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ABSTRACT

The English family in the early modern period is viewed in the perspective of reciprocity: an exchange of goods that involves giving and obtaining something in return. Reciprocal interactions between parents and children extended throughout the life course and were not confined to infancy or early childhood. The exchange could be delayed, and its timing and duration varied between social groups and across time. It was unequal: the parental investment was large, and the returns were uncertain and less extensive. The exchanges involved a wide range of material and emotional goods: support, affection, prestige, reputation. Reciprocity was not simply granted, but rather it was negotiated and induced with gifts and in other less tangible ways.

Human Bonding: Parents And Their Offspring In Early Modern England

We are inclined to think of parent-child relations in terms of altruism: selfless love flowing from parents to their children, sacrificial giving that involves no thought of reward or consequences and is expressed in large emotional and material investment in offspring. Historians can be divided into two groups: those who think that such parental altruism is a modern phenomenon, brought about by the rise of the privatised, sentimental family and the loss of its traditional functions (production, welfare, education);[2] and those who think that parental devotion to their children had always existed, the most entrenched aspect of family life in the past.[3]

A different approach to parents and their offspring involves the view of reciprocity: as in all human interactions, parents give, but they also receive something in return, though this return is unequal.[4] As will be here argued, such view accords with the evidence on early modern English parents and their offspring, especially when the relations between them are examined across the whole life course, rather than in the early stages in the lives of daughters and sons. Parents in early modern England invested in their offspring in their infancy, childhood, early teens but also beyond: well after they left home, married and had families of their own. Children also reciprocated, in childhood but also when they matured and their parents reached old age. The reciprocity was not on equal terms: parents gave more than they could hope to obtain in return; and it also varied: in types of giving to and from children, in the timing it occurred in the life course, in its sheer scale. While stressing *variations* along class and gender (ultimately across time), the perspective presented here offers a *rationale* for the family bond and the way it was sustained. Based as it was on norms of obligation to kin that ensured special generosity to offspring, the family bond was nonetheless sustained -- like all human bonding -- by an exchange: giving and reciprocation that were not simply sacrificed or prescribed, but rather were cultivated and negotiated throughout the entire cycle of family life.

Let me begin with some general observations regarding reciprocal exchange. First, as in other interpersonal relations, reciprocal interactions between parents and their offspring need not necessarily involve material calculations and gains, as some

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[2] Stone, *Family, sex and marriage*; Aries, *Centuries of childhood*; Shorter, *Making of the Modern Family*. For an economic view of altruism in the family, see Becker, *A Treatise on the Family*; Stark, *Altruism and beyond*.

[3] Wrightson, *English society*; Pollock, *Forgotten children*; Macfarlane, *Marriage and love*; Houlbrooke, *The English family*; Laslett and Wall, *Household and family in past time*.

[4] Offer, 'Between the gift and the market'; Rossi and Rossi, *Of human bonding*; Finch, *Family obligations*. For a spectrum of reciprocal exchanges (generalized, balanced, negative), see Sahlins, *Stone age economics*, 193-96.

historians who refer to reciprocity among kin imply.[5] Reciprocal exchanges may indeed involve money and material goods, but also a wide array of benefits, favours, emotions and non-priced goods. Affection, regard, loyalty; subordination, personal honour may all form parts of bargains and bonds of exchange. In return for material goods, a person might confer reputation and prestige, the sort of exchange that is frequently glimpsed in giving that flows from the rich to the poor. Or she might convey a sense of solidarity and belonging, of personal identity and moral worth in a donor that provides material or other benefits. Conviviality, sociability, the need for company may all be part of reciprocal bonding. None of these is peculiar to the family bond; all may be implicated in the parent-child relation as well.

Secondly, reciprocal exchanges need not be symmetrical. The flow of goods may be balanced and equivalent in quantity or quality; but obligations to reciprocate may also remain implicit and diffuse. The parent-child relation tends to tilt-- at times heavily so -- towards the latter pole. Parents invest more than they can hope to obtain in return, and the exchange is therefore *unequal*. This concession on the part of parents implies a commitment that may give their children a *lever* in their interactions and negotiations with them.

Thirdly, reciprocal exchanges need not be immediate. Requitals may be soon (as in a market exchange), but they may also be postponed. Parent-child relations frequently involve *delayed* reciprocity, whereby reciprocation may be postponed for many years across the life course, and at times it may never occur at all.[6]

A final observation involves the role of norms of parental and filial obligations. As in many other societies, in early modern England strong norms governed and reinforced obligations to and from children, based as they were on biblical injunctions and commands. The Protestant religion, with its view of the spiritual family and its emphasis on discipline and education, made strong claims regarding the duties of parents to nurture, provide and educate their children, and the obligation of children to obey, honour, and follow the prescriptions and demands of their parents. [7] These precepts were inculcated to children who grew up in pious families and went to schools in increasingly growing numbers. They were articulated in catechisms and a wide range of devotional writings and conduct books for parents and for the young, the market for which grew substantially in the course of the period.

This devotional literature emphasised unequivocally the natural and divine aspects of the obligations of parents and children; for Protestants, familial obligations were the manifestation of God's blessing, of a divine scheme of things upon earth. Parental love was a natural instinct: 'among all the affections of nature, there is none that is so deeply graved in a father's mind, as the love and tender affection towards his children';[8] obedience to parents was obedience to the Lord. Duties, obligations,

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[5] Anderson, *Family structure*, 111; Thane, 'Old People and their families', 128. For a different perspective that stresses the affinity of 'interest' and 'emotion', see Medick and Sabean (eds.), *Interest and Emotion*.

[6] Sahlins, *Stone age economics*, 193-4.

[7] Crawford, 'Katherine and Philip', 46; O'Day, *The family and family relationships*, 48-9.

[8] John Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, quoted in Penny, 'Family matters' , 606.

subscription to religious precepts were paramount. Less evident in such discourse was the extent to which giving to and from children could be nurtured not by obligation, but by reciprocal exchange between parent and child, what King Lear's daughter Cordelia, in the opening scene of the play, refers to as her 'bond'. To her father's interrogation of who amongst his daughters loves him the most (the love test), she replies:

> 'I love your majesty according to my bond, no more nor less... you have begot me, bred me, loved me. I return those duties back as are right fit, obey you, love you and most honour you.'[9]

This type of reciprocal bonding, in which the child's gift to her parent is a measure of the parental investment in her -- a sort of counter-gift -- and which Lear views, to his demise, as denial of filial love, is the subject of the remaining sections, which deal with parental investment, children's reciprocation and the asymmetry inherent in the exchange, and the degree to which giving and reciprocation were negotiated and induced.

Investment

Early modern English parents made emotional and material investments in the upbringing of small children, though the scale and depth of such investment is hard to gauge. Research on wills left by Englishmen throughout the period makes it abundantly clear that the bulk of possessions was distributed to immediate kin: wives, sons and daughters. This to some extent reflected concern for transmission in the kin line, typical of most pre-industrial societies, as well as strong awareness of legally defined rights in property. Yet the investment in children went deeper than adherence to kin. Parents took care to provide for all children, privileging the eldest son, but providing for younger children -- sons and daughters -- often equal shares.[10] Most spent large portions of their annual income on rearing and supporting small children. A recent study of probate accounts (listing expenses in the first year after the death of the will maker) indicates an annual maintenance of small boys and girls at £5 p.a. among prosperous farmers and wage labourers as well. Expenditures could include milk, wetnursing, food and clothing, but also washing and mending clothes, medicines, special treatments for sickness, pocket money, schooling.[11]

As they grew up and reached their early and mid-teens, many left their homes for schools, apprenticeships, domestic and agricultural service. Leaving home for service and apprenticeship had been associated with indifference if not cruelty of English parents towards offspring, but most historians today interpret it as a family strategy designed to protect, rather than dispense with, children themselves. Service was suitable for nuclear families, in a demographic regime of high mortality rates, great

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[9] *King Lear*, Act I, Scene I.

[10] Spufford, 'Inheritance and land in Cambridgeshire', 158-160; Wrightson, 'Kinship in Terling,' 326-29; Erickson, *Women and property*, 68-78.

[11] Erickson, *Women and property*, 50-2.

uncertainty in trade and agriculture, and underemployment. In pasture farming, service allowed parents to adjust labour needs to the family cycle: when their children were too young, service supplied necessary labour, when they were in their teens, it provided alternative sources of livelihood for those left unemployed on the farm.[12] Among craftsmen and traders, whose sons were replaced by other youngsters in the parental shop, service was designed to spread the risks involved in maintaining children, a form of insurance against parental death or economic hardship. In his autobiography, James Fretwell, a merchant's son, recalled the pressure his father placed on him to remain in London when he was an apprentice 'meeting with some disappointments in the way of business [he] was very much concerned upon my account [should I return home]'.[13]

What is particularly striking is the degree to which parents continued to provide and assist children during the long years when they were away. They sent money and clothes, supervised masters and took them to court if they abused their children. In a case in Chancery Court in 1620, it was claimed that the father of a Hereford apprentice was 'hearing from day to day' about his son's whereabouts and the master's neglect in properly training him.[14] And if they did not press legal action (most of them did not), parents could assist their children against their masters. Joseph Mayett was given advice against going to service with a farmer his father had known to be cruel to servants; and when he conspired to trick another master, the father backed him up ('I broke my mind to my father and he agreed to my plan').[15] Henry Best, a seventeenth-century Yorkshire yeoman, advised farmers 'never to hire such [servants] as are too near their friends'.[16] Since most servants and even apprentices did not travel very long from their homes (in Bristol, nearly half of male apprentices came from villages and towns about 10 miles away, and in smaller towns the proportions were larger),[17] mutual visits on Sundays, Holidays and market days were not infrequent. Parents sometimes sent money and gifts: wigs, hats, shoes, books are mentioned in an apprentice diary in London around the year 1700.[18] And they often took home children who became ill, or when they became unemployed. Ann Martindale was 'desirous to come home' when she became ill with the smallpox; and David Jones, a poor apprentice caught for vagrancy in Southampton in 1624, spent the whole winter with his mother after having been deserted by his master, a Warminster glover. Other similar cases can be cited in autobiographies and court records, all pointing to the degree to which service was complementary to, rather than a substitute

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[12] Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry*, 26.

[13] Fretwell, *A family history*, 197.

[14] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 161.

[15] Kussmaul, *The autobiography of Joseph Mayett*, 17.

[16] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 181.

[17] *ibid*, 160-61.

[18] *Ibid*, 162. For money sent to a child, among the poor, see Kussmaul, *The autobiography of Mayett*, 35. For extensive advice and gifts sent by a wealthy mother to her child (in Germany) see also Ozment, *Three behaim boys*, 93-159.

for, the parental home, which continued to provide a sort of a safety net for children during their teens and early adult life.[19]

No less critical was parental support at the end of service terms: gifts in the form of money to set up, dowries for daughters (cash and sometimes land), wedding gifts -- among middle-income groups these could amount to hundreds of pounds. Acquisition of goods and land was made to establish incomes for children; loans were given routinely.[20] Parents provided valuable information about places for lodging, shops available for rent; among the middling sort advice and contacts for proper marriages prevailed.[21] By the time they married in their mid or late twenties, many children -- between half and two thirds -- would have already lost one of their parents.[22] Yet as autobiographies and court records indicate, those who still had even a widowed parent alive continued to obtain support not only in marriage but beyond, especially in times of hardship. Benjamin Bangs, who sometime after his apprenticeship ended became a Quaker and began to travel and preach, headed home to his mother as soon as he fell ill, to remain there a whole winter. George Trosse's mother gave succour and travelled with him to obtain special treatments when he was ill, upon his return from his apprenticeship on the Continent in Lisbon.[23] The father of James Fretwell gave his son advice and sent physicians to help him when he became seriously ill. James, a yeoman, was then already in his early thirties and living on his own.[24] Parents also provided shelter and material support to married children and their families when they were temporarily out of work,[25] and to daughters whose husbands went to sea.[26] Many took upon themselves to pay their children's debts,[27] to care and provide for their grandchildren when their offspring died or were left widowed. Grandparents were, after members of the nuclear family, among the most frequent choice as guardians, and not a few writers of seventeenth-century autobiographies were reared by grandparents or acted themselves as guardians for grandchildren.[28]

Nor was parental assistance to grown up children confined to middling and wealthier families. When Edward Barlow's sister, herself already a mother and living for many years in London, became sick, she travelled to her parents, poor labouring people in Lancashire, where she hoped to 'grow better' as her brother put it in his

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[19] *Ibid*, 163-4; Anderson (ed.), *Southampton examinations*, 42.

[20] Ralph Josselin spent at least 800 pounds on dowries for his daughters. Macfarlane, *The family life*, 51; Mascuch, 'Social mobility', 58-9; Hunt, *The middling sort*, 152-3.

[21] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 164.

[22] Laslett, 'Parental deprivation', 162, note 4.

[23] Bangs, *Memoirs*, 24; Trosse, *Life of*, 106.

[24] Fretwell, *A family history*, 219.

[25] Martindale, *Life of*, 213.

[26] Coxere, *Adventures at sea*, 51; *Barlow's journal*, vol. II, 310.

[27] Martindale, *Life of*, 213.

[28] Coster, 'Guardianship in the diocese of York', 21. For autobiographies: Oxley, *Joseph's offering*, 205-8; Martindale, *The life of*, 221; Hardy, *Memoir of*, 59; D'Ewes, *The autobiography and correspondence*, 51.

autobiography.[29] Joseph Mayett, an agricultural servant of poor labouring parents, who following his service joined the militia, still returned to his home parish when his regiment disbanded, where he lived for several years while working as a labourer and making shifts as a peddler until he married at the age of 35. Glimpses of continuing daily contact with his parents are captured in his autobiography; both parents continued to provide support and to be present in the life of Mayett until their death when they were over 80 years old. [30]

Other types of support to grown up children amongst the poor can be gleaned in witnesses accounts at the Old Bailey in early eighteenth century London, all pointing to gifts that continued to flow from parents to their children, even when they were poor and their offspring have already married and were in charge of their own households. 'I was looking after my daughter Eleanor Griffin's shop in Red-Lion square' [while an assault started] -- is a typical remark.[31] In their testimonies, witnesses made allusions to behaviour and exchanges between themselves and their offspring or their own parents. They mentioned giving temporary lodging to grown up children 'when he was out of business' as one testimony described it, or when they became ill with 'ague and fever', as it was claimed in another.[32] Others mentioned advice they gave to their offspring in matters concerning employment, jobs, neighbourly relations. Parents ran errands for their children,[33] passed on information about the character and reputation of neighbours and prospective traders, [34] gave shelter and protection to adult children implicated in crime.[35] They testified and intervened on behalf of adult children who risked imprisonment or transportation.[36] Mutual visits, shared dinners of parents, their children and spouses, are mentioned as a daily routine.[37] Some paid for the lodging of married daughters and sons-in-law;[38] others were nursing adult sons injured during assaults, robberies, or accidents at work. In one case the mother intervened in the physician's decision for a treatment for her child, then already with house and wife of his own.[39] In another case the witness, a newly arrived migrant who became involved in a quarrel with a fellow lodger, mentioned taking his clothes to his mother to mend. He was already twenty years old,

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[29] *Barlow's journal*, 250.

[30] Kussmaul, *The autobiography of Mayett*, passim.

[31] *Proceedings of the King's commission*, 6-8 Dec. 1733, 5.

[32] *Ibid*, 7-11 sep. 1732, 202; 6-8 Dec. 1733, 21; The o*rdinary of* Newgate, 12 Feb. 1728, 3 (George Meedam lives with his mother following his apprenticeship 'for a while').

[33] *Proceedings*, 6-11 Dec. 1732, 14.

[34] *Ibid*, 7-11 Sep. 1732, 202.

[35] *The ordinary of Newgate*, 9 July, 1734 ('and being in some danger, went to dwell with his father till his apprehensions should be over'). See also the confession of Daniel Malden, 2 Nov. 1732, 12.

[36] *Proceedings*, 7-11 Sep. 1732, 177; 6-8 Dec. 1733, 7.

[37] *Ibid*, 7-11 Sep. 1732, 204.

[38] *The ordinary of Newgate*, 1 Feb. 1725, 4 ('Mr Pickens [implicated in robbery after unpaid debts] puts his wife advice into practice, leaves her with her mother who had hired a lodging for themselves').

[39] *Proceedings*, 7-11 Sep. 1732, 184.

and his mother was living in the countryside.[40] Though some allusions were also made to support that children gave to their parents -- of which more shortly -- the impression given by these casual remarks is that it tilted in the direction of gifts from parents to their grown up children, rather than the other way around (about three quarters of events mentioned).

The wide range of support that extended to three and more decades in the lives of daughters and sons went also with a great deal of *emotional* involvement. The evidence for this is somewhat sparse, especially for the lowest strata of society, but what there is indicates not only parental affection, but the high emotional stakes that parents had in children whose very survival and well-being were so desperately precarious. The single greatest indication of affection and emotional investment is that concerned with grief and bereavement for children, as it is recorded in diaries and autobiographies. Some expressions were more subdued, recording the few final words of a beloved child ('says she to me, father, I go abroad tomorrow and buy you a plum pie', as Nehemiah Wallington recorded), or expressing resignation ('it being a great grief to us both but we ought to submit to the will of God', as the seaman Barlow put it.)[41] Others were more outspoken and expressed deep horror, 'as if in hell' --as it was put in one case -- when no consolation could prevail.[42] Some recorded deep agony over the death of grown up, married daughters living away from the parental home.[43] Richard Napier, the seventeenth-century medical practitioner, found that of bereavement-induced depression amongst his patients, about half involved the loss of a child.[44] Diaries also convey great anxieties over children's illnesses, their welfare and future prospects.[45] Some autobiographies recorded emotionally charged separations: Joseph Mayett remembered how his mother escorted him to the town where he departed for the militia, stayed with him all night with 'a very heart heart', beseeching him not to enlist.[46] Others remembered special signs of care. 'His father, for the affection he had to him, wold always have him ly at his bedes feete in a lyttle bed' as Simon Forman wrote.[47] Among the poor, there is some evidence of hardship entailed in the abandonment of children, of care and sense of loss in mothers forced to leave their children in the hands of strangers.[48] Most others held on to their lot. 'Though he [i.e. my husband] has been a barbarous man to me, I'll never [leave him], for I have

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[40] He mentioned taking his torn shirt for mending to his mother. *Ibid*, 7-11 Sep. 1732, 217.

[41] *Barlow's journal*, vol. II, 310. For Nehemiah Wallington, see Seaver, *Wallington's world*, 87. And see also P. Collinson, *The birthpangs*, 80.

[42] Laurence, 'Godly grief', 68-9. See also Houlbrooke, *The English family*, 188.

[43] Martindale, *Life of*, 19.

[44] MacDonald, *Mystical bedlam*, 82.

[45] Mascuch, 'Social mobility', 60.

[46] Kussmaul, *The autobiography of Mayett*, 25.

[47] Forman, *Forman's autobiography*, 3.

[48] Cunningham, *Children and childhood*, 43; Fildes, 'Maternal feelings re-assessed', 153-4.

two children by him, and am now big with another' was how a woman entrapped in domestic violence, explained her plight in her testimony at the court.[49]

Parental transfer to their offspring also varied: in scale and duration across the life course, along class and gender lines. It can be estimated (on the basis of wills and payments by parish authorities to poor or bastard children) that between 4 and 5 pounds p.a. were considered sufficient for a child, and about 6 for a youth in his teens.[50] Although probate accounts show that this was the median level of parental expenditure on children, girls and boys alike, the range was still immense, between 1 and 12 pounds. This meant that among the very poor some could barely support children of tender years.[51] Prospects for abandonment in infancy were also higher amongst the very poor, especially in the large towns.[52] School fees, boarding out, apprenticeship premiums were costly and again, variations affected greatly the well-being and future prospects of children as they grew up. Boarding could be as little as £4 p.a. and as high as 15 or 16 pounds; apprenticeship premiums ranged between several pounds in the lowest occupations held by poorest craftsmen, to dozens and hundreds of pounds among the more prestigious crafts and the mercantile urban trades. Smaller gifts in the course of service and beyond could make large differences in terms of not only the well-being, but also of the life styles and associations of children.[53]

Investment was also highly gendered, especially as children grew up. No difference is evident in expenditure (recorded in probate accounts) on small boys and girls in their early lives, nor does a marked distinction in bequests and dowries for daughters and sons appear to have existed.[54] Yet when it came to the careers of children, investment was gendered; among the middling classes, large sums were provided for schooling and apprenticeships for sons, while fewer girls were sent to schools, and fewer still placed in prestigious apprenticeships. As research on the apprenticeship of women in various towns and the countryside shows, the proportions of women in apprenticeship, especially in the large towns, were tiny, and in the countryside they became increasingly smaller as the period progressed.[55]

Unequal exchange

For all the large material and emotional investment that they made, early modern English parents could not expect to rely greatly on their children as they grew up.

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[49] *Proceedings*, 6-8 Dec. 1733, 3. For emotions towards children in late nineteenth-century working classes, see Ross, *Love and Toil*, 166-69, 189-94.

[50] Macfarlane, *Family Life*, 45; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 111.

[51] Adam Martindale from Lancashire spent nearly £20 p.a. on the rearing of his grandson. Martindale, *Life of*, 221.

[52] Fildes, 'Maternal feelings re-assessed'; Wilson, 'Illegitimacy and its implications'; Henderson and Wall (eds.), *Poor Women and Children*, 9-11.

[53] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 162; Macfarlane, *Family Life*, 50.

[54] See below.

[55] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 135-45, and notes.

There were several reasons -- economic, social and demographic -- why this was so. Most types of employment, in agriculture as well as in a large range of crafts and trades, required force and skill and were unsuitable to children of tender years; contrary to the assumption of some, children were therefore *not* normally drawn into the workforce at a very young age. Nor were they admitted to service and apprenticeship before thirteen or fourteen years of age, even among the poorest and younger parish apprentices.[56] Moreover, even when employed, the labour of young children was irregular, intermittent (in agricultural parishes it was confined to summers or the harvest) and poorly paid. Well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the vast majority of children under mid-teens in agricultural parishes were unemployed through most of the year, and only at age 14 could they begin to earn some minimal wage, as returns to the questionnaire of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law in 1834 show.[57] Throughout the period, the contribution of children to family earnings, while young, was small, if any. As much research on poor relief has shown, children, and especially those under 10 years, were the largest single category of those in need of relief. Amongst the poor, the more children one had, the worse off she became.[58]

By the time they reached an age when they were able to work or acquire a skill, most children left their home to become servants elsewhere. This relieved some of the burden involved in supporting them, but it also prevented them from becoming a regular source of assistance to the family. Those who went to school or entered apprenticeships (which did not involve wages in the first years of training) were not expected to assist or support their parents. Service outside the home involved migration and posed difficulties in monitoring children or inducing them to help their parents. Since wages were also expected to provide savings for dowries and setting up, and given that many youngsters started their own families and never returned to their homes at the end of their service terms, the incentive, and the expectation, to help parents would have been low.

Demography and family structure also placed great restrictions on the capacity of children to reciprocate. Many parents did not live to see their children come of age. It has been estimated that of older people who reached 65, almost a third would have no child alive. As all studies of household structure have shown, few parents could hope to reside with children when they reached old age. Quantitative data on household structure indicates that co-residence was atypical, that the proportions of extended families were small, and generational depth -- three generations cohabiting under the same roof -- rare. Peter Laslett, Richard Smith and David Thomson emphasised the important role of the community -- rather than the family -- in taking

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[56] Cunningham, 'The employment and unemployment', 132.

[57] *Ibid*, 133-4.

[58] Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and life-cycle', 375.

upon itself the obligation to support and provide for the aged poor.[59] All studies show the close correlation between poverty and widowhood throughout the period.[60]

For all these limitations, children still reciprocated. The returns were indefinite. But children provided a range of gifts, both material and non-material. While the unemployment of children under mid-teens was prevalent, child labour was still bound to occur, given that one third of the population was under fourteen. It was prevalent especially in domestic manufacture that spread throughout the period. Spinning, pin-making, silk mills all relied heavily on the work of younger children and mothers; mines also offered some opportunities for labour and a small wage. In agriculture less skilled tasks were allocated to younger children, and animal farming, shepherding, ploughing were performed and taught to children, as some autobiographical evidence indicates, at a relatively young age (9-12 years). Harrowing, weeding, spreading dried dung, helping out at harvest, gleaning alongside mothers, working alongside fathers on large estates, threshing and cleaning barns -- were performed by children before they left their homes. Domestic tasks such as fetching water, gathering sticks, going errands, and, for girls, cleaning and mending -- were routine.[61]

Material assistance was also provided when children left their homes for service. Since many youths did not travel long away from home, and because agricultural service was annual and servants moved frequently, many kept intermittent contacts with home and returned for weeks and longer. Annual service was also interspersed with casual day and seasonal labour, which again implied that youths returned to their parental homes for shorter and longer duration in the interim. Although the practice was by no means universal, some servants remitted wages to their parents, especially if they were poor or in need, as is evident in the autobiographies of Joseph Mayett and Fred Kitchen, both agricultural servants in the late eighteenth century who brought all their wages to their parents when they were fourteen.[62] Even long distance migrants sent money to their parents, as autobiographies of youths who left to become apprentices at sea suggest.[63]

The reciprocation of children also came in other less material forms. Children gave parents a sense of identity, comfort, satisfaction -- 'a comely child, of sweet disposition, extraordinary solidity' as a child of already 15 years could be described.[64] They also enhanced the *prestige* and reputations of their parents in their respective roles as household heads and mothers. In a society in which parental authority over younger children was elevated, in which the family as a guarantor of social order assumed an immense role -- children conferred prestige and honour, while rebellious

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[59] Laslett, 'Characteristics of the family', 12-50; Smith, 'Some issues concerning families', 13-5; idem, 'Charity, self interest and welfare'; Thomson, 'The welfare of the elderly', 194-221.

[60] Wall and Henderson (eds.), *Poor women and children*, 14-5; Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 75-6.

[61] Cunningham, 'The employment and unemployment', 126; Berg, *The age of manufacture*, ch. 6; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 40-7.

[62] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, 72, 224.

[63] *Ibid*, 224.

[64] Disney, *Some remarkable*, 23. See also Houlbrooke, *The English family*, 135.

sons caused havoc, despair, shame.[65] Prodigality continued to have a powerful hold on the minds of contemporaries, and it remained a popular theme in plays, ballads, pictures and prints, in numerous stories and sermons about insubordinate children and misspent youths. By the eighteenth century disobedient sons among London's mercantile traders could bring some families to the verge of disintegration.[66] For women motherhood conferred reputation of a different sort, underlying their devotion and tenderness rather than power over their children. Eulogies for women highlighted their affability and neighbourliness, but also their qualities as 'tender, careful and provident... to her children', as one writer commemorated his mother. A less religiously disposed seaman, Edward Barlow, wrote that his wife commanded respect and honour for she was 'a kind and indulgent mother to her children'.[67]

Nor did old age involve the total distancing of parents and their adult children. Given late age at marriage and low life expectancy, any interval of co- residence with children was bound to be short and less likely to be captured in the few remaining lists on which studies of household structure are based. Recent case studies suggest higher rates of co-residence in some agricultural parishes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in communities ridden with poverty in the late eighteenth. Thomas Sokoll found that in one Essex community half of all poor women aged 50 and over lived in extended households with married daughters-thus providing their mothers the same type of 'safety net' that parents offered offspring when they were in their teens. [68] Autobiographies and diaries indicate the intermittent nature of arrangements for shared living with older parents among the middling classes, as the examples of the parents of William Stout and John Croker, who moved between the houses of their adult children in the latter years of their life, suggest.[69] Other writers mentioned visits of ageing parents for weeks and sometimes months,[70] while taking a dying parent into the house of a married daughter or son is mentioned as a matter of course ('In the latter part of her time, her residence was ... with her son', in the eulogy for Frances Dodshon, Quaker; 'she died at the house of my brother', in the case of Mayett, a labourer whose mother was kept by parish relief until her death at the age of 85.[71]).

Most children continued to live at some distance from their parents rather than sharing a roof with them. Under such circumstances, various exchanges still took place. Help during illness, comfort and consolation in times of bereavement, assistance at work, protection against other members of the community, mediation with parish

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[65] The parents of Richard Norwood laboured hard to dissuade him from embarking on a career at sea, discouraging him by pointing at how 'raggedly and solvenly' all seamen were. When he remained adamant in his decision, he lost his inheritance portion. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 66.

[66] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 17-8. For anxieties over the prodigality of children among the middle classes, see Martindale, *Life of*, 215; Hunt, *The middling sort*, 49-53.

[67] Stout, *The Autobiography*, 175; *Barlow's Journal*, vol. II, 310; D'Ewes, *The autobiography*, 116-7.

[68] Thane, 'Old people and their families', 126; Smith, *Charity and self Interest;* Sokoll, 'The household position of elderly widows', 207-24; Rose, 'Widowhood and poverty in nineteenth-century Nottinghamshire', 269-91.

[69] Stout, *The autobiography*, 175; Croker, *Brief memoir*, 304-5.

[70] Forman, *Forman's autobiography*, 32, Bewley, *A narrative*, 28-30.

[71] Dodshon, *Some account of the convincement*, 42; Kussmaul, *The autobiography of Mayett*, 84.

authorities are all mentioned in autobiographies, diaries, court testimonies. When Jane Martindale heard of her mother's illness, she 'post[ed] down with all speed', and upon her death, took her father to her own house in London, for his 'diversion', and subsequently decided to re-settle with her husband in Lancashire.[72] James Fretwell and his brother took turns in caring for their father while he became ill, in sending physicians, nurses, and taking him to numerous different types of treatments and practitioners. Among the poor, some form of protection, advice and help was offered too. Joseph Mayett negotiated with the parish overseer to obtain a raise in the relief of his mother when she became incapacitated, and later on threatened him when he suspected he took away some of her goods.[73] Testimonies in the Old Bailey in early eighteenth century London show adult children coming to stay with mothers when they were injured or ill, keeping daily contact and providing information, recommending lodgers, protecting mothers who were robbed, and bringing their cases to the court.[74]

Prestige, help, comfort, protection -- the evidence regarding the reciprocation of children indicates a range of gifts, frequently of non-material kind. Even among the poor, and in those occasions where children managed to earn a small wage, this probably did not come to half as much as the cost of providing them in infancy and childhood, as contemporaries themselves recognised.[75] Some wills mention provisions for ageing parents;[76] none of this would equal the amount of goods bequeathed to children or the costs involved in rearing and maintaining them when they were young. And when elderly parents lived under the same roof with mature children, some worked for their living as long as they could. William Stout's mother continued to spin until four months before her death in the house of her son.[77]

Finally, as with parental giving, so with reciprocation: variations recur. Scattered evidence suggests that reciprocation was gendered: daughters, for example, appear more likely to act as surrogate mothers and housekeepers, and sisters were mentioned, in autobiographies, as having been 'very helpful in bringing up her younger [orphaned] brothers' as John Whitting wrote.[78] Sokoll's study of three eighteenth century Essex communities also shows that the offspring who shared a house with poor mothers were for the most part married daughters.[79] Class and level of resources

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[72] Stout, *Autobiography*, 17-8.

[73] Kussmaul, *The autobiography of Mayett*, 77-8. For his return home to visit his sick mother, when he was serving in the militia, see p. 37.

[74] *Proceedings*, 7-11 Sep. 1732, 199; 6-8 Dec. 1733, 45; 28-30 June 1733, 156 ('but his mother was seek, and he w[ould not] g[o] then [on a business trip]); Disney, *Some remarkable*, 204. See also Thane, 'Old people and their families', 132; Beier, 'The good death', 56.

[75] Cunningham, 'The employment', 130.

[76] Spufford, 'Peasant inheritance', 174-5.

[77] Stout, *The autobiography*, 175.

[78] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 68; Davidoff and Hall, *Family fortunes*, 346. For reference to similar practices in criminal biographies in the early eighteenth century, see *The Ordinary of Newgate* 2 Oct. 1734, 21 ([Elizabeth Tracy] ...'lived with her father and kept house for him after her mother's death'); 26 Oct. 1720, 5 ([Martha Purdue]… 'born at Hornsey...[her] father was a shoemaker, but very poor, having seven children, the eldest of which took care of the youngest'.)

[79] Sokoll, 'The household position', 40.

were crucial in the timing of children's reciprocation. Among the poor, the labour of children in their early teens, and the parental reliance on it, became more common with the spread of domestic manufacture in the course of the period; among middling groups, on the other hand, growing numbers of children were sent to schools and continued to be supported by their parents throughout their teens.[80] Perhaps above all, as evidence in autobiographies indicates, geographical distance affected the extent of support that children offered to their parents. Edward Barlow, the seaman, may well have been exceptional in not seeing his mother for twenty years before she died. But there were also others who travelled dozens of miles from their parental homes, especially to the large metropolis, where the average distance of migration of males in the sixteenth century was 115 miles — far above that travelled to other towns, including large provincial centres.[81] Mutual visits would have been less common; contact would remain rudimentary -- if at all. Criminal biographies show that some migrant servants in early eighteenth century London lived without contact with their parents for many years, then married young men who remained total strangers to their kin. [82] That parents were apprehensive about the prospects of long-term separations is evident in some autobiographical accounts. Benjamin Bangs left for service for a parish nearby in his early teens; but the break with his widowed mother came a year or two later, when he decided to join his master in his move to the metropolis in search of work. It was this that his mother appears to have dreaded and bemoaned, saying to him, 'Child, it will not be long before I shall see thee again' -- as he remembered it many years on.[83]

Negotiation

If parents imparted goods and hearts to children, and if children reciprocated though not on equal terms, was giving and reciprocating negotiated? Negotiations could occur in various forms of *inducement* to reciprocate: rewards or punishments for services rendered or withdrawn, tacit understanding for mutual benefits and gifts, the cultivation of relationship whereby emotional bonds, care and indebtedness were nourished through many years. Both parents and children had a lever: parents could invoke the indebtedness their children owed them for the larger investment they had made; children could rely on the advantage they derived from the asymmetry inherent in the exchange, the concession parents made in their commitment to give their offspring more than they obtained in return. The negotiations could sometimes fail: children's leverage could increase as they matured, their relations with their parents and other family members could become troubled over the years and affect the outcome of the exchange.

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[80] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 46-7.

[81] Clark, 'Migration in early modern England'; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 95.

[82] *The ordinary of Newgate*, 2 Nov. 1736, 12-3. See below.

[83] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 63.

An effective means to prompt the reciprocation of children could be through the use of bequests and inheritance portions. These could be employed overtly as forms of penalty through disinheritance, or more subtly by way of rewards and through preferential giving that could be designed to condition the division of inheritance on the actions children took.[84] All the evidence available to us on will making in this period suggests that among yeomen and downwards inheritance portions were rarely used in these ways. Parents sometimes used the threat of disinheritance to coerce children to amend or change their actions: the mere possibility of having portions reduced to meagre sizes could extract the subordination of children and induce them to marry properly and according to parental reputations, as some cases in late seventeenth century London show.[85] Women of the middle groups were particularly vulnerable to these types of pressures: employment opportunities for them were restricted, and marriage without a proper dowry was unlikely. Yet while threats were made, disinheritance itself was rare. In the rural countryside the commitment to the transmission of land to kin was strong, even within a framework of an active land market and frequency in sales of land.[86] In towns, the proportion of sons who were penalised through disineritance was tiny: only 3 sons in 181 wills in late seventeenth century London examined by Peter Earle.[87]

Preferential giving was to some extent more common, but it too does not appear to have been manipulated to affect the reciprocation of children. The privileging of an eldest son was evident among the elite more than lower down on the social scale, but some bias towards primogeniture existed at most social levels. This implied that eldest sons had a greater commitment to the family: greater responsibilities were placed on them in the allocation of shares to siblings who reached majority (if these came from the main holding), and in taking care of parents who reached old age.[88] Preferential giving could also be used to admonish offspring: in late seventeenth century London, male writers of wills sometimes bequeathed property to wives to give to such children 'as shall be the most dutifull to her'.[89] But overall the record of wills and probate accounts points in the direction of an egalitarian approach to inheritance portions among ordinary people. Primogeniture in these groups was greatly mitigated by generous and equal provision for younger children.[90] Will making was designed,

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[84]Bernheim, Shleifer and Summers, 'The strategic bequest motive', 1046-7; Arrondel, Masson and Pestineau, 'Bequests and inheritance', 9-10.

[85] Earle, *The making of*, 187; Hunt, *The middling sort*, 51-3.

[86] Erikson, *Women and property*, 78; Wrightson, *English society*, 329. For the argument that sales of land do not imply lack of commitment to the younger generation, see Hoyle, 'The land-family bond in England', 151-73. For the rarity of disinheritance and for sentiments that tempered the free alienation of land, see Sreenivasan, 'Reply to Hoyle', 185-8.

[87] Earle, *The making of*, 235-6; 187.

[88] Spufford, 'Inheritance customs', 159-60; 174-75; Wrightson, 'Kinship in Terling', 329.

[89] Earle, *The making of*, 235.

[90] Spufford, 'Peasant inheritance', 158-59; Wrightson, 'Kinship in Terling', 327-29; Cooper, 'Intergenerational social mobility', 293-6; Erikson, *Women and property*, 68-78. This may well have had the effect of eliminating the potential for sibling tension. Thirsk, 'The European debate', 186. For elite mothers and their attempts to

among these groups, to correct and modify inheritance rules rather than to apply the legal device of preferential giving so as to inspire or instigate reciprocation.[91] In towns equal sharing and exact portions to all children -- old and young, male and female -- was the norm. Practices of inheritance were sometimes 'compensatory' -- they were governed by need and position of the child in the life cycle, rather than by his or her behaviour. [92] This egalitarian approach amplifies the *asymmetry* of the parent-child bond: a disposition in the transmission of property and goods that could strengthen the position of offspring in their interactions with their parents. Children could count on receiving an inheritance portion regardless of the extent to which they remained obligated to their parents.

The reciprocation of children could still be invoked in a host of other ways. As studies of wills show, family property was passed on to the younger generation over a considerable period of time, rather than at the parental death.[93] This suggests that exchange in the form of *inter vivos* gifts -- when parents were alive and their children were in need -- were not infrequent. It is at this level of exchange during the life course rather than near death that the parent-child interchange was the most intense, and where negotiations for reciprocation could be worked out. Contemporaries appear to have expressed great unease at the very thought that children's support to their parents was conditioned and exchanged -- a form of barter. King Lear's outrage at Cordellia's notion of 'bond' in which she expressed her love as a form of reciprocal gift to her father suggests that a negotiated exchange between parents and children was viewed with suspicion if not shame. Some autobiographies express great anxieties over 'virulent tongues' -- as one writer called it -- spreading rumours about children whose care of their parents expressed anything less than pure concern 'for their [i.e. parents] own future happiness'.[94]

For all the unease, tacit negotiations did take place. Take marriage formation: it was governed by a relative freedom in courtship and choice of partners, but within the boundaries placed by parental consent. Most marital unions were endogamous: children tended to marry within their own rank, and to seek the approval of their parents. 'He did nothing without the consent of her friends and my own' - was how Edward Coxere described his moves following the decision to marry which the couple had made.[95] Research on court records indicates that this procedure was common, and not only among the wealthy: young couples sought the consent and support -- the

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protect their younger sons and daughters from the consequences of primogeniture, see Harris, 'Property, power and personal relations'. For compensations to younger sons among the elite see also Pollock, 'Younger sons'.

[91] Erikson, *Women and property*, 78.

[92] Wrightson, 'Kinship in Terling, 328; Cooper, 'Intergenerational social mobility', 294-5. For compensatory giving and aspects of bequests that suggest egalitarian distribution among testators in the U.S. today, see Arrondel, Masson and Pestieau, 'Bequests and Inheritance', 9, 18-9, 23-4.

[93] Wrightson, 'Kinship in Terling, 327, and note 18; Howell, '*Peasant Inheritance*, 145; Bonfield, 'Normative rules', 155-76. .

[94] D'Ewes, *Autobiography*, vol. II, 10.

[95] Coxere, *Adventures by sea*, 32.

'rule' -- of their 'friends'. [96] They were apprehensive about failure to procure the consent of parents, or enter marital unions without securing the acquiescence, and consequently the support, of their parents. For their part, parents prompted their children to co-operate, sometimes with threats to withdraw support, or with gifts they offered as rewards for forsaking undesired spouses.[97] Among the middling groups, gifts to offspring upon their marriage could be based on a tacit understanding for counter help in old age.[98]

Mutual benefits for parents and offspring were sometimes openly offered and agreed upon. The great mobility of children instigated such exchanges: the greater the anxiety of parents over the distancing of their children, the more negotiations for mutual benefits could occur. So the father of Gervase Disney offered that he came to live nearer to him upon his marriage, 'that we might especially be helpful one to another in the best things'. Similar expressions of mutual benefits occur in other autobiographies that mention decisions of married children to come to live near their parents.[99] Among the poor, some parents who were already separated from children for many years still tried to negotiate their help. A prisoner at Newgate in early eighteenth century London remembered an emotional reunion of his wife (a servant) and her father, whom he himself had never met ['I did not know him, nor he me']. The father gave the married couple some money to help them out in their troubles, promised a gold ring for his daughter, and offered that if the couple came to live with him in the countryside, he would render them both 'something'.[100]

The reciprocation of children was also induced in less tangible ways, through the cultivation of attachments and relationships, whereby the commitment of children to reciprocate was earned over many years. 'But considering how good a father he had beene' -- so Adam Martindale described his father's funeral -- 'we thought it convenient to bring him home handsomely'.[101] Descriptions of deathbed scenes in Quaker families were sometimes couched in similar terms: with parental recognition of children's love and devotion, and their blessing therein.[102] These types of tacit negotiations whereby reciprocation was *to some extent* predicated on earlier experiences in relationships are difficult to document, even in autobiographies. Writers of early modern autobiographies tended to elevate family love and solidarity, thereby to conceal tensions and relations gone astray, or to emphasise the prodigality of sons and the forgiveness and absolution rendered by their fathers. But taken as a whole, a range of

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96 Wrightson, *English society*, 74-7; Ingram, *Church courts, sex, and marriage*, 189-218; O'hara, 'Ruled by my friends', 12-21, 32-3.

97 Ingram, *Church courts, sex and marriage*, 202-3.

98 Hunt, *The middling sort*, 153.

99 Disney, *Some remarkable*, 62; Martindale, *Life of*, 18.

100 *The ordinary of Newgate*, 2 Nov 1736, 13.

101 Martindale, *Life of*, 119-20.

102 'My mother lived to the year 1688, and made a good end. I loved her very tenderly, and carried myself towards her with dutifulness; this she fully expressed on her death-bed, and of her dear love for me.' Pike, *Some account*, 13-4.

relationships still emerge, and these suggest variations in the parent-child bond conditioned, among other things, on childhood experiences of family relations. In some autobiographies early childhood experiences of death and emotional distress cemented special relations between children and kin, when a widowed parent or a grandmother reared an orphaned child, who returned to live, support and provide special care to his kin after many years of service and travel in the countryside.[103] Others returned from service abroad to provide support, and took upon themselves the responsibilities of help in a farm.[104]

Yet in other cases, parental death and especially the remarriage of a widowed parent caused friction and overt resentment.[105] Sore relations between parents and offspring come forth too. Some authors harboured resentment towards fathers whom they felt was strict and ungenerous, but to whom they nonetheless offered support in illness and then in death. It was the dead parent, rather than the widowed, that was remembered with gratitude and warmth.[106] In other cases, hostility to a father was transformed into animosity towards siblings. An egalitarian approach to inheritance might mute, but hardly eradicate, sibling rivalry over the attention, care and attachment of their parents. Some writers of autobiographies blamed their siblings for the discrimination they suffered in the hand of their fathers;[107] in others sibling rivalry over the protection of ageing parents surface. Joseph Mayett evoked the tenuous relations he had with his two brothers in his adult life. When the older brother died, a conflict erupted over the handling of his ageing mother's relief in the hands the brother's widow. Tensions with the younger brother also ensued, and when the mother became ill and died in his house, the brother failed to inform Mayett to come to her death bed; 'so I never saw her no more'.[108]

In some autobiographies a total collapse of the parent-child relations is recorded. None of these cases (mostly brothers of the writers) appear to have involved disinheritance; in all the sons left and never returned. Adam Martindale wrote of a brother whose course caused his father 'great dissatisfaction', who left the house and whom 'we had reason to beleeve we should never see _ againe, as accordingly it proved'. Gervase Disney remembered the friction that was never reconciled between his father and brother; and Simon Forman felt rejected by his mother and remained embittered with her throughout his life. When already an adult with family and practice (as an astrologer) of his own, he mentioned in his diary visits of his two brothers at his

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[103] Oxley, *Joseph's offering*, 200-23. For relationships following parental death, see also Bangs, *Memoirs*, 12-3, 24 and passim; Bownas, *An account*, 2; Martindale, *The life*, 17-9, passim; Stout, *The autobiography*, 71-4, passim.

[104] Brysson, *Memoirs*, 273.

[105] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 57-8.

[106] D'Ewes, *Autobiography*, Vol. I, 118-9; vol. II, 7-13.

[107] Evans, *An eccho to the v*oice, 5-6. See also *The ordinary of Newgate*, 6 Nov 1723, 4. ('Having been always the favourite and darling of his mother, upon her decease he could not endure his Home any longer, fancying that his father had more affection for his sister than for him').

[108] Kussmaul, *The autobiography of Mayett*, passim, esp. 61-6; 83-4, 92..

London home. His mother, who died at an old age in the countryside sometime before or very near the writing the autobiography, was not mentioned in it at all.[109]

Conclusion

Reciprocal exchanges between parents and children need to be placed in context and cannot be adequately considered 'net' of broader demographic, cultural, and economic structures. In early modern England, demography and patterns of mobility, notions of family and gender, level of resources — all affected the exchange between parents and children: the relative shares of each side, the timing and duration in the life-cycle in which it occurred, the sheer *scale* of the exchange. The third of a 40-year income of a seventeenth century yeoman that was invested in offspring amounted to thousands of pounds that provided for their rearing, education, dowries, and for the extension of gifts for as many as twenty and more years in their lives.[110] Among the labouring poor, many may well have spent similar proportion of their incomes on their children;[111] but this amounted to only dozens of pounds that could barely support a child until his early teens. From the perspective of the transformations involved in the shift to modern society -- longer life expectancy, rising levels of affluence, the 'magnification' in the value of children as objects of sentiment,[112] to name but few -- the change in the duration and scale of the parent-child exchange would have become indeed vast.

Yet compared with studies on the parent-child relation in present-day western societies, some strong similarities with what we have here described do emerge. Enormous amounts of money are being spent on children today -- an estimated £50,000 in direct costs per child. But as proportions of total levels of income these costs appear similar to and even lower than those estimated for a seventeenth-century yeoman-parent.[113] In emotions and other types of gifts flowing to children from their infancy through their teens, marriage and beyond -- early modern English parents were not wholly apart from their modern counterparts. Nor was the reciprocation of offspring and the inequality built into it wholly different. Studies on present day Britain and America show asymmetrical reciprocation of children, who provide their parents few material benefits, but a range of gifts in the form of comfort, advice, care in old age. The frequency and scale of the reciprocation is greatly affected by geographical

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[109] Martindale, *Life of,* 22; Disney, *Some remarkable,* 19-21; Forman, *Forman's autobiography,* 3, 31, 32, and passim.

[110] Macfarlane, *The family life*, 50.

[111] If parents were spending £5 p.a. on a child, or £280 on 4 children for the first 14 years of their lives, and their annual income was £20, or £800 over 40 years.

[112] Zelizer, *Pricing the priceless child*, 72.

[113] Offer, 'Between the gift and the market'. If a father's earnings in about 40 years is estimated at £650,000, direct costs for two children would amount to less than a fifth of his income. For the seventeenth century, the estimate of costs for a yeoman with four children as proportions of his 40-year income is between a quarter and a third. Macfarlane, *The life*, 50. For an estimate of father's earnings, see Joshi, 'The cost of caring', 121. For additional indirect costs of children today, see also Offer, 'Between the gift and the market'.

distance, but also by a multiplicity of other factors, amongst which the early experiences of childhood and family configurations do count.[114] Unequal reciprocity is enduring evidence of the special generosity of the parent-child relation, but at the same time of the all-too-human quality of a negotiable, sustainable, bond of exchange.

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[114] Rossi and Rossi, *Of human bonding*, 262-395; 455-7; Offer, 'Between the gift and the market'.

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