Cambridge, 1988), 185.

[56] M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Halton, *The Meaning of Things* (New York, 1981), 40.

[57] M. Segalen, *Historical Anthropology of the Family* (Cambridge, 1986), 40.

[58] T. K. Haveren, "Recent Research in the History of the Family" in *Time Family and Community*, ed. M. Drake (Oxford, 1994), 25.

[59] Wheaton, "Observations on Kinship History," 329.

[60] J. C. Mitchell, "Social Networks" in *Annual Review of Antropology*, ed. B. J. Siegel, vol. 3 (Palo Alto, 1974), 297.

[61] A. S. Klovdahl, "Urban Social Networks" in *The Small World*, ed. M. Kochen (Norwood, N. J., 1989), 177. See also S. Nenudic, "Identifying Social Networks" in *History and Computing*, ed. E. Mawdsley, vol. 3 (Manchester, 1990), 189.

[62] A. MacFarlane, "Historical Anthropology," *Social History* 5 (1977): 632.

[63] T. Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore, 1982), 5–8.

should be defined by blood, occupation, neighborliness, social interaction, geographic area, or residential propinquity or whether it exists only as a state of mind, as a reified ideal.[64] Gemeinschaft is really an ideological concept designed to contrast the alleged, face-to-face life of the countryside with urban anonymity. The most practical definition is that it is a bounded social system and not necessarily homogeneous.[65]

## THE POVERTY OF THEORY

Models of the family abstract, simplify, and map reality in accordance with specific rules in order to emphasize recurrent and typical forms, display clusters of attributes, predict behavior, reveal trends and connections, and avoid ad hoc interpretations. Historians have been criticized for reducing the value of their analysis by ignoring theory and by studying the domestic family instead of the familial system.[66] Their practice of treating sources as direct descriptions has been challenged on the grounds that "all history is cultural history."[67] Theorists often display great animosity toward empiricism and any appeal to facts, historical or otherwise.[68] A bourgeois mind-set has been identified with an "overmastering obsession with the logic of the real."[69]

Whereas historical sociologists categorize the evidence and then compare and analyze it, social historians usually prefer thick description without an organized system of propositions.[70] Some take great pains to establish the facts and then offer weak explanations, which reflects an inability to analyze rather than the absence of theory.[71] Many family histories make the mistake of comparing past and present instead of

[64] A. MacFarlane, S. Harrison, and C. Jardine, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge, 1977), 2.
[65] D. Sachs, "Celebrating Authority in Bristol" in *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, ed. S. Zimmerman and R. F. E. Weissman (Newark, 1989), 188.
[66] S. D. Amussen, "Early Modern Social History," *Journal of British Studies* 29 (1990): 83; R. Winch, et al. *Familial Organization* (New York, 1978), 96–7.
[67] L. Jordanova, "The Representation of the Family" in *Interpretation and Cultural History*, ed. A. Wear and J. H. Pittock (Basingstoke, 1991), 11, 118 (the argument is watered down on page 131).
[68] B. Hindess and P. Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (1975), 311.
[69] A. Easthope, "Romancing the Stone," *Social History* 18 (1993): 248; H. Belknap, *Beyond the Great Story* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 230; V. H. White, *The Content of Form* (Baltimore, 1987), 3, 36.
[70] V. E. Bonnell, "The Uses of Theory," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980): 170–1; P. Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Ithaca, 1982), 332; M. Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Family* (1980), 38.
[71] W. O. Aydelotte, *Quantification in History* (Reading, 1971), passim.

measuring change over successive generations.[72] Observing behavior does not necessarily reveal the reasons for that behavior.[73] Belief can be cautiously inferred from behavior, but a group mentality cannot be inferred from individual beliefs.

The frequent injunction to adopt theoretical rigor, however, betrays narrowness of vision and knowledge.[74] Many theories depend on factual ignorance, on slighting or ignoring the evidence.[75] Labels, like bourgeois, are applied indiscriminately to the family; although they imply class determination, the process of inference is never specified.[76] As Locke observed, "I see it is easier and more natural for Men to build Castles in the Air of their own than to survey well those that are to be found standing."[77] Models used to describe actual families must be tested for empirical validity, because events are governed by fortuitous as well as by systematic factors.[78]

The principal weakness of most theories of society is their denial of individual agency. The apparatus of roles is designed to obviate any need to scrutinize the thoughts or character of individuals. Structures cannot exist without humans; they have to be reproduced across time and space. Every idea has to be conceived by a person.[79] Meaning cannot be a subject of investigation independent of individuals. Economic models of the family are limited in their application, because they predicate a rational economic person who is never ambivalent or conflicted and they treat people like commodities.

Human agency has acquired a new importance, and it is no longer assumed as a matter of course that social systems have their own logic, which humans can neither understand nor influence.[80] Social determinism has been rejected on the grounds that it requires the construction of

[72] D. S. Smith, "Parental Power and Marriage Patterns," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (1973): 419.
[73] S. Wolfan, *In Laws and Outlaws* (1987), 199; R. T. LaPierre, "Attitudes versus Actions," *Social Forces* 13 (1934): 230–7.
[74] A. Marwick, "A Fetishism of Documents" in *Developments in Modern Historiography*, ed. H. Kozicki (New York, 1993), 110–11, 131.
[75] F. Mount, *The Subversive Family* (1982), 63, 187–8.
[76] P. Laslett, "The Character of Familial History" in Haveren and Plakans, *Family History*, 273.
[77] J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. E. S. DeBeer (Oxford, 1976–89), Locke to Molyneux 20 January 1693.
[78] H. J. Habbakuk, "Economic History and Economic Theory," *Daedalus* 100 (1971): 311.
[79] M. C. Lemon, *The Discipline of History* (New York, 1995), 176.
[80] S. K. Sanderson, *Social Evolution* (1992), intro.; P. Joyce, "The End of Social History," *Social History* 20 (1995): 84–5.

all the mental states of agents as causes of their actions.[81] There is in fact no objective social reality; societies are what people do.[82]

Most historians are more interested in the typical than in the universal or the structural, and they have developed sophisticated techniques to assess and interpret the evidence without the baggage of theory.[83] Historians' propositions are always existential, because they are ultimately founded on individual behavior, whatever the level of generality.[84] Charles Darwin, it will be recalled, conquered the typology of fixed species by concentrating on the variability of individual organisms within the population. Theory is only applicable at the level of subjectivity of those whose lives are to be explained.[85] It is the evidence and not an agenda that historians of the family must follow; without verification there can be no knowledge.[86]

A grand theory of discontinuity appeals to those who seek simple, monistic explanations for the development of the family. The analytical mode prefers parsimony in explanation and eschews variant causes.[87] Causation can, however, rarely be precisely determined; it is often cumulative, circular, and indirect.[88] A factor can be indispensable without leading inevitably to a particular conclusion.[89] An event can be explained by invoking a particular action or by describing the conditions for that action.[90] Qualitative changes, by definition, cannot be predicted on the basis of past experience.

A different problem is presented by present centeredness, or as Frederick William Maitland defined it, "retrospective modernism." Historians have been accused of reducing the history of the family to a sentimental discourse as an antidote to current values.[91] It is doubtful whether any culture can be analyzed in terms of anachronistic concepts

[81] Q. D. R. Skinner, "Social Meaning" in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, vol. 4, ed. P. Laslett, W. G. Runciman, and Q. D. R. Skinner (Oxford, 1974), 156.
[82] E. A. Gellner, "Explanations in History" in *Modes of Individualism*, ed. J. O'Neil (New York, 1973), 263.
[83] R. T. Atkins, *Knowledge and Explanation in History* (Ithaca, 1978), 37.
[84] G. Leff, *History and Social Theory* (1969), 77.
[85] P. Abrams, "Historical Sociology," *Past and Present* 87 (1980): 12.
[86] F. W. Fogel and G. R. Elton, *Which Road to the Past?* (New Haven, 1983), 100.
[87] D. S. A. Smith, "A Perspective on Demographic Methods," *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982): 445.
[88] D. S. Landes, "What Room for Accident?" *Economic History Review* 47 (1994): 655.
[89] P. D. MacClelland, *Causal Explanation and Model Building in History* (Ithaca, 1975), 74.
[90] S. Pollard in *Culture in History*, ed. J. Melling and J. Barry (Exeter, 1992), 10; R. Martin, "Causes Conditions," *History and Theory* 21 (1982): 58.
[91] N. Armstrong and L. Tennenhouse, *The Imaginary Puritan* (Berkeley, 1992), 83.

that its members would not have understood.[92] The early modern period had its own obsessions and criteria of what was important; the obsession with image and representation is, however, a preoccupation of the late twentieth century. Historical writing has always been a powerful tool of both radical and conservative propaganda, since it can validate current dislikes and reinforce or destroy myths. Those who abhor market capitalism, because they think that it dissolves fraternity and family ties, prefer to blame blind historical forces rather than accept that it is a product of human choice and voluntary action.[93]

The unifying principles of general theory always have the advantage over conflicted histories. Readers demand simple answers and immutable laws that will invest human history with meaning. They yearn for a moral vision and an intellectually imposed order; a theoretical civilization seeks regularities or what Francis Bacon termed the "idols of the tribe."[94] What begins as theory ends as ideology.[95] Ideologies are both prophetic and exclusive; they consist of assumptions that no longer appear to be assumptions and that are never subjected to critical examination by their disciples.[96]

Because there is no basis to disprove them, ideologies turn into myths.[97] Myths offer comfort, whereas the truth promotes anxiety.[98] Because beliefs endure longer than opinions and usually meet some inner need, they can seldom be refuted; only when the world has lost interest in an issue can the historian treat it objectively.[99] Empirical research on

[92] A. MacIntyre, "Causality in the Social Sciences" in *Rationality*, ed. B. R. Wilson (Evanston, 1970), chap. 6. Sadamer, however, considered prejudice to be a condition of knowledge. See W. Outhwaite, "Hans George Sadamer," in *The Return of Grand Theory*, ed. Q. Skinner (Cambridge, 1985), 26.

[93] R. Grassby, *The Idea of Capitalism before the Industrial Revolution* (Lanham, Md., 1999), chap. 5.

[94] F. Bacon, *Works*, ed. J. Spedding et al. (1857–90), iv. 55–6; E. A. Shils, *The Constitution of Society* (Chicago, 1982), 210; C. Taylor, "Use and Abuse of Theory" in *Ideology, Philosophy, and Politics*, ed. A. Parel (1983), 50–1.

[95] A useful list of the main types of ideology is provided by J. B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford, 1990), 61–6. To I. Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (1983), 81, truth as a cultural ideal is simply an opiate for the masses; in *The Capitalist World Economy* (Cambridge, 1979), 35, he could confidently predict the *imminent* appearance of socialist world government.

[96] On Marxists as Scholastics see A. MacLachlan, *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England* (1996), 122.

[97] R. Boudon, *The Analysis of Ideology* (Oxford, 1989), 204; B. Halpern, "Myth and Ideology," *History and Theory* 1 (1961): 135; K. Walsh, "The Post-Modern Threat to the Past," in *Archaeology after Structuralism*, ed. I. Bapty and T. Yates (1990), 281.

[98] D. C. Coleman, *Myth, History, and the Industrial Revolution* (1992), 40.

[99] K. V. Thomas, *The Perception of the Past* (Creighton Trust Lecture, 1983), 24.

the family cannot hope to compete with the self-fulfilling prophecies of ideologies, which usually claim moral significance and acquire allegorical or symbolic forms as timeless archetypes.[100] Ideologies have much in common with astrology; they are systems of thought that are self-confirming and immune to external argument.[101] Fashions in indignation and methodology do, however, change in the long run. The Oedipal passion invested in the debates over the new economic history has long since metamorphosed into indifference.[102] The econometricians won a Pyrrhic victory because they ignored the first rule of business, which is to protect market share.

It is the business of historians to look for patterns of behavior, to identify trends, and measure change. But it is extremely difficult to generalize from the particular.[103] Studies of human attitude and behavior cannot be entirely objective, because they require empathy and sensitivity to nuance.[104] But they must be impartial and free from cultural assumptions.[105] Where humans are involved, it is only possible to estimate probabilities. Historians have to study the sources systematically and then settle for fragments of the truth.[106] They perform best when they reconstruct the specific sequence of events and refrain from asking unanswerable questions and from having the answers before they even ask the questions. Their principal obligation is to strive to get it right, to explain how rather than why events have occurred.

## QUANTIFICATION

Statistical data are limited in their applications because psychic behavior—motives and intentions—is not susceptible to precise measurement. It is impossible, for example, to quantify religious conviction.[107] Figures

[100] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Anthropology and History* (Manchester, 1961), 8; A. Wilson and T. G. Ashplant, "Whig History," *Historical Journal* 31 (1988): 261. Genuine debate can only occur when all parties are prepared to be proved wrong. The most effective weapon against the invincible ignorance of the true believer is not reason, but ridicule.

[101] K. V. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), 767.

[102] A. Field, ed., introduction to *The Future of Economic History* (Boston, 1987), 1, 35.

[103] G. Levi, "On Microhistory" in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. P. Burke (University Park, 1992), 106.

[104] T. Zeldin, "Social History and Total History," *Journal of Social History* 10 (1976): 243.

[105] S. Wilson, "The Myth of Motherhood a Myth," *Social History* 9 (1984): 198.

[106] F. W. Maitland, *Selected Essays*, ed. H. D. Hazeltine et al. (Cambridge, 1936), 241.

[107] M. Spufford, "Can We Count the Godly?" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985): 437.

do not prove inferences, which have to be logically inferred. It is also difficult to reconstruct process from statistics. Even broadly based official records do not necessarily produce the relational data for anthropological field research.[108]

This is well illustrated by studies of the household. The focus on mean household size conceals variations in structure and differences between localities, occupations, and status groups; a high level of aggregation renders kin networks invisible.[109] By treating the household as an end in itself and by relying exclusively on official records, historians have overlooked the importance of nonresident kin and of economic factors. It is vital to observe individuals, because the average or typical family or household is an abstraction with no counterpart in reality. A family can exist without any children or without one or even both parents.

Historians sometimes use statistical data and introduce graphs and tables as evidence without acknowledging the problems of statistical inference. They rely on a rough correspondence between two variables without asking whether the variables are typical or comparable or whether the association is random or distorted by a third factor or by some change in the independent variable. Statistical correlation can only suggest the strength of linear association, never causation, which can only be established by other evidence.[110] The coefficient of determination can indicate what percentage of the variation in one factor is associated with variation in another. But correlations that technically are statistically significant still have low predictability; the number of alternative factors is usually so high that the effectiveness of the correlation as an explanation is diminished.

Path analysis has been described as a "form of statistical fantasy." A path diagram between two variables can never disconfirm a false causal assumption, even if the variables correlate.[111] Correlation, unlike causation, works in both directions and not necessarily in chronological order, so that it is unclear which variable is active and which passive. Significant coefficients can only be obtained if all complicating factors and all other variables can be controlled. Many statistical procedures work no better than old-fashioned insight or common sense, because they cannot prove any substantial hypothesis.[112]

[108] A. Plakans, *Kinship in the Past* (New York, 1984), 249.
[109] Wheaton, "Observations on Development of Kinship," 294.
[110] M. W. Oakes, *Statistical Inference* (New York, 1990), 65.
[111] R. Ling, "Correlation and Causation," *Journal of American Statistical Association* 77 (1982): 490.
[112] N. Fitch, "Statistical Fantasies," *Historical Methods* 17 (1984): 251.

Generational and cohort analysis present special problems for the social historian. Generations have a wider age spread than cohorts, and it is difficult to establish chronological boundaries to compare their behavior. Since a society reproduces itself continuously, where does one generation begin and another end?[113] Unless the sample chosen is random, which often cannot be ensured with historical evidence, it is impossible to generalize from it on the whole population. Changes in the life course of any individual are different from changes in the population of which he is a member.

The hunger for statistics can lead to indigestion and obesity. Figures tend to mesmerize historians, who take them at face value, whereas they sift and critically examine other primary sources.[114] Unless distinctly odd or unless some passionate issue is at stake, statistics are never reworked, because the labor does not seem to justify the effort. The fact is quietly ignored that any data set is probably based on thousands of quick, subjective decisions and distorted by errors of transcription, calculation, bias, and the omission of unknown values.[115]

Collating and interpreting the evidence raises formidable methodological problems.[116] A database can only be constructed by taking complex evidence out of context and reducing it to simple categories. Data has to be coded so that it can be input and then manipulated, and, once aggregated, it cannot be checked without direct access to the program. The labels and categories employed often have an ideological component; cases that do not fit the allocated box are dropped or squeezed to fit; the code determines which questions can be asked, and it cannot be changed once the project is under way.[117]

Adequate statistics are, however, indispensable for establishing the structure of the family. They not only provide a framework for analysis, but they indicate what needs to be explained. The cliometricians did not so much test existing facts as establish new facts that could not be known

[113] N. B. Ryder, "The Cohort as a Concept," *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 843, 853; A. B. Spitzer, "The Historical Problem of Generations," *American Historical Review* 78 (1973): 1358.

[114] D. Landes, "The Fable of the Dead Horse" in *The British Industrial Revolution*, ed. J. Mokyn (Boulder, 1993), 168.

[115] One insoluble problem of privately held databases is that the reader is unable to check sources, as in conventional historical writing. Although most subjects have been individually documented here in a memo field, it is not feasible to list over 85,000 references in the text and the database will be destroyed once the final volume on material culture is published.

[116] For methods and problems of coding see appendix B.

[117] L. Stone, *The Past and the Present* (1987), 60.

until the evidence was subjected to their kind of questioning.[118] Behavior can be measured and relative changes between different variables compared. The greatest single virtue of statistics is their ability to disprove and thereby eliminate false explanations. They can confirm or reject the null hypothesis that chance will produce the same result. Statistics create a solid basis for probability statements.[119] What emerges are patterns of frequency rather than causal relationships.[120] If the data demonstrate that a high proportion of individuals consistently marry their neighbors over a long time period, it is highly probable that propinquity is a major factor in marriage without knowing the deciding factor or why any particular individual has married. The business family can only be studied through collective macrobiography, through the precise aggregation of individual life histories and genealogies.[121]

## DESIGN OF THE PROJECT

Previous historians have usually worked with either a sample occupational group, such as aldermen, or with a block of demographic data, like the records of the Quakers. J. R. Woodhead, for example, included all aldermen and common councilors (1660–89) and Henry Horwitz drew a sample of 379 aldermen and company directors.[122] Sample sizes and time periods have varied. Theodore Rabb identified 3,933 merchants as investors in joint stocks and members of regulated companies.[123] Steve Rappaport analyzed the careers of 1,000 London freemen, 530 in detail.[124] Studies of particular port books have usually involved some 3,000 exporters and importers.[125] Peter Earle analyzed a sample of 375 citizens from the orphans records as well as the interrogatories of 1,994 men and 2,121 women (1660–1725) and 1,794 men and 1,436 women

[118] L. J. Goldstein, "The Sociological Historiography of Charles Tilly" in *Developments in Modern Historiography*, ed. H. Kozicki (New York, 1993), 92.
[119] C. Hay, "Historical Theories," *History and Theory* 19 (1980): 50.
[120] M. Douglas, *Risk and Blame* (1992), 50.
[121] R. M. Taylor and R. J. Crandall, eds., *Generation and Change* (Macon, 1986), 21; W. M. Mason and S. E. Fienberg, *Cohort Analysis in Social Research* (New York, 1985), 35.
[122] J. R. Woodhead, *The Rulers of London, 1660–89* (London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1965); H. Horwitz, "Testamentary Practice," *Law and History Review* 2 (1984): 225.
[123] T. K. Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 53.
[124] S. Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds* (Cambridge, 1989).
[125] N. Zahedieh, "London and Colonial Consumer," *Economic History Review* 47 (1994): 243; D. W. Jones, *War and the Economy* (Oxford, 1988).