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THE FAMILY, SEX AND MARRIAGE IN ENGLAND 1500-1800. By Lawrence Stone. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. pp. xxxi, 800. Reviewed by Alan Macfarlane

This is an important book. It deals with subjects of considerable topical interest and great complexity about which we know little. It claims to make statements about both the past and the present. Professor Stone argues, for example, that the modern Western family system is "geographically, chronologically and socially a most restricted and unusual phenomenon, and there is as little reason to have any more confidence in its survival and spread in the future as there is for democracy itself' (687). It makes very general comments on the nature of preindustrial life and cites another discipline, anthropology, in support of these claims. The writer is a "formidable-scholar,"[1] so that this is the "most ambitious book yet" from the pen of an historian who has "by now produced some 3,000 pages in hard covers. " [2] It is written by the Dodge Professor of History at Princeton University and is based on the G. M. Trevelyan Lectures at the University of Cambridge. It is a massive work of eight hundred pages with some thirteen hundred footnotes. The author claims that he has used "every possible type of evidence" in order to "pick up hints about changes in values and behaviour at the personal level" (10). The combination of topic, academic reputation, and size of book is likely to ensure that not only will it be widely read but that its central arguments will be accepted by specialists and the general public alike.

That the book is already on the way to such acceptance can be seen from the early reviews. Keith Thomas makes some serious criticisms but predicts that there "is no doubt that the book deserves the widest possible readership or indeed that it will get it." [3] He points to the "many merits of Professor Stone's absorbing if occasionally wayward book," believing that his "argument may yet prove to be substantially right," and that, even if he is mistaken, Stone "has offered an indispensable chart ..." [4] Joan Thirsk

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1. E. P. Thompson, review of Stone, *New Society* (8 September 1977), 500.
 2. Keith Thomas, review of Stone, *Times Literary Supplement* (21 October 1977), 1226.
 3. *Ibid.*, 1227.
 4. *Idem.*
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predicts that there "will be quibbling over small details, but no major disagreement, I think, with the general perspective." [5] J. P. Kenyon writes that "in the last analysis the accumulation of random evidence is impressive, and most of it fits together. His picture of pre-modern man, so very different from what most of us would have expected, will be subject to amendment in many of its details, but I expect its main outlines to stand." [6] Rosalind Mitchison has a number of reservations about the book, but concludes that "on its main theme, the rise of individualism, there can be no doubt that it is firmly founded." [7] The only major dissenting voice so far is that of Edward Thompson; even he is apologetic about being so "cross." [8]

The reception for the book would not be so assured if it was not based on a general theory of the development of modern English society which historians and sociologists find attractive. This is the real justification for a long review. Stone has stated bluntly what many have assumed but never said. Furthermore, his book provides an interesting example of the way in which a set of assumptions shapes the historian's evidence. The dust-jacket claims that this is a "book whose hypotheses challenge much conventional wisdom about English social evolution, and its relationship to religion, politics, capitalism and industrialization." In fact, the central hypotheses concerning the gradual growth of individualism in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries are all anticipated in the works of Marx and Weber and have been reiterated in various forms by historians since then. Stone takes for granted the gradual transformation of a traditional, group-based, kinship-dominated society into the modern capitalistic system, a change most notably described by R. H. Tawney. The general outline of the shift in the nature of English economy and society between 1400-1750 appears to be well established. In this period the following occurred: the invention of private, absolute property and the destruction of group ownership; the destruction of the household as the basic unit of production and consumption; the growth of a money economy; the rise of a class of permanent wage-laborers; the upsurge of the profit motive and the unending accumulative drive; the rise of modern industries and large towns; the elimination of "magical" and "irrational" forces which prevented economic accumulation; the undermining of 'Small, closely-meshed communities with the growth of geographical and social mobility. England changed from a society in which the individual was subordinated to a group of some kind, whether the family, village, religious congregation or estate, to that de-

5. Joan Thirsk, review of Stone, *Times Higher Education Supplement* (28 October 1977), 16

6. J. P. Kenyon, review of Stone, *Observer Review* (4 September 1977).

7. Rosalind Mitchison, *The New Review* 4 (February 1978), 42.

8. Thompson, 501

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picted by Hobbes in the seventeenth century in which society was composed of autonomous individuals.

Specifically in relation to the family and kinship, Max Weber laid down many of the foundations upon which Stone builds. Weber describes the gradual erosion of wider family groupings. Societies all originated in a stage where kinship dominated all life a large clans absorbed the individual. In China and India this phase continued, into the nineteenth century. In West Europe, a combination of Christianity, feudalism, and the growth of towns began to erode these large groups. Protestantism was especially important in shattering the "fetters of the kinship group." The Puritan divines further stressed the nuclear family and the importance of marriage as a period of affection. The power of the head of the household as a patriarch-was also stressed by the Puritans. Gradually the subservience of women began to be challenged and the individual began to assert himself against his parents. The nature of this general shift in family structure, as well as the reasons why it occurred the rise of acquisitive individualism appear to be well established.[9]

The general theory of the changes in economy, society, and politics predicts that when one turns to sentiments as expressed in family life, marital arrangements, and sexual behavior there should be a gradual evolution along the lines documented by Stone. Thus his picture of the past is just what one expects to find. The only cause for surprise is that the medieval and early modern period was even more cruel and beastly than one might have anticipated. Thus there might be arguments about whether Stone has exaggerated certain changes. Yet there can be little doubt that we would expect to find that his claim to have described "perhaps the most important change in **mentalité** to have occurred in the Early Modern period, indeed possibly in the last thousand years of Western history" will be borne out (4). Thus, as Thompson states, his central argument is "not original," but "Stone is the first to isolate its - Affective Individualism's - familial and sexual consequences in English history in this way." [10] Thus Stone's book helps to confirm and add depth to the current paradigm of the development of the first industrial nation. It reveals remarkably clearly the current consensus on the nature of the transition which is supposed to have occurred between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Stone has set dates and given labels to the various shifts in domestic life which occurred

9. This summary of Weber's views is based on Max Weber, *General Economic History*, transl. Frank H. Knight (New York, 1961), 505-1, 54 ff., 173; R. Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (London, 1966), 70-71, 74-77, 79, 114-115, 139-330, 417.

10. Thompson, 499. Likewise, commenting on an earlier summary of Stone's central thesis, Christopher Lasch not only found it unoriginal, but wrote that Stone "outlines a curiously old-fashioned argument" concerning the decline of kinship (*New York Review of Books*, 11, December 1975, 53).

alongside the evolution toward the modern capitalist economy. The three main stages in the history of the family, for example, he describes as the "Open Lineage Family," which lasts from approximately 1450-1630; then the "Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family," from about 1550-1700; and finally the "Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family," from about 1640-1800.[11]

There is only one major difficulty. While Stone manages, on the whole, to make the past fit into his scheme, putting forward a theory of the various stages through which England's inhabitants passed, his description of life in the Early Modern Period bears little resemblance to the society which is revealed to a number of us who have studied the period. For example, I have been working for fifteen years on court records, village documents, diaries and autobiographies, pamphlets and tracts, sources which Stone uses and also others which he has failed to investigate. None of these supports his general evolutionary framework. Furthermore, as a social anthropologist who has lived and worked in a contemporary non-industrial society,¹¹ find that his assertions about the basic nature of life before the advent of industrialization are largely misleading. What appears to have happened is as follows. Stone was faced with an awkward choice, of which he may or may not have been fully aware. His training and basic assumptions, the whole weight of a century of historical research, led him to expect a gradual progression of social life in a certain direction. The historical evidence either flatly contradicted the predictions, or failed to fit them neatly. He thus either had to jettison the whole set of interlinked assumptions which have their roots in Marxist, Weberian, and Whig history, or else he had to ignore or misinterpret the evidence. It is not surprising that he should have taken the latter course. His massive effort to fit the material into an inadequate scheme provides a compendium of the distortions produced when a tenacious but false paradigm blinds the historian.

In order to assess the value of Stone's contribution, we may first of all examine four central assumptions in the book. The first is that sentiment is intimately related to demography. Stone repeatedly argues that affection and love were, on the whole, impossible before the eighteenth century because the conditions of preindustrial life were so insecure that one would not dare to enter into a deep relationship for fear of it abruptly ending. This is bluntly stated by Stone when he writes that the "value of children rises as their durability improves . . ."; nowadays "Children no longer die, and it is worth while to lavish profound affection upon them. . ."; "to preserve their mental stability, parents were obliged to limit the degree of their psychological involvement with their infant children"; "high mortality

11. As will be seen below, Stone alters some of these dates as the book progresses.

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rates made deep relationships very imprudent" (420, 680, 70, 117). Marriages were loveless for the same reason. Stone argues that marriages only lasted for an average of seventeen to twenty years in "Early Modern England," and marriage was "statistically speaking, a transient and temporary association" (55). Consequently, relations between husband and wife were affectionless. The conjugal family, based on unloved children and unloving husband and wife was therefore "very short-lived and unstable in its composition. Few mutual demands were made on its members, so that it was a low-keyed and undemanding institution which could therefore weather this instability with relative ease" (60). Furthermore, because parents did not love their children, they let them die, hence increasing insecurity and leading to further neglect: "the neglect was caused in part by the high mortality rate, since there was small reward from lavishing time and care on such ephemeral objects as small babies. It was a vicious circle" (81).

There are at least four major objections to this central psychological assumption. Firstly, an awareness of anthropological literature would immediately have provided cases of societies without modern medicine and with low standards of living in which people are enormously loving toward their children, despite frequent deaths in infancy. [12] Secondly, no study is cited to show that people consciously work out the expectation of life of their children or the likely duration of their marriage and tailor their emotional lives accordingly. In any case, a marriage lasting for an average of over seventeen years can hardly be dismissed as "transient." Thirdly, there is abundant evidence, as far back as personal records have survived, that people did love their children or their spouses and feel despair when they died. Fourthly, as Stone admits, there is no correlation whatsoever between mortality rates and the supposed development of the feelings and affection which he tries to chart (82). The supposed growth of love, particularly in the eighteenth century, does not fit with any known changes in the expectation of life or duration of marriage. Thus one of the fundamental axioms upon which much of Stone's speculation is based is of dubious value.

A second assumption is a form of economic determinism. There are frequent generalizations which are based on the belief that social institutions, feelings, and attitudes can be deduced from technology and the level of wealth in a society. It is assumed that the material world determines the

12. The general works by Erik Erikson and Margaret Mead contain numerous instances of a loving attitude toward young children in societies with non-Western demographic patterns. Specific instances of love could be cited from most anthropological accounts; two instances from an area I know are the Garos (R. Burling, *Rengsangri: Family and Kinship in a Garo Village* [Philadelphia, 1963], 106) and the Nagas of Assam (C. von Furer-Haimendorf, *Morals and Merit* [London, 1967], 112).

culture in a fairly simple one-to-one way; and, consequently, that as affluence increases, so will feeling. We are told that in the past a large part of the population was so poor and miserable that there was no time or energy for an emotional life. Stone writes concerning the eighteenth century that there "are levels of human misery at which the intensity of the struggle to satisfy the basic need for food and shelter leaves little room for humane emotions and affective relationships." Propertyless wage-laborers failed to help their parents because "their houses would be too small to accommodate them, and their incomes too marginal and precarious to have any surplus with which to feed and clothe them" (476, 421). Sexual norms are to be explained by the distribution of property: "the principle of premarital female chastity and the double standard after marriage are, therefore, functional to a society of property owners, especially small property owners"; "the higher ones goes in the society and the greater the amount of property likely to change hands with a marriage, the greater the stress on pre-marital chastity" (637, 504). Thus the rise in pre-marital sexual intercourse was a result of the "rise of the proportion of the propertyless with no economic stake in the value of their virginity...." (641). Economics also determined the choice of a marriage partner: "economic considerations bulked large in motivating mate selection . . ." among the lower middle classes in the eighteenth century, as among the gentry (392). As the economic stake in marriage rose, so did the status of women: the "seventeenth century saw a sharp rise in the size of marriage portions paid by the bride's parents to the groom's parents. This rise meant an increase in the economic stakes in marriage, and so enhanced the position of the wife" (330). Numerous other examples could be cited.

Yet any familiarity with the literature on modern non-Western societies, where standards of living are often far lower than those enjoyed by the English in the preindustrial period, would have shown that emotions, the care for parents, sexual norms, the arrangement of marriage, and the status of women vary enormously. They cannot be explained by economic factors. If Stone were right, the benighted peoples of the Third World and most of the past would have lived lives devoid of emotion, moved merely by the scramble for a livelihood. His assumption is extremely naive. It can again be challenged on the grounds that it neither fits the chronology of the supposed development of emotion which he believes in, nor does it fit with what we know about other societies, nor with the evidence for England from the fifteenth century.

A third assumption is that there has been a gradual evolution in history from simpler, more "backward," "lower" periods through a series of stages "up" to the present. Although on several occasions Stone makes general remarks disclaiming any simple linear development, writing for example that "even if the trend [that is from **Gemeinschaft** to

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Gesellschaft] has been correctly identified, it has not been a constant linear movement" (661), the whole book is based on the evolutionary model described earlier in this critique. Of course there were reversals, as in the nineteenth century, but the picture is one of inexorable "progress" along the lines envisaged long ago by Macaulay. As Thompson has also noted, "despite disclaimers of any normative intent, Stone cannot prevent 'the modern family' from becoming the hero of his book. " [13] This can be seen in the words that are used to describe changes in the past: things are constantly "rising" toward the present; where something has not yet risen, the country is "backward." For instance, "England was more advanced than France in most respects, but more backward in a few" (480). It can also be seen in the portrayal of the period up to the sixteenth century and beyond as one which was inhabited by cruel, unfeeling, smelly people. It was filled with parents who were "cold, suspicious, distrustful and cruel"; the "late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were for England the great flogging age"; there was "a low general level of emotional interaction and commitment" (194, 170-171, 95). Gradually there emerged the loving, caring society where dirt, cruelty, and disease were eradicated. There is a striking similarity to some nineteenth-century anthropology, where "savages" were regarded as children, without fully developed minds or emotions, who gradually "grew up" into civilization. Behind the details there is the same feeling that England was gradually "growing up" and renouncing childish ways.

A fourth assumption is that the wealthy and powerful provide the leading sector in change; their morality was "seeping down" to the lower orders because the rich were the "pace-makers of cultural change" (374, 12). Consequently, the emotional and intellectual life of the ninety percent of the population below the gentry was even more "backward" than that of the elite. Stone justifies his lack of interest in what he patronizingly calls the "Plebs," partly on the grounds that they merely followed their masters, partly because he believes that "the historian is forced to abandon any attempt to probe attitudes and feelings, since direct evidence does not exist" (603). His allusions to those below the level of the gentry are brief, usually a few lines at the end of sections on the wealthy. Yet a lack of interest and consequent lack of evidence does not inhibit Stone from making a number of assertions about the sentiments and behavior of such people. We may look at a sample of the types of generalizations made; none of them is supported by any solid English evidence. The poor "had no economic incentive to have many children" in the eighteenth century; "they procreated extensively, partly because of social tradition and partly for lack of forethought and self-control"; the "poor seem in general to have been both more prudish and less imaginative about sex than the leisured

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classes"; "the poor were very much dirtier than the rich"; "among the mass of the very poor, the available evidence suggests that the common behaviour of many parents towards their children was often indifferent, cruel, erratic and unpredictable," though this may partly be excused "because they needed to vent their frustration on somebody" (421, 488, 487, 470). As Thompson remarks, these "hypotheses reproduce, with comical accuracy, the ideology and sensibility of 18th century upper class paternalists." [14] Since no evidence is given in support of these views, there is clearly no need to take them seriously.

Thus, equipped with a number of assumptions about human nature and motivation, the progress of history and the nature of the class structure, Stone then arms himself with some technical tools for his massive reconstruction. One of these is an analytic terminology. It is obvious that the study of kinship, marriage, and the family is a vast field in which anthropologists, sociologists, and historians have laboured for many years. Much of the discussion has revolved around the appropriate terms, for it is well known that a clear use of words such as "marriage," "family," and "kinship" is essential if any progress is to be made. Stone claims anthropology as an ally on a number of occasions, so we may look briefly at his use of terms from an anthropological viewpoint. The result is not encouraging. He does not define a number of key terms' such as peasant, marriage, kinship, descent, as if their meaning were self-evident. He speaks of "fostering" on numerous occasions. This word has a technical meaning concerned with the specific allocation of certain rights and duties to a surrogate parent; yet Stone uses it loosely to mean sending a child off to another household, and thus apprenticeship and servanthood is, for him, "fostering" (106-108, 167). He also uses the words "clan" and "caste" in curious ways (86, 22). Yet he is perhaps wise to leave most of the terms vague and undefined, because the few attempts to define words are even more unsatisfactory. Stone defines a "family" as "those members of the same kin who live together under one roof" (21). This is of no use; for example, it means that when brothers and sisters are living apart, they are not members of the same family, nor would be parents and children. Stone's definition of another key term, "household-" which he states "consists of persons living under one roof," is not at all satisfactory; several unrelated families living in a large house would have to be called a "household," which is misleading (26). He defines a "lineage" as "relatives by blood or marriage, dead, living, and yet to be born, who collectively form a 'house' " (29). Since the "house" as a concept is left undefined, we do not know what this means. This accords with no known

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historical or anthropological definition. It shows a total innocence as regards the vast anthropological literature on lineages and descent. In fact, we are not told anything about the principles of descent in England; how it was reckoned, principles of recruitment and classification.

While Stone fails to draw on anthropology for his analytic terminology, he is prepared to support his case by reference to the work of anthropologists. This is not surprising since his topics fall into an area which has absorbed well over half the energies of that discipline for the last hundred years. Historians who are unfamiliar with anthropology may be impressed by Stone's invocation of anthropological findings in support of his contentions about the past. Perhaps I should therefore comment on these in my role as a social anthropologist. Stone describes sixteenth century England as a society where "a majority of the individuals that composed it found it very difficult to establish close emotional ties to any other person. Children were neglected, brutally treated, and even killed; adults treated each other with suspicion and hostility; affect was low, and hard to find" (99). He then says that "To an anthropologist, there would be nothing very surprising about such a society, which closely resembles the Mundugomor in New Guinea in the twentieth century, as described by Margaret Mead" (99). It should be said that anthropologists would, in fact, be very surprised; they were surprised at the Mundugomor and have never found a large agrarian centralized state with a social system similar to the tribes of New Guinea. They may be broad-minded in their view of what human societies can be like, but it is inadmissible to use the Mundugomor to support any assertions about sixteenth-century England. On a second occasion, Stone describes the supposedly loveless, arranged marriages of the sixteenth century and claims that such marriages were not doomed since "In practice, as anthropologists have everywhere discovered, the arranged marriage works far less badly than those educated in a romantic culture would suppose" (104). Since Stone fails to cite a single author, society, or study in support of this observation, it remains an unproven assertion. If he is right, of course, it adds nothing to the argument concerning the nature of arranged marriages in the sixteenth century. Yet he continues the argument later when he states that the "accepted wisdom of the age was that marriage based on personal selection . . . was if anything less likely to produce lasting happiness than one arranged by more prudent and more mature heads" and that this "view finds confirmation in anthropological studies of the many societies where love has not been regarded as a sound basis for marriage, and where one girl is as good as another, provided that she is a good housekeeper, a breeder, and a willing sexual playmate" (181). Again Stone gives no references for his anthropological "confirmation."

This is not surprising, since anyone who has read the accounts

of marital and sexual relations in tribal societies by such men as Evans-Pritchard, Elwin, Haimendorf, Malinowski, Schapera will be aware that this is a demeaning and distorted parody of their descriptions. There is a vast literature which shows that one girl is not as good as another since there are usually elaborate rules concerning proscribed and prescribed marriage. Furthermore, to read twentieth-century morality into the situation by talking about the desire for a "willing sexual playmate" is totally inappropriate vulgarity. Stone later proceeds to support his view that romantic love was not present up to the eighteenth century by citing the "anthropological studies of the many societies in which sentiment is unknown" which he claims support the view that love is the "product . . . of learned cultural expectations, which became fashionable in the late eighteenth century thanks largely to the spread of novel-reading" (284, 286). Again, not a single authority is cited, so it is difficult to know what Stone is talking about. Yet most anthropologists would find it exceedingly quaint that Stone seriously believes that a nation could suddenly be converted to romantic love by reading novels. Further on, there is reference to an analogy between the sexual depravities of Louis XIII's childhood in court and Malinowski's account of the Trobriand Islanders' sexual behavior (510). Finally, we are informed that "Anthropologists tell us that the value attached to chastity is directly related to the degree of social hierarchy and the degree of property ownership" (636). Again, we are not told who the mysterious anthropologists are, and I do not know of any serious studies which would argue such a naive hypothesis.

A lengthier review would enable one to investigate Stone's use of three other technical disciplines - law, statistics, and psychology. In each of them there are reasons to be worried. For example, in relation to the history of law there are numerous minor and major efforts. We shall consider just two. Stone writes that in the sixteenth century "witches were denounced, tortured and burned" (654). He ignores the very large amount of work that has come out recently which has repeated the well-known fact that, except in certain exceptional circumstances, witches in England were not subjected to judicial torture and were hanged not burnt.^[15] Secondly, he writes confidently that "In the late middle ages, the current head of one of the larger landed families was regarded as no more than a temporary custodian of the family estates . . . he was quite unable either to disinherit his eldest son or, very often, to provide adequately for the other children" (87). A more careful reading of the considerable literature, both contemporary and secondary, on medieval land law would have shown him that it was one of the peculiarities of England from at least the thirteenth century

15. For example, Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970), 16, 20.

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that parents could, indeed, disinherit their children. As soon as entails were introduced, ways of breaking them were devised. [16]

Yet it is above all in his treatment of evidence that Stone shows his dilemma best, and it is to this we may now turn. In order to support a thesis which stemmed directly from the conventional view of the major transition from feudalism to capitalism, but which seemed difficult to prove, Stone is driven by his largely unexamined general theory to distort the past. He ignores or dismisses contrary evidence, misinterprets ambiguous evidence, fails to use relevant evidence, imports evidence from other countries to fill gaps, and jumbles up the chronology. This enables him to confirm that his expectations were right and to show to his own satisfaction that the past moved in the way it should have done. The fact that he was driven to such extremes is itself strong evidence that the fit between general framework and the historical material is very bad.

The first weakness, the ignoring of contrary evidence, is best displayed in Stone's treatment of literary material, particularly poems and plays. Stone is committed to the proposition that love and affection were largely the creation of the eighteenth century. They must not, therefore, exist before that date. The problem for him is that there is a vast literature, from medieval love poetry and Chaucer, through the Elizabethan sonnets, Shakespeare, Donne and the metaphysical poets, to Restoration drama and poetry, which seems to point to the opposite conclusion. It is admittedly difficult to brush aside one of the finest literary traditions attesting to love and affection that the world has ever produced, but Stone is not daunted. He knows that Shakespeare's audience would not have been much interested in the love themes of the plays: "To an Elizabethan audience the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, like that of Othello, lay not so much in their ill-starred romance as in the way they brought destruction upon themselves..."(87). He grudgingly admits that his "rather pessimistic view of a society with little love" needs to be modified since "Romantic love and sexual intrigue was certainly the subject of much poetry of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and of many of Shakespeare's plays" (103). But the modification need not be great since such plays and poetry had hardly any effect and bore little resemblance to ordinary life. The elite were "subjected by the poets and playwrights to propaganda for an entirely antithetical ideal of romantic love as expressed for example in Shakespeare's Sonnets and plays. There was a long tradition of love poetry in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," but this "ran directly across the norms and practices of its readers" (180). Thus, we are reassured, "Despite the flood of poems, novels and plays on the themes of romantic and sexual love, they played little or no part in the daily lives of men and women of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.... It was part of

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a fantasy world, rather than a reality, for all but a handful of idle young courtiers and attendants in noble households" century onward there "has been an unrealistic fantasy about romantic love" (685). Even by Stone's own arguments this is all rather strange, for from the late eighteenth century onward people were quite capable of learning to feel and love from reading novels, "thanks to nature imitating art" (490). Why novels should succeed at that late date when plays and poetry had flooded across the population for three centuries with no effect is not made clear. If we stand back from the book, however, it is obvious that an historian who writes an eight-hundred-page book on the themes of family, sex, and marriage in England from 1500-1800 and is forced to omit almost the whole of the literary evidence because it does not support his central thesis is in a very peculiar position.

Another example of the ignoring of contrary evidence may be less conscious. It concerns the overlooking of a very great amount of material that does not fit the chronological framework, occurring too early, and which is therefore not mentioned. On numerous occasions Stone states that something is new and revolutionary, particularly in the eighteenth century. On almost every occasion it is possible to find the same view or trend present several hundred years earlier. We cite just three examples. On one occasion Stone comments that "as early as 1741 Baron de Pollnitz was struck by the greater liberty English women enjoyed than those in his own country" (318). This is used as evidence that women in the eighteenth century were being given greater freedom and treated with affection for the first time. A more careful reading of the literature produced by travellers would have shown that people were astonished at the liberty and loving treatment of wives not just "as early as 1741" but from at least the sixteenth century. Thus, as Mildred Campbell wrote long ago, referring to the writings of various foreign travellers in England between 1558 and 1614, "English women were held, in general, better off than their sex elsewhere. Hentzner, a German travelling in England in 1598, declared they were fortunate above all women in the world. Other foreign travellers expressed similar views, as did contemporary English writers." [17] Another example occurs when Stone argues in relation to the introduction of contraception that "It was not until the eighteenth century that the pleasure principle began to be clearly separated from the procreative function, both in theological tracts and in the minds of husbands and wives" (416). Yet even a brief search will show that in the early seventeenth century the Puritan pamphleteer. William Gouge wrote that although some argued that sexual

16. F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *History of English Law before the Time of Edward I*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1968), ii, 308-313.

17. Mildred Campbell, *The English Yeoman* (New Haven, 1942), 261.

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death of his ten-day-old child, or that of the thirteen- month-old one" (113). The actual description in my book conveys resignation and loss: "my deare Ralph before midnight fell asleepe whose body Jesus shall awaken; his life was continuall sorrow and trouble; happy he who is at rest in the Lord." [21] Although this was a controlled sadness, it is far from a "cold-blooded" lack of feeling. In the next paragraph of my book I then describe the death of Mary,, the eight-year-old child. The account is still very moving indeed, after all these centuries; it shows a depth of sorrow which it would be impossible to fit with Stone's central thesis.[22] Stone therefore pursues the only possible course; he totally omits Mary and moves on to the older children.

This example verges on the second major weakness of Stone, namely the misinterpretation of evidence. Stone's main sources are autobiographical accounts. We have seen what he can do with a diary, and the same way of dealing with evidence can be seen in his treatment of another genre, namely account books. It would appear to be self-evident that since account books in the past, as in the present, were written in order to list income and expenditure, one would not expect them to be expressive. They would not be the place to find the revelation of deep feelings. I keep an account book, and if a child of mine died, -my heart might almost break but the entry would probably read, "Funeral costs for my child - £20" or some such wording. I would be horrified to think that a future historian would try to deduce anything about m feelings for my children from this. Yet this is exactly what Stone tries to do. He believes that "Between upper-class parents and children, relations in the sixteenth century were also unusually remote ... [there was] a degree of indifference and casual unconcern which would be inconceivable today. The most one normally could expect from a father at that time was the laconic entry in the account book of Daniel Fleming of Rydal in 1665: 'Paid for my loving and lovely John's coffin: 2s. 6d.' " (105). Allowing for the context, this appears to be far from "laconic," but more seriously, to use such evidence as proof of lack of affection appears unwarranted. It is part of a general fault which has been noted by several reviewers, namely the frequent -tendency to interpret lack of evidence as indicative of lack of feeling. Silence cannot be treated as synonymous with apathy or hostility. Nor can modes of address, the naming of young children, the treatment of children at school be interpreted in the brusque and straightforward way employed by Stone. It would be easy to prove almost anything about contemporary society if we took its etiquette and rules of behavior at their face value.

A third method which helps to keep the past within the strait jacket

21. Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin* (Cambridge, 1970), 165.

22. The full description is even more moving than that quoted in *The Family Life*; see *The Diary of Ralph Josselin* , ed. Alan Macfarlane (Oxford, 1976), 201-204.

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imposed by Stone is the failure to cite or use material which should have been included in such a study. There are two major examples of this. The first concerns the treatment of the backdrop to the work, the later medieval period up to the middle of the sixteenth century. Since Stone's whole argument rests on the movement away from the supposed characteristics of this initial position, it is extremely important to know what kind of society England was between about 1350-1550. Stone does indeed spend a good deal of space describing this "traditional society" which was "eroded" by the new sentiments and the market economy as time passed (29). In contrast to the later periods there was a "more simple semi-tribal, feudal or community" organization in medieval England; it was a period when "privacy, like individualism, was neither possible nor desired"; marriage among the property-owning up to the sixteenth century was "a collective decision of family and kin"; "inside the home the members of the nuclear family were subordinated to the will of the head, and were not closely bonded to each other by warm affective ties" (152, 6, 87, 7). Accounts are given of medieval marriage, which resulted in a situation where, at the lower levels, "the habitually casual ways of the population" conspired to "make the medieval approach to marriage and sex very different from that of seventeenth-century England" (30 ff., 605). For instance, we are told that the "three objectives of family planning were the continuity of the male line, the preservation intact of the inherited property, and the acquisition through marriage of further property or useful political alliances" (42). Since Stone is here repeating a number of the conventional views about late medieval society, it is possible that he felt no need to document his pages of assertion or to look at a single original document, either in manuscript or in print, before 1500. Yet if he had looked more carefully at the Paston Letters, Chaucer, manor court rolls, or the recent spate of detailed studies of particular villages, he would have been in for a shock, for to the unbiased observer they seem to indicate a society very different from his stereotype. Yet, not only does Stone not utilize contemporary sources, he fails to cite even the secondary literature. An examination of his footnotes and bibliography reveals that the secondary base for his numerous generalizations about the background out of which England developed consists of four books, on nunneries, universities, a Huntingdonshire manor, and marriage, and half a dozen articles, mostly on marriage and infanticide. It is thus extremely difficult to challenge his implausible picture of England as a kinship-based, loveless, brutal, and community-based society.

The other type of omission concerns the main period of his study. If one is to undertake a serious study of the family, marriage, and sexual behavior in the period between 1500-1800, there are a number of very obvious primary manuscript sources, other than the autobiographical material used by Stone. The richest sets of manuscripts are the records of the courts, not

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only the ecclesiastical ones which supervised morality, but also Quarter Sessions, Assizes, Chancery, King's Bench, and many others. A second major source is testamentary material, particularly wills, A third is the assembled collection of other local records, particularly manorial documents and parish registers. There is no evidence in this book that Stone has ever looked at a single manuscript source in any of these categories for the purpose in hand. This is partly explicable by his residence in America. Yet, since he must have realized that these classes of records provide abundant evidence on the topics that he is dealing with, it is curious that he has not used more than a tiny selection of the printed collections of such documents which would be available in any large library. To illustrate this omission, we may take the most important single source, the records of the ecclesiastical courts. A considerable number of depositions, office cases and presentments, and other ecclesiastical documents have now been published or summarized. The only collection of original documents which Stone refers to, and that on only one occasion, are for the Archdeaconry of Buckingham. Elsewhere he relies on the work of P. E. H. Hair and F. G. Emmison, who have selected and summarized cases. Other historians might be prepared to make a few hesitant suggestions on the basis of such thin evidence, but Stone is prepared to make the most sweeping generalizations. From Emmison's work he is prepared to generalize that this was a society "which was both sexually very lax and also highly inquisitorial" (519). It is solely on the basis of Emmison's book, or at least no other source is given, that Stone is able to paint his notorious picture of Elizabethan life:

Overwhelming evidence of the lack of warmth and tolerance in interpersonal relations at the village level is provided by the extraordinary amount of back-biting, malicious slander, marital discord and unfaithfulness, and petty spying and delation which characterized life in the villages of Essex in the late sixteenth century.... The Elizabethan village was a place filled with malice and hatred, its only unifying bond being the occasional episode of mass hysteria, which temporarily bound together the majority in order to harry and prosecute the local witch. (93)

Having worked with my colleagues for many man-years on the records of Essex villages, I consider this account to bear little or no relationship to what the records reveal. The documents themselves show orderliness, intelligence, warmth, and humour in the lives of those who pass briefly before our eyes.

Another technique which Stone uses may be termed the argument by analogy and involves the wholesale importation of foreign evidence. The book is entitled "The Family, Sex and Marriage in **England**," but if one counted up the footnote references, a large proportion of them come from outside England. This is a technique which Edward Shorter also exploited in his book *The Making of the Modern Family*, a work which

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Stone refers to as being "based on a careful study of all the evidence" (193). At first sight the use of French and other material would seem to be justified, for Stone writes at the start that "trans-national comparisons have been made with France and New England in order to try to separate those features which were common to most of Western Europe at a given time from those which were peculiar to England" (18). This is an interesting and reasonable procedure. Whenever he makes such a comparison it shows to Stone, as it did to Shorter, that the English and Continental family systems were dissimilar. [21] Thus in relation to marriage arranging, we are told that "there can be little doubt that England and America were well in advance of continental Europe in the shift of power over marriage from parents to children"; in France the "time-lag with England is quite astonishing" (324, 323; see also 387, 389). Another "precocious change" was in English child-rearing practices, for the "relative liberation of the child occurred about a century earlier in England and New England than in France" (425, 478). Having shown that the countries were different, it might have been thought that such a conclusion, combined with the well-known differences in social, legal, and economic structure between the two countries, might have made Stone cautious in his use of French evidence. Yet there is a problem here which has forced him into some rash ventures. Since much of the English evidence goes against his general thesis, and other evidence which might have been consulted has not been used, there is singularly little material below the level of the gentry for most of the topics which Stone would like to investigate. This is particularly true of the more intimate aspects of life. The French material is ideal, partly because historians of France have been more interested in such matters and consequently more is easily available and summarized in print, partly because France seems to fit Stone's various hypotheses so well. No matter, therefore, that the book is supposed to be about England; we may forget the channel and all the social, political, and economic differences and assume that England France are the same.

When we pursue Stone's argument and proof on many topics, we find again and again that the evidence is from France. His basic premise, that we can deduce from French evidence the nature of English experience unless there is strong proof to the contrary, is stated openly on a number of occasions. In relation to sexual exploitation of the poor, the author writes that "There is no reason to believe that the records of the town of Nantes, which have been analysed in detail, would not also apply to England" (642). Concerning bridal pregnancy, we are told "It is worth noting that in France in the eighteenth century, and therefore probably in England"

23. Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London, 1976), 219 30, 42, 47, 125, and elsewhere, notes that England was different from the Continent.

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(609). We are told that "One of the very few pieces of direct evidence we have about the sexual behaviour -of the children of the peasantry in the seventeenth century comes from the pen of a French village *curé* in 1700" (510). It is, of course, the English peasantry and its history that Stone is trying to describe. What is most insidious about this approach is that nearly always the evidence is used to close a gap which Stone believes will one day be filled by material from England. He does not consider that the absence may have occurred because England was different from France. For instance, he writes that "eighteenth- and early- nineteenth-century evidence from all over Europe shows peasant wives addressing their husbands in deferential terms, never sitting down at the table at which the men and boys were eating, and always walking a step or two behind their husbands. These are concrete symbols of patriarchy in the family which were presumably also normal in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, even if contemporary evidence is at present lacking" (199). In fact, there is a good deal of contemporary evidence and it shows a lack of such deference. It really is not satisfactory to project nineteenth-century French peasant social structure back onto the English in the sixteenth century. If we threw away all of Stone's French evidence, there can be little doubt that many of his hypotheses would collapse since their weak evidential basis would crumble into almost nothing.

For one instance of an approach which leads him to construct artificial people in the past, a leg from one country and century, an arm from another, we may look at his evidence for the "traditional penal solidarity of the clan." The evidence in the paragraph comes from fifteenth-century Florence, sixteenth- century England, eighteenth- century France, twentieth-century Russia (126). His evidence for the medical views on sexual behavior comes from Ovid, French and Italian literature, a French eighteenth-century doctor, work by Chinese Taoist scholars, a Swiss eighteenth-century doctor, and assorted English writers of several centuries (493-495). A mass of quotations have fallen onto the pages from the card indexes having little unity, relevance, or connection to one another.

The final technique, which resembles the ignoring of national boundaries, is the jumbled chronology. Clearly Stone is dealing with long-term shifts, and there is no objection to using evidence from a number of centuries. But it is Stone's habit of whisking from century to century, moving randomly forward and backward in the same paragraph, which makes it possible for him to prove his case. One example may be added to all those already given. Discussing attitudes to children and wet-nursing, he moves in one paragraph from Simonds D'Ewes (English, seventeenth-century) to Guazzo (French, sixteenth), to Radischev (Russian, late eighteenth), to Louis XIII (French, seventeenth) (106-107). Furthermore, he tends to treat all his examples, though separated by centuries, as having their existence

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at the same point in historical time. Thus Stone states that "various general conclusions about upper-class sexual behaviour and attitudes in eighteenth-century England may be drawn from these six case histories" (599). If we examine the six case histories, which we might have imagined would be six Englishmen living in the eighteenth century, they turn out to be an eighteenth-century Scotsman (Boswell), an eighteenth-century American (Byrd), two seventeenth-century Englishmen (Hooke, Pepys), and a sixteenth-century Englishman (Forman). This leaves one Englishman living in the right century. Frequently Stone cites evidence from the middle of the nineteenth century to justify claims about the period before the middle of the eighteenth century (100, 130, 379).

The real problem is that the evolutionary chronological frame used by Stone does not fit the evidence, even when every possible device has been used to squeeze it into shape. Stone appears to be aware of this at certain points in the book, making general statements about the lack of fit and warning against "the many pitfalls of any unilinear theory of history, which ignores the ups and downs of social and intellectual change, the lack of uniformity of the direction of the trends, and the failure of the various trends to synchronize in the way they ought if the paradigm is to fit" (660). He frequently admits that at any particular point in time there may be several, conflicting tendencies present, as in the case of patriarchy and the coexistence of family types in the later sixteenth century (195, 124). In fact, Stone's general periodization is constructed in such a way that there are usually several phases or modes co-existing. Thus evidence that goes against his various hypotheses can be dismissed as the relic of an earlier phase" or a precocious anticipation of one that has not yet fully surfaced. Indeed, the boundaries between the supposed phases become rather hazy in practice. Thus, while the three periods are boldly set out in chapter headings as lasting from 1450 to 1630 (Open Lineage), 1550-1700 (Restricted Patriarchal), 1640-1800 (Closed Domesticated), Stone does not seem to notice that in the text he has changed two of these dates so that the second phase is said in one place to start in 1530, and the third phase is brought forward to 1620 on another occasion (7, 655). Then he changes his mind in relation to the last phase and on the same page as he describes it as starting in 1620 talks about it starting "in the late seventeenth century." By one of his interpretations, therefore, there- was a period in 1620-1630 when all three stages were going on together. To make the problem worse, these stages do not overlap with the stages in the history of sexual behavior, which have different time boundaries (545). An added complication is that the modes of child-rearing do not fit with the family structures. Toward the end they become extremely complicated, so that "by 1800 there were six distinct modes of childrearing practised by different social groups" (405). The final difficulty is that there was a time-lag between social groups, so

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that at any one time bits of behavior jettisoned by the upper classes might still be present at the lower levels. Thus it appears that even Stone is uncomfortable with his periodization.

In relation to a wide variety of topics Stone uses a combination of the techniques listed above. We cite just one example of the way in which an apparently strong case and very grand deductions are based on the flimsiest of relevant evidence. It appears to be important for Stone that the English "plebs" should have led an undisciplined life of lust, only partly controlled by "folk" customs and such natural barriers as bad hygiene and poor health. Stone is therefore both anxious to find, and strongly expects to find, evidence of a "folk custom" called "bundling." Stone himself describes this as a permitted ritual whereby a man was allowed to pay "court to a girl, in bed, in the dark, half naked" (606). This custom is referred to throughout the book. Thus Stone writes of the poor "who indulged in the common practice of intimate courting known as 'bundling' and premarital sexual relations" (282). Later he alludes to the "pre-existence of a ... folk custom - how widespread in England is uncertain - of bundling" (638). On another occasion he cites as evidence of the "rather casual English attitude to sensuality" the fact that "in America and England, the Puritans were either unwilling or unable to suppress the custom of bundling . . . common throughout most of north-west Europe...." He admits that the evidence for England is much thinner, but it exists" (520). Having on three occasions referred to this custom without providing a scrap of English evidence, he naturally aroused our curiosity about the proof. In the central passage on the topic, Stone once again cites evidence from Wales and America, as well as Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, and elsewhere. He then argues that "the wide prevalence of this custom in eighteenth-century New England makes it hard to believe that it was not also fairly common in England itself," but admits that "the evidence on this point is scanty" (606).

The evidence is indeed "scanty," for that given in the book for a nation of roughly five million persons over a period of three centuries turns out to be as follows. When a certain Thomas Turner was courting his second wife in 1765 "he twice spent all night with her" Stone admits that Turner "was shocked at a case of prenuptial conception in the village," and points out that it is "not stated" as to whether Turner was seated or lying down (606). Nor do we know that he was half naked or in the dark. In other words, even for the one instance cited in the book, the case is not definitely one of "bundling" at all. It is but wishful thinking to base the numerous assertions about bundling on this instance and on an equivocal remark about Wales in 1804 that "within the last few years [bundling] was scarcely even heard of in England" (606), which Stone takes as evidence that it had existed earlier in the eighteenth century in England. The use of

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Continental evidence and an overloading of ambiguous evidence is well illustrated in this case. "Bundling" may well have existed in England, but Stone has not shown that it did, nor is it permissible to talk of the "common practice" of bundling.

The instance of bundling has been taken because it is a relatively minor feature which can be dealt with briefly. It would be possible to take many other topics in the work and to subject them to the same analysis. In many cases it would be found that grand assertions and large generalizations are built on extremely flimsy evidence. For example, the many references to swaddling throughout the book, from which Stone derives much of his picture of an uncaring, unloving, tightly constraining society, are based on hardly any evidence. For three centuries in this literate society, the evidence consists of one tomb and some French and two English accounts given about middle class nursing, which M. J. Tucker describes as "tender." [24] There is undoubtedly other evidence for the period, but it is not cited or discussed by Stone. To construct vast theories about the most important emotional change in Western civilization on such ambiguous and thin evidence is clearly less than satisfactory. Another instance of the evidence not matching the confidence of the generalizations is in relation to household structure. Stone frequently repeats assertions to the effect that "There can be little doubt that most widows in peasant families lived in the same house with one of their children" (24-25). This view runs against the evidence from the numerous listings of inhabitants analyzed by Laslett and others, which show no such thing; it is supported by the very much weaker evidence from a few entries in wills which describe how widows had the right by the will to live with their married children (60).

There is a further reason why the book is unconvincing. Even if Stone were correct about the general nature of the change which is supposed to have occurred, he offers no plausible theories as to why the transformation in feeling should have happened when it did. He believes that the main reasons for the harsh brutality and lack of feeling in the earlier period was high mortality, economic insecurity, and the absence of "learned cultural expectations." Therefore he would need to show how there was a sudden change in all these factors in the eighteenth century. Yet he admits that mortality fluctuated in a way that did not fit with sentiment, that economic security did not suddenly emerge in the eighteenth century, and that literary and educational pressures had been just as great in the seventeenth as in the eighteenth century. His task of sorting out the causal chain is not made easier by his confusion of "capitalism," factory work, and "industrialization." Thus on several occasions he slides from one to the other as

24. Stone, 424-425, 160-161; M. J. Tucker in *The history of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (London, 1976), 242.

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if they were synonyms (646, 661). As Thompson points out, Stone must surely know that these are separate entities which "are not identical and are not historically coincident . . ." [25] To equate them adds another dimension to the inadequacy of the discussion of causation.

We may conclude by giving our solution to the question posed by Thompson, namely how it is that a man who has read so much and worked for so long on England in this period could have written such a book: "there must be some ulterior theoretical explanation for this disaster." [26] For however much we may admire Stone's energy, exuberance, wide knowledge of the upper-class literature and power of synthesis, as well as the other virtues which it has not been necessary to point out since most reviews are full of them, there is a problem. Whatever the considerable merits of certain sections of the book, the final judgment on it can hardly be other than that it is indeed a "disaster." Thompson believes that it can be explained by Stone's isolation of the "family" as an institution, thus taking it out of its embedded context. Certainly this is a cause of a certain shallowness, but it is not a sufficient explanation for the basic inadequacy of the book. The answer lies at a deeper level and, ultimately, has nothing to do with Stone. It would appear that historians of England have for the past hundred years or so developed a general model of the nature of economic and political change in England from the medieval to the modern period which is constituted of a whole set of assumptions about progressive evolution from the past. Such a model seems plausible as long as we keep to the external world of politics and economics and as long as the detailed evidence from certain sources is not used. The works which have appeared concerning social and economic life at the local level in the medieval period onward, particularly in the last twelve years, do not fit at all with the predictions of the model. We are therefore either forced to scrap much of the old framework and to start again, or we can try to force the evidence into the older mould. Stone is quite correct. If Marx, Weber, Tawney, et al. were right, the past should have developed in the way he describes. If we take away his hyperbole, the transition in feeling and the rise of individualism should have occurred exactly as he describes it. This is why, on the whole, unless they are made irate by his handling of the "pebs," historians are likely to find his story innately convincing. They may dispute details but will find it hard to disagree fundamentally with his general picture.

I have suggested elsewhere an alternative interpretation of the general transition from a supposed "traditional" to a "modern" society in En-

25. Thompson, 500.

26. Idem .

gland . [27] Oversimplifying a complex argument, I have suggested that in relation to England, Marx and Weber were wrong and consequently that most of the edifice which has been built on their work is also defective. Those self-evident and obvious shifts in basic economic and social structure between 1400 and 1700 did not occur at all; they are an optical illusion created largely by the survival of documents and the use of misleading analogies with other societies. England in 1400 was roughly as follows. The concept of private, absolute property was fully developed; the household was not the basic social and economic unit of society but had already been replaced by the individual; a money economy was fully developed; wage labor was already widely established, and there was a large class of fulltime laborers; the drive toward accumulation and profit was already predominant; the "irrational" barriers toward the isolation of the economic sphere were already dismantled; there were no wide kinship groups, so that the individual was not subordinated to large family structures; natural "communities," if they had ever existed, were gone; people were geographically and socially highly mobile. If this were the case, we may wonder what the consequences would be for the speculations concerning the supposed massive emotional and psychological transition which Stone believes occurred between 1400-1800. Such a major change would no longer be expected. We would predict that from the very start of the period there would be some loving parents and some cruel parents, some people bringing their children up in a rigid way, others in a relaxed atmosphere, deep attachments between certain husbands and wives, frail emotional bonds in other cases. Of course there would be variations in the social and legal relations, in customs and fashions, both over time and between different socio-economic groups. But the idea of a massive transformation from a group-based, brutal, and unfeeling society to the highly individualized and loving modern one would not need to be documented. My reading of the historical evidence for England suggests that such a general framework fits the evidence far better, leading to far less distortion, than that which Stone has inherited. It is a picture based on co-existing and varying "modes," similar to that adopted for the study of child-rearing and religious experience from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries in England and New England in a recent book. The alternative offered here would probably not work for France or a number of other European countries. It is based on the fact that, for as yet unexplained reasons, England seems to have been peculiar in that, from at least the fourteenth century, it was inhabited

27. Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Cambridge and New York, 1978).

28. Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York, 1977).

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