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0521771471 - Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage

Naomi Tadmor

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Introduction

After decades of academic research on the history of the family in early modern England, scholars and students are both enlightened and perplexed. We now have a very considerable body of knowledge at our command. A field once dominated by ill-informed myths about family life in the past has been enriched with well-researched facts and many well-founded interpretations. Thus, for example, we now possess invaluable data on the demography of the family. We know the mean age at marriage of different populations, the average duration of marriage, rates of re-marriage, and the extent of non-marrying populations. We know how many children families in the past were likely to have, how many were born out of wedlock, and how many were likely to die before they reached maturity.¹ Beyond these facts and figures, we know much about conventions of courtship and marriage, as well as the history of marital breakdown.² We are aware of different life-cycle stages, from childhood

¹ See especially E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1989; 1st edn 1981); P. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York, 1965); P. Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations: Essays in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, 1977); P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time: Comparative Studies in the Size and Structure of the Domestic Group Over the Last Three Centuries in England, France, Serbia, Japan and Colonial North America* (Cambridge, 1972).

² The following represents a very small selection of works in this area: A. Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman* (Cambridge, 1970); D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism* (New York, 1977); R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981); K. Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (London, 1982), chs. 2–4; R. Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450–1700* (London, 1984); M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1987); D. O'Hara, 'Ruled by my friends: aspects of marriage in the diocese of Canterbury c. 1540–1570', *Continuity and Change* 6 (1991), 9–41; R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England, 1500–1850* (London, 1995); D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), esp. chs. 10–16. On separation and divorce see, for example, L. Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530–1987* (Oxford, 1992); L. Stone, *Broken Lives: Marriage and Divorce in England 1660–1875* (Oxford, 1995).

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and adolescence to the experience of old age.³ We know about differences between town and country, rich and poor, east and west, north and south. Indeed, we have many studies that inform us about the experience of particular localities.⁴ We also know much about the different experiences of women and men in the past, and about the laws and customs that bred and nurtured these experiences.⁵

³ For childhood and adolescence, see, for example, R. Wall, 'The age at leaving home', *Journal of Family History* 3 (1978), 181–202; A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (New Haven and London, 1981); J. H. Plumb, 'The new world of children in eighteenth-century England', in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (eds.), *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982), pp. 286–315; L. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500–1900* (Cambridge, 1983); K. Thomas, 'Children in early modern England', in G. Avery and J. Briggs (eds.), *Children and their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 45–77; I. K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven and London, 1994); P. Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford, 1996). For old age, see, for example, P. Laslett, 'The history of aging and the aged', in Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love*, pp. 174–213; K. Thomas, 'Age and authority in early modern England', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 (1976), 205–48; R. M. Smith and M. Pelling (eds.), *Life, Death and the Elderly: Historical Perspectives* (London, 1994), chs. 3–4; S. Ottaway, 'Providing for the elderly in eighteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change* 13 (1998), 391–418; R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford, 1998). See also Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, chs. 1–8, 17–20.

⁴ Important details about family life can be found, for example, in D. G. Hey, *An English Rural Community: Myddle under the Tudors and the Stuarts* (Leicester, 1974), esp. pp. 126–84, 198–218; K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (Oxford, 1995; 1st edn 1979), esp. chs. 3–4; N. Goose, 'Household size and structure in early Stuart Cambridge', *Social History* 5 (1980), 347–85; C. Howell, *Land, Family and Inheritance in Transition: Kibworth Harcourt* (Cambridge, 1983), esp. pp. 198–208, 237–69; J. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. pp. 120–37, 247–61; G. Nair, *Highley: The Development of a Community 1550–1880* (Oxford, 1988), esp. pp. 104–27; D. Levine and K. Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society: Whickham 1560–1765* (Oxford, 1991), esp. pp. 308–44.

⁵ For example, K. Thomas, 'The double standard', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959), 195–216; G. J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought* (Oxford, 1973); P. Crawford, 'Attitudes to menstruation in seventeenth-century England', *P&P* 91 (1981), 47–73; L. Charles and L. Duffin (eds.), *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England* (London, 1985); J. A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England* (York, 1980); V. Brodsky Elliot, 'Widows in late Elizabethan London: remarriage, economic opportunity and family orientation', in L. Bonfield and R. M. Smith (eds.), *The World We Have Gained: Essays Presented to Peter Laslett on his 70th Birthday* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 122–54; S. Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988); L. Pollock, '"Teach her to live under obedience": the making of women in the upper ranks of early modern England', *Continuity and Change* 4 (1989), 231–58; B. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1989); P. Earle, 'The female labour market in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', *Economic History Review* 42 (1989), 328–53; V. Fildes (ed.), *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren* (London, 1990); P. Sharpe, 'Literally spinsters: a new interpretation of local economy and demography in Colyton in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Economic History Review* 44 (1991), 46–65; A. J. Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of

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This impressive accumulation of facts and interpretations attests to the productivity of historians of the family. The implications of this knowledge, however, reverberate well beyond the boundaries of this particular field. Over the last decades, findings about norms and customs of family life have informed research in many other areas, from the development of the agricultural economy and industrial change to practices of local government and state control; from the study of religious life and political thought to the study of popular culture.⁶

Yet if we seek to ascertain some comprehensive process of development in the history of the English family, we find ourselves at a loss. Some attempts to produce general syntheses are so categorically conflicting – and some are also so categorically sweeping – that over the years they have had the effect of deadening constructive debate in the field. Initially, the main point of disagreement centred on whether the history of family structures, relationships, and sentiments in early modern England was marked mainly by processes of change, or by enduring patterns of continuity. For instance, historians debated whether small households, populated mostly by nuclear families, with close sentimental ties among the family members and considerable independence from broad networks of kin, were the product of developmental processes leading to modernity, or whether these were enduring structures, typical of English society from at least the early modern period until today. Clearly, such vast questions invite disagreement. But for some years these questions generated extremely heated debates. Some scholars strongly emphasised continuity,

English women's history', *Historical Journal* 36 (1993), 383–414; A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (New York, 1993); A. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven and London, 1995); A. Laurence, *Women in England, 1500–1760: A Social History* (London, 1994); L. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996); H. Barker and E. Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, Responsibilities* (London, 1997); L. Pollock, 'Rethinking patriarchy and the family in seventeenth-century England', *Journal of Family History* 23 (1998), 3–27; A. J. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Life in Georgian England* (New Haven and London, 1998); R. B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650–1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres* (London, 1998).

⁶ This is but a selection of some broad studies which also contain arguments about the family: K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985); J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, 1985); E. A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth: The Transformation of Traditional Society* (Oxford, 1987); P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke, 1988); P. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660–1730* (London, 1989); A. Kussmaul, *A General View of the Rural Economy of England, 1538–1840* (Cambridge, 1990); D. E. Underdown, *Fire From Heaven: The Life of an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1992).

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others highlighted change.⁷ Most notably, Lawrence Stone described great shifts in the history of the family from the decline of the late medieval 'open lineage family' to the emergence in the middle of the seventeenth century of the 'closed domesticated nuclear family', and its subsequent development.⁸ Edward Shorter, Randolph Trumbach, and John Gillis, for example, have also identified some similar processes of discontinuity, although their chronological and thematic emphases differ.⁹ On the other side of the historiographical field, there emerged a powerful school that emphasised continuity in familial structures and familial sentiments. Works by Laslett, Macfarlane, Wrigley, Schofield, Wrightson, Levine, Pollock, and Houlbrooke, for example, all emphasise in various ways the enduring characteristics of the English family, complemented by enduring patterns of family sentiments.¹⁰

The sparks that initially flew from these scholarly encounters grew dim by the late 1980s. By now the debates have virtually reached a standstill. In many ways, the 'continuity' school has emerged triumphant, as the importance of nuclear family life in early modern England seemed firmly established by the early 1980s.¹¹ The idea that the period from 1500 to 1800 witnessed great developmental changes in the history of the family, however, did not entirely lose its appeal. Stone, for instance, continued to

⁷ See Wrightson's overview of the field in K. Wrightson, 'The family in early modern England: continuity and change', in S. Taylor, R. Connors, and C. Jones (eds.), *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 1–22. I would like to thank Keith Wrightson again for giving me the unpublished draft of his chapter.

⁸ L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (Harmondsworth, 1977).

⁹ E. Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London, 1976); R. Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York and London, 1978); J. R. Gillis, *For Better or Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York and Oxford, 1985). For European studies which also emphasise discontinuities, see, for example, P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Paris, 1960), trans. R. Baldick (London, 1962); J.-L. Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality* (Paris, 1976), trans. R. Southern (Cambridge, 1979); M. Mitterauer and R. Sieder, *The European Family: Patriarchy to Partnership from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Munich, 1977), trans. K. Osterveen and M. Horzinger (Oxford, 1982).

¹⁰ It is important to note that arguments in favour of long-term continuities in family structures and sentiments had been made before the publication of Stone's thesis; however, the historiographical debate about continuity and change sharpened following Stone's intervention.

¹¹ By the early 1980s this new history of the early modern family had been instated in leading syntheses, most notably Wrightson, *English Society*, chs. 3–4; Houlbrooke, *The English Family*. The question of the nuclear family is discussed in detail in ch. 1. Note also that the compelling suggestion has been made that, far from eroding kinship ties and bringing about the rise of the nuclear family, the onset of industrialisation has created some complex kinship and household structures in local communities: M. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971); Nair, *Highley*, esp. p. 255.

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develop his arguments in subsequent publications, and in fields outside history, such as literary criticism, his work continued to be used as a standard reference on the history of the family and marriage.¹² There also remained unanswered questions about historical difference and change that could not be addressed successfully within the existing polarised approaches.¹³ A specific area in which there were conflicting findings that could not be accommodated easily within existing frameworks was the history of kinship.¹⁴ Important work on the history of the family thus continued to be produced, but evidently the field now attracted less scholarly interest. After a formative period of intensive research, the history of the family has been hit twice. If some broad interpretations of familial change proved unconvincing, some of the greatest achievements in the field – the assessment of central enduring patterns of familial experience – appear now as pyrrhic victories. For, once established, these patterns of long-term continuity have ceased to excite interest. Thus, on the one hand, heated debates have led to an impasse, while on the other

¹² Stone, *Road to Divorce*; Stone, *Broken Lives*. See, for instance, references to Stone in N. Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York and Oxford, 1989), p. 41; J. P. Zomchick, *Family and the Law in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: The Public Conscience in the Private Sphere* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 19, 41, 133. The continuing allure of the developmental chronology of the history of the family is probably also sustained by the fact that some processes of change noted in the historiography of women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are also based on developmental approaches. See Vickery's critique of such chronologies 'Golden age to separate spheres?'.
¹³ On the question of accommodating difference see Wrightson, 'The family in early modern England'.

¹⁴ Whereas some traced the rise of the nuclear family and the erosion of extended kinship ties in early modern England, others emphasised the enduring importance of the nuclear family and the looseness and limitations of extended kinship ties, and others highlighted the abiding importance of kinship in early modern England. See, for example, some debates on kinship in D. Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction in early modern England', *P&P* 113 (1986), 38–69, and references to earlier works there; D. Cressy, *Coming Over: Migration and Communication between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. ch. 11; Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, esp. pp. 329–44; D. Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society: Gloucestershire, 1500–1800* (London, 1992), esp. chs. 4–5; C. Phythian-Adams (ed.), *Societies, Cultures and Kinship, 1580–1850* (Leicester, 1993); K. Wrightson, 'Postscript: Terling revisited', in Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety* (1995), pp. 187–97; J. A. Johnston, 'Family, kin and community in eight Lincolnshire parishes, 1567–1800', *Rural History* 6 (1995), 179–92; M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996); Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*; B. Reay, 'Kinship and neighbourhood in nineteenth-century rural England: the myth of the autonomous nuclear family', *Journal of Family History* 21 (1996), 87–104; R. Grassby, 'Love, property and kinship: the courtship of Philip Williams, Levant merchant 1617–50', *Economic History Review* 113 (1998), 335–50; I am grateful to David Cressy for directing my attention to this article; L. Davidoff, M. Doolittle, J. Fink and K. Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (London and New York, 1999), esp. pp. 77–83. See further discussion below, ch. 4.

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hand it might appear that to a large extent the history of the family has done its job.

How can we emerge from this stalemate? One way forward, this book suggests, is to examine and indeed re-cast some of the terms of the debate. Particularly problematic, I believe, are some of the terms and categories borrowed from the social sciences, which have influenced the conceptualisation of the history of the family.

The history of the family has developed in the past decades within a very close dialogue with the social sciences. For many of the pioneers of the history of the family, the fusion of demography, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and history opened new and exciting horizons for research. The use of certain terms and categories borrowed from the social sciences, however, has also had some problematic effects. In fact, the merit of some categories and their systematic application was questioned at early stages in some debates in the field, but often with little effect. For instance, some scholars noted that the category of 'the nuclear family' was too static and narrow in view of life-course changes,¹⁵ too unrepresentative in view of the complex kinship relationships that could exist in families mainly due to death and remarriage,¹⁶ and often hard to reconstruct with any certainty due to limitations in the sources.¹⁷ Nor was

¹⁵ See T. K. Hareven, 'The family life cycle in historical perspective: a proposal for a developmental approach', in J. Cuisenier and M. Segalen (eds.), *The Family Life Cycle in European Societies* (The Hague, 1977), pp. 339–52, and the critique on pp. 339, 342–3; T. K. Hareven, 'Cycles, courses, and cohorts: reflection on the theoretical and methodological approaches to the historical study of family development', *Journal of Social History* 12 (1978), 97–109. See also discussion and further references in T. K. Hareven (ed.), *Transitions: The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1978); T. K. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time* (Cambridge, 1982), e.g. pp. 5–8; G. H. Elder, Jr, 'Family and lives: some development in life-course studies', in T. K. Hareven and A. Plakans (eds.), *Family History at the Crossroads: A Journal of Family History Reader* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 179–99, and criticism by M. Segalen in *ibid.*, pp. 213–15. But it is important to emphasise that there are studies that highlight both life-course changes and the basic pattern of the nuclear family, e.g. P. Laslett, 'Le cycle familial et le processus de socialization: caractéristiques du schéma occidental considéré dans le temps', in Cuisenier and Segalen (eds.), *The Family Life Cycle*, pp. 317–38; K. Wrightson, 'Kinship in an English village: Terling, Essex, 1500–1700', in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 313–32; Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, p. 337.

¹⁶ See especially M. Chaytor, 'Household and kinship in Ryton in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries', *History Workshop Journal* 10 (1980), 25–60, and esp. p. 38. See K. Wrightson, 'Household and kinship in sixteenth-century England', *History Workshop Journal* 12 (1981), 151–8, and esp. p. 151. Wrightson agrees with Chaytor on the point that apparently nuclear family households could in fact contain complex family structures, and comments on the importance of Chaytor's stress on this neglected aspect.

¹⁷ For instance, Berkner discusses the difficulties in reconstructing household and family units from listings that do not include details about age, exact relationships, or the wife's maiden name. Relationships within households, he suggests, may perhaps have been different or more complex than an analysis by surnames indicates: L. K. Berkner, 'The

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it always clear whether the unit referred to by historians as ‘the nuclear family’ was the elementary kinship unit in the anthropological sense, the functional and affective unit in the sociological or psychological sense, the domestic unit in the demographic sense – or various combinations of all of these.¹⁸ The utility of the concept of ‘the extended family’ was also questioned; indeed, as we shall see, historians differed significantly in the ways in which they charted familial ‘extension’.¹⁹ But despite these critical reservations, ‘the nuclear family’ and ‘the extended family’ and ‘extended’ kinship ties remained among the most used terms within debates on the history of the family.

In addition, some terms and concepts borrowed from the social sciences have proved problematic because of the assumptions embedded within them. Many social concepts and categories have themselves been predicated upon historically specific notions about what the family is – or ought to be – as well as upon developmental notions about the history of the family. For example, until the 1960s it was taken as given in diverse sociological traditions that the nuclear family, with its specific structures and relationships, was particularly typical of the industrialised, urban, and individualistic societies of modern times, whereas more complex and extended family forms were typical of ‘traditional’ and pre-industrial societies.²⁰

use and misuse of census data for the historical analysis of family structure’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5 (1975), 721–38, and esp. pp. 724–5. See also L. K. Berkner, ‘The stem family and the developmental cycle of the peasant household: an eighteenth-century Austrian example’, *American Historical Review* 77 (1972), 398–418. Wrigley points out that family reconstitution studies yield no direct evidence about members of co-resident families who join them in ways other than birth or marriage, or leave them in ways other than marriage or death: see E. A. Wrigley, ‘Reflections on the history of the family’, *Daedalus* 106 (1977), 75.

¹⁸ See, for example, R. McC. Netting, R. R. Wilk, and E. J. Arnould (eds.), *Households: Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), Introduction, and R. R. Wilk and R. McC. Netting, ‘Households: changing forms and functions’, in *ibid.*, esp. pp. 3–4, on functional and morphological definitions of household and family.

¹⁹ See especially J. Goody, ‘The evolution of the family’, in Laslett and Wall (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time*, pp. 103–24, and further discussion in ch. 4, below.

²⁰ See, for example, the following critiques and references therein: Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, pp. 1–3; T. K. Hareven, ‘The history of the family and the complexity of social change’, *American Historical Review* 91 (1991), esp. pp. 95–6; Wrightson, ‘The family in early modern England’, esp. pp. 2–3; M. Anderson, ‘What is new about the modern family?’, Occasional Papers of the Office of Population Censuses & Surveys, *The Family* 31 (1983), reprinted in M. Drake (ed.), *Time, Family and Community: Perspectives on Family and Community History* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 67–90, and esp. pp. 67–73; M. Segalen, *Historical Anthropology of the Family*, trans. J. C. Whitehouse and S. Matthews (Cambridge, 1986), esp. pp. 73–5. For some sociological accounts see, for example, T. Parsons, ‘The kinship system of the contemporary United States’, in T. Parsons, *Essays in Social Theory* (rev. edn, New York, 1949; first published in *American Anthropologist*, 1943), pp. 177–98; T. Parsons, ‘The social structure of the family’, in R. N. Anshen (ed.),

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When pioneering social historians set out to investigate the history of the English family, they sometimes wished to test and challenge specifically developmental notions such as these. As Laslett explains, for example, he wished to test ‘Whiggish’ notions of historical progress which herald the European nuclear family as a symptom of modernisation, as opposed to ‘traditional’ or ‘primitive’ kinship-oriented systems.²¹ But, paradoxically, as these historians continued to rely heavily on terms and methods borrowed from the social sciences, and to apply them with polemical ardour, the old developmental categories were perpetuated. As a result, discussions in the history of the family continued to be construed in classical oppositional terms, which seemed to imply movement away from one polarity and towards another.²² The nuclear family and various

The Family: Its Function and Destiny (New York, 1959; 1st edn 1949), pp. 241–74; T. Parsons and R. F. Bales, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (London, 1968; 1st edn 1956); W. Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (London, 1963), esp. chs. 1–II; W. F. Ogburn, ‘Social change and the family’, in R. F. Winch and L. W. Goodman (eds.), *Selected Studies in Marriage and the Family* (3rd edn, New York, 1968; 1st edn 1953), pp. 58–63; W. Goode, ‘The role of the family and industrialization’, in *ibid.*, pp. 64–70, and see also and compare R. F. Winch and R. L. Blumberg, ‘Social complexity and familial organization’, in *ibid.*, pp. 70–92, and references there. Note, however, that the nuclear family has also been recognised as a universal human grouping, either as the sole prevailing form of the family or as the basic unit from which more complex familial forms are compounded: e.g. G. P. Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York, 1949), esp. p. 2. See also, e.g., S. M. Greenfield, ‘Industrialization and the family in sociological theory’, *American Journal of Sociology* 67 (1961), 312–22. Some of the terms of these debates can probably be traced to the legacy of a set of developmental assumptions, current in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social thought and manifested in various ways in works by some of the ‘founding fathers’ of social thought, such as Maine, Morgan, Engels, Toennies, Weber, and Durkheim. I have discussed these ideas in ‘Privacy, sentiment and the family’, unpublished paper, delivered at the Anglo-American Conference, Institute of Historical Research, London, 1–3 July 1993; ‘The structural transformation of the private sphere’, unpublished paper, circulated in ‘Feminism and the Enlightenment: Colloquium on women and the civilizing process’, 8 May 1999, The King’s Manor, University of York.

²¹ See P. Laslett’s illuminating essay on ‘The character of familial history, its limitations and the conditions for its proper pursuit’, in Hareven and Plakans (eds.), *Family History at the Crossroads*, pp. 263–84, and esp. pp. 267–72, on ‘Proceeding forwards in time and avoiding the use of “modernization”’, and ‘Reading history backwards and changes in family composition over time’, and various references there to other works by Laslett. The effect of Laslett’s findings on social thought, and particularly its challenge of a functional interpretation, are discussed in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 18 vols. (New York, 1968), s.v. ‘family’, pp. 310–11. Laslett and Wall also wished to test the Marxist model in which the fragmentation of the family is an important stage in the emergence of industrial capitalism. Others, such as Stone, debated Marxian views and Parsonian functionalism while offering alternative developmental interpretations. The testing of developmental approaches has thus triggered extremely important research, but different interpretations: Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*; Laslett and Wall (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time*; Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*. See also Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*; references to Macfarlane, n. 23, below; J. Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), esp. pp. 6–33.

²² I am using here Wrightson’s formulation, as explained and discussed in ‘The family in early modern England’, esp. pp. 12–13.

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patterns associated with it thus continued to be studied in opposition to complex and extended family forms. Considerations of individual choice were still compared and contrasted to various familial strategies. Warm and affective family relations were still seen as opposed to formal, ritualised, authoritarian, or instrumental family relations. The substance of new research has thus been placed on an antiquated armature.

Moreover, these oppositional categories also had the effect of intensifying central debates about continuity and change in family history. For if historians such as Stone and Shorter used the oppositional and developmental categories to emphasise how the family in early modern England was just emerging from its 'traditional' state, revisionist historians used the same categories to emphasise that the family in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England was in fact already 'modern'.²³ When used by scholars of the revisionist school, as Wrightson explains, these categories had the effect of over-modernising the distant past and playing down the alien character of some aspects of past experience.²⁴

Indeed, the most significant effect of the heavy reliance on categories borrowed from the social sciences was that they barred historians from taking seriously terms and categories used by the historical actors themselves. While historical materials have been pounded all too often into anachronistic models, simple historical questions have not been sufficiently pursued: questions such as what concepts of the family did people in the past have? What did the family mean for them? In what terms did

²³ It is worth noting at this point that a new idea, proposed or intimated by scholars, was that England was the first to march along the route to modernity because in some fundamental ways its enduring nuclear family structures have made it essentially 'modern' for a very long time. See, for example, how Wrigley connects the history of the English family to the origins of industrialisation: '[t]he predominance of the small conjugal family household antedates the industrial revolution by many centuries . . . the prior existence of a society composed of small conjugal families – where marriage came late, implied economic independence, involved neolocal residence and was associated with high levels of mobility – was strongly congenial to relatively high real incomes, adaptability and growth': Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth*, p. 13. The most extreme hypothesis that both traces the attenuated nature of English kinship to the remote past and links it strongly to modernity is proposed by Macfarlane, who sees the unique characteristics of the English family and kinship system as an important component of what he defines as 'English individualism', the essential precondition of subsequent social, cultural, and economic developments: A. Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Oxford, 1978), see e.g. statements on pp. 196, 198. See also A. Macfarlane, 'The myth of the peasantry: family, and economy in a northern parish', in Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*, pp. 333–49. Macfarlane agrees that 'there is no necessary correlation between the predominance of the nuclear family and industrial growth', but he also contends that a special association exists between the nuclear family and modernity: Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, p. 159; Macfarlane, *Individualism*, e.g. pp. 25, 146, 198–201. In a later work Macfarlane emphasises the close tie between 'the Malthusian marriage system' and economic growth: Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England, 1300–1840* (Oxford, 1986), e.g. pp. 321–3. See also A. Macfarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1987).

²⁴ Wrightson, 'The family in early modern England', p. 13.

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0521771471 - Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage

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Excerpt

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10 Introduction

they understand family relations, household residence, kinship relationships, friendship, and patronage?²⁵ It is at this point in particular that *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England* seeks to make a distinctive intervention. It takes seriously concepts of the family used by people in the past. It seeks to understand these concepts, analyse them, and reconstruct the social views implicit in them and their uses. It is in this way that this book seeks to investigate anew central issues in the history of the family in eighteenth-century England.

This is an objective that requires us to attend to language. Terms and categories are expressed in words. In order to understand concepts of the family current in the eighteenth century we therefore need to turn our attention to the language in which familial and social terms were coined, expressed, and negotiated. What, for instance, did people in the eighteenth century mean when they spoke or wrote about ‘families’? Was it really the nuclear family that they mainly had in mind, or were there perhaps other concepts of the family that were significant for these people and that were also expressed through their words? And when people at that time made references to ‘relations’ or ‘kindred’, what sort of groupings did they have in mind? What, indeed, were the relationships that they thought of when they used rudimentary terms such as ‘mother’, ‘son’, or ‘sister’? Usages such as these, this book emphasises, could be far from straightforward. If we investigate them closely, we can see that they contain complex and historically specific meanings that shed new light on the history of the family and require us to rethink our understanding of many social ties in eighteenth-century England and the early modern period more broadly. Focusing on the eighteenth century, *Family and Friends* cannot present a full answer to the question of continuity and change in family history. But it will, I hope, open new paths for debate and propose a new way forward.

Indeed, the study of historical concepts of the family, I argue, must inevitably branch from relationships of blood and marriage to other social ties. This is not only because relationships of blood and marriage were extremely significant in early modern society and culture, but also because the boundaries between familial and non-familial ties, as we shall see, were different then and now. Such different boundaries were also manifested in linguistic terms, and the study of keywords such as ‘family’, ‘friend’, and ‘connexion’ will enable us to trace them. We will thus be able

²⁵ Archaic usages have been documented and studied by historians to a degree, but their implications have rarely been fully pursued in establishing new frameworks for analysis. Important attempts at re-conceptualisation, however, can be found in Cressy, ‘Kinship and kin interaction’, esp. pp. 65–9; Cressy, *Coming Over*, ch. 11; O’Hara, ‘Ruled by my friends’. See also pp. 19–20, 118–22, 167–72 below, and notes there.