Conclusion

Gift giving offers the historian a potent perspective on a wide range of social interactions as well as the role played by the circulation of goods in the formation and sustenance of social bonding and ties. Our study, which focused on a set of practices in an early modern context, pointed to the vigour with which these practices were sustained over the entire period. Varied forms of giving and support did not wither or decline under the impact of the Reformation and the pressures of expanding state and market activity – as had sometimes been assumed – but rather proliferated, diversified and thrived. Gift giving and support were essential to parent–child interaction and familial configurations, and they abounded within networks of kin, neighbours and associates in the rural countryside as well as amidst urban environments and associations. In parishes across the country, diverse and eclectic forms of collections and alms offering were maintained alongside the gradually implemented system of public relief based on the compulsory rates. Endowments and testamentary bequests were sustained, as were varied benevolences and repeated acts of almsgiving during an individual's lifetime – within churches and households, in guildhalls and during fairs, in alehouses and streets, or in the new cultural spaces of fast-growing towns. Varied forms of aid and support – from 'strategic' support offered at critical life-cycle junctures to more casual but still vital support in the form of services, favours and gifts, information, contacts, material aid and sociability – are to be observed, permeating multi-faceted networks that formed the interface of expanding urban environments including trade and economic activity as well as leisure and associations that promoted varied interests and designs.

In all these activities and modes of operation, the force of gifts and support in the creation of binding commitments and bonds of obligations was apparent. Bonds were created via reciprocal exchange whereby an act of offering entailed the obligation – tacit and discretionary, desired but also unwanted – to offer something in return. Interpersonal interactions and repeated encounters were important but not always indispensable; binding commitments implied neither equality nor rigid

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rules of conduct. Given the measure of discretion and flexibility pertaining to timing, quality and content of the exchange – as well as the dynamics that occasionally allowed a negotiated exchange – a wide range of material and non-material assets circulated within varied contexts and social configurations, generating complex forms of giving and variations in density, duration and contents of the exchange. This myriad reciprocal exchange notwithstanding, several offered and exchanged assets were encountered repeatedly in this book; *welfare* and *well-being*, *trust* and *loyalty*, *social status*, *power* and *prestige*. Some social contexts of interactions invariably entailed elements of them all.

Central to our discussion was the economy of giving – the management and reinforcement of informal support systems through a set of distinctive practices and discourses. Acts of offering help and support were cultivated through practices that rewarded individuals for their deeds and reminded them of their obligations, as well as announcing and making public commitments and expectations for help. Gift giving and feasts, public displays of largesse, commemorative practices and modes of written appeal, record keeping and communication, all these were formative in sustaining obligations and cementing binding commitments and ties over the course of the period. The Protestant and Humanist discourses were potent in conveying and articulating the value of giving and gifts, with emphasis placed in our study on a certain dimension of Protestant teaching, which, partly through the dialogue created with audiences, generated a range of models and options pertaining to charitable giving and informal support. For all its well-defined notions regarding the merits and application of works, the Protestant message broadened the language of giving and allowed leeway for manoeuvre and choice, reinforcing and energizing numerous – if not always wholly consistent – modes of charitable offering and gifts.

Support systems, gifts, bonding and obligations – all these were not without limitations and boundaries. Within parishes and guilds, practices of exclusion that restricted group membership and banished outsiders were evident over much of the period, depriving some groups – particularly women, vagrants and the poor – access to the full benefits of informal support systems. Observed in this study, as well, were the boundaries created by densities of reciprocities, quintessentially exemplified in testamentary bequests that demonstrated the professed preference for kin and close friends over more distant relations and strangers, even among social groups and during decades when charitable giving and testamentary bequests to the poor reached their zenith. Amidst dense ties of kin and friends a measure of uncertainty was built into forms of giving and support, generating occasional tension and

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strife, violation of norms or loss of trust. What is worth reiterating at this point is the fact that the salient features of gift exchange itself rendered systems of support particularly prone to certain vulnerabilities and failures; the deeper the bonds of exchange, the more was at stake and the greater the risks and temptations for violation or subversion. Fraud and embezzlement, cheating and abuse, disappointment, all these were predicated on the existence of ongoing exchange and binding commitments, on trust, 'inside knowledge' and personal bonds, as in the case of the master who violated the trust of his servant or vice versa, or in the case of the trader who deceived his close associate for many years. Most of the disputes encountered in this book were instances of a breakdown that occurred within well-defined and often particularly intense and personal relations of giving and exchange. Witchcraft accusations over much of the period remain the most instructive in this regard.

For all the limitations and exclusionary practices entailed in support systems and interactions, gift giving and binding commitments to offer support often prevailed. Gauging the scale of informal support systems remains difficult, and assessing the volume of charitable offering *vis-à-vis* the gradually implemented compulsory rates is improbable even in subsequent decades and centuries, when records are more abundant.[1] Many practices remained invisible or only partially chronicled – door-step alms that were never recorded, church collections that were consumed immediately or gifts and favours that were dispensed within families and networks and remained discretionary rather than outspoken and declared. Networks and associations are immeasurably hard to reconstruct, and even patronage and the ensuing voluminous letters and requests for favours – thousands of these letters were sent to a family such as the Verneys – do not necessarily reveal the extent of tangled ties and precise scale of favours and support that were made available via such ties.

For all the difficulties pertaining to measurement, several points emphasized in this study indicate profusion, expansion and growing vitality of gift exchange and informal support systems over the course of the period:

1 The sheer diversity of informal support. Informal support systems entailed varied practices, options and strategies that were exercised within a great variety of contexts and applied in families and

[1] For the difficulty of calculating the amount of money given by charities to poor relief in the nineteenth century, see Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain* (Aldershot, 1995), 5; Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, 62–3.

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communities, in rural and urban environments as well as the networks that traversed town and countryside. While some forms of giving declined, others proliferated and continued to permeate all types of activities – in the social and economic domains, in politics, religion and leisure.

2 In some areas, especially in charitable giving, there is evidence of gradual and persistent increase. In the wake of the Reformation and the vacuum created by the elimination of fraternities and monasteries, many practices continued to be sustained or to expand. Some of these practices – notably charity ales, funeral doles and small, one-time testamentary bequests – had dwindled by the late seventeenth century, but others persevered and were invigorated throughout. There was the increased scale of endowments and bequests that were channelled via numerous guilds and parishes into hundreds of institutions such as almshouses, hospitals and schools, as well as varied relief programs that remained viable throughout the period. Church collections were sustained and expanded through a revitalized culture of fasts, and were reinforced and cultivated via communions and briefs, with the occasional parochial voluntary collection, in London as well as elsewhere, implying the amassment of large amounts that did not fall short of the obligatory rates. If we add to these practices the varied forms of lifetime donations and numerous household charities, as well as the increased volume of support offered by guilds to their own members, it becomes evident that the charitable scene was extensive and diverse throughout the seventeenth century and beyond. By the early decades of the eighteenth century, when the new subscription and benefit societies emerged, an explosion in charitable techniques and modes of operation can indeed be observed. There was to this extent no zero-sum relation between charitable giving and an emerging public relief system, the former remaining vital and broadening even as the latter was implemented and gradually increased.

3 In many instances we observe subtle transmutation and revitalization over time, rather than declension or diminution in gift giving and informal support. Hospitality, voluntary church collections and associations of varied sorts all invariably witnessed shifts in form, methods or performance, which often implied increased resources and variegated options for gift offering and support. Elite hospitality became more segregated and exclusive over the course of the period, but it continued to be practiced on an ever-lavish scale, encompassing peers and guests as well as neighbours and the poor. It remained a potent cultural form that was central to the sociability and politics of the elite, permeating

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polite and leisured society in the countryside as well as towns throughout the entire period. Voluntary church collections, as well, underwent gradual and protracted transformation rather than decrease, with the charity ale and the festive liberality it connoted being gradually superseded by the techniques of solicitation applied following fasts, communions and briefs. Fund-raising strategies gradually expanded beyond the confines of the established church; they were adapted by the dissenting sects and relocated in varied settings of taverns, meeting houses and the large fair. By the early eighteenth century, methods of solicitation were vigorously applied by new subscription associations that promoted the charitable arena within new cultural spaces of towns. Associations themselves were revitalized and transformed. The craft guilds were pivotal in providing care on an increasing scale to their members throughout the late seventeenth century, while parishes were the loci of the distribution of endowments and charities, alongside the compulsory rates. The novel benefit and charitable societies that appeared on the scene by the mid- and late seventeenth century revitalized the scene, broadening the scope of support channelled through parishes and associations to larger sections among middling groups, migrants and the working population at large.

Shifts in the cultural practices that nurtured an economy of giving also implied increased vitality and novel options for cementing binding commitments and ties of support. The diffusion of print and a written culture broadened the means available for appeal and communication – in petitions and letters, in commemorative practices and published sermons, and in print and newspapers that vigorously announced the value and merits of charitable acts. Diaries, account books and the correspondences that were maintained between distant communities were particularly forceful in reinforcing ties and consolidating the sense of esteem or personal regard critical to the circulation of gifts and support.

4 The impact of an expanding state, the marketplace and towns. While to some extent reinforcing the boundaries that were inherent to informal support systems, the state and the market predominantly stimulated gift giving and varied forms of exchange and help. State policies sponsored, encouraged and benefited from the resources made available through a culture of giving based on bequests and endowments as well as alms giving and collections at church. An increased volume of trade and commercial activity triggered varied forms of support by offering mechanisms that could be mobilized in the service of support and gift offering. An increased supply of money, varied credit instruments, new marketing arenas and the growing

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volume of commodities implied in an emerging consumer culture, all were instrumental in sustaining support and in opening up strategies and novel channels for gift giving, exchange and support.

In these economic, commercialized and social exchanges, the role of multiplying networks and personal interactions was crucial. As state, markets and towns expanded, an infrastructure of personal ties linking individuals from different social milieus in ties of patronage, business, credit and information grew more vast and complex. Both the patronage system and the expanding market relied upon, and in turn induced, personal ties and interactions with networks being established via the supply of credit and commodities, buying and selling, migratory movements and patterns of labour employment in the rural countryside and towns. Varied practices of charitable giving themselves promoted social networks and interactions; Londoners endowed almshouses, hospitals and schools in distant places across the country thereby expanding the links and social horizons of both their original rural parishes as well as the city that subsequently became their place of abode.

As diaries and personal documents occasionally reveal, these networks could become extensive and multi-stranded, coexisting but also becoming enmeshed one with the other. Patronage permeated neighbourhoods and ties of kin, while trade and business associates were embedded within family and friendships, as well as associations or patronage ties. The networks of Nehemiah Wallington, the seventeenth-century London turner, centred on kin who were also neighbours, while his innermost circle of friends consisted of fellow puritans, in London and elsewhere, who were also traders or suppliers of the materials required for his shop. In fast-growing neighbourhoods such as Covent Gardens, neighbourly contacts and kinship ties overlapped, with neighbours acting as investors and creditors who also provided indispensable patronage links. The voluminous and exceptionally rich diaries of Samuel Pepys offer powerful indication of these multiplex networks that were created and elaborated amidst expanding urban populations, state offices and patronage, as well as expanding commerce and trade.[2] Pepys's networks embraced neighbours and residents of his immediate parish of St. Olave, but also shopkeepers and retailers who supplied the goods and commodities for maintaining the standard of fashionable society to which he aspired. The links that he established focused on Westminster and Charing Cross, but also stretched to more distant

[2] The following paragraphs are based on Archer, 'Social networks in Restoration London'.

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parishes within and occasionally outside of the walls. Pepys maintained social ties and interactions with his associates at the Navy Office and naval suppliers, as well as clerks in other government offices – the Exchequer, the Council and Chancery – with whom he was acquainted since his youth. Among his associates were merchants who traded in Portugal, France and Tangiers, as well as professionals, clergymen and scientists affiliated with London's virtuosi circles. Pepys owed his career to one of his cousins, who was made Earl of Sandwich and whose household members (his steward, man of business and clerk) remained among Pepys's closest ties. Yet, overall his personal interactions and contacts with associates, employers and merchants appear to have been no less vital than either his patronage or his kin.

Pepys's multi-stranded and extensive networks did not necessarily involve support, gifts or particularly dense and affectionate bonds. His relations with some of his colleagues, towards whom he expressed a certain disdain, appear tenuous, and he regarded them as incompetent, corrupt or uncivilized. But overall his social networks clearly embraced and fostered giving and receiving numerous services, favours, gifts and support. This was first and foremost true of his ties with variegated kin in London and Cambridge, with whom he maintained regular contact and mutual visits, and amongst whom the circulation of strategic support and varied favours was apparent. Pepys himself was the recipient of his cousin's favours and patronage, and he also benefited greatly from the legal advice and counsel offered by another cousin who was MP for Cambridge. For his part, Pepys intervened and helped arrange the marriages of his brothers and sister. When he became clerk in the Navy, he advanced and secured a position for his brother John, as well as secured contracts, loans and varied positions for others among his kin.[3] Pepys also acted as executor for a poorer aunt, a butcher's widow, while numerous favours and services were also exchanged amidst his other ties. Thus, a wine merchant and neighbour named William Batelier, who lived in proximity to Pepys, supplied him with wine, books and prints that he had brought from France, and also offered good advice in writing appeals to eminent people at court. As clerk of the Navy, Pepys also promoted timber suppliers, dispensing favours to merchant contractors, from which he benefited considerably. Pepys also offered favours to people beneath him, including the husbands of two of his mistresses. He maintained regular contact with shopkeepers, retailers and suppliers, with whom he pursued customer loyalty – 'my tailor' 'my shoemaker', 'my bookseller', as he referred to them in his diary.[4]

[3] *Ibid.*, 88–9. [4] *Ibid.*, 80, 85, 90.

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At the Navy office Pepys was entitled to lodgings, and so he spent many days and long hours with his colleagues in a close domestic arrangement. Despite a certain strain and lack of professed affection, talking, singing, drinking and eating into the night appear to have been routine. Pepys's overall social links, amidst numerous public houses as well as within his household, were extensive. In 1660, he dined and drank with no less than 277 individuals other than members of his own household, at least once and often more. In 1666 he socialized with 184 people (56 of whom were women). These social ties included associates and his employers at the Navy, merchants and numerous other friends. Many of these individuals would have been known to each other; all would have been keenly aware of the indispensability as well as the burdens of the bonds and obligations that mutually bound them – 'how little merit doth prevail in the world but favour', as a conversation with a close friend was presumably concluded and subsequently quoted in the diary.[5]

As noted and emphasized at various points throughout this study, state office and patterns of rule, an increased volume of trade and commodities as well as fast-growing urban environments were all conducive to the granting of favours, services, material aid, binding commitments and gifts. As urban society and trade expanded, personal transactions gained increasing importance, providing indispensable mechanisms for the conduct and expansion of trade as well as allowing the mobilization of the type of support that was crucial for advancing and pursuing trade, careers and other employments. Nor was this mobilization solely evident among the urban elite, pervasive and expansive as it was among these groups. Indicated at various points in our study were the casual but telling allusions made in eyewitness accounts at the Old Bailey, which all point to the persistence and complexity of varied ties of support. Here as well, amidst neighbourhoods that were enmeshed in household, kinship, shops, small trade and sociability, varied forms of support circulated and were vigorously maintained.

All this implies that complex sets of interactions and feedback allow the gift and a culture of giving to flourish in varied settings, including more modern environments and contexts. Marcel Mauss, the doyen of gift studies who postulated a decline of gifting in the face of modern environments dominated by anonymous markets and self-interest, was nonetheless ambiguous about forms of giving in modern contexts. He conceded that patterns of giving ungoverned by calculations of

[5] *Ibid.*, 85.

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self-interest were by no means wholly eradicated amidst capitalist economies and state bureaucracies, although his discussion of these patterns remained brief at best.[6] As even a cursory glance at the increased body of research we have today suggests, varied gifts and informal support circulated amidst diverse and changing social configurations throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, suggesting that if a decline of gifts occurred at all, it was certainly not as straightforward as had previously been presumed. So, for example, various and extensive reciprocal interactions between parents and offspring, including filial support in old age, have been documented from the eighteenth century, but also throughout the era of industrialization and well into the mid- and late twentieth century. Following the implementation of universal pensions in 1945, and despite vast transformations in familial configurations and patterns of exchange in the increasingly affluent decades following the Second World War, reciprocal exchange, filial support and binding obligations to parents in old age continued to thrive.[7]

Other forms of support systems investigated in this study can be observed in assorted and vastly transformed settings and landscapes of towns and the rural countryside throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during early industrialization and beyond. The key role that kinship played in trade and commercial activity has been observed in studies of the middling classes, which pointed to the active part of kin in the provision of financial resources and in recruitment to business enterprises and the promotion of careers. Kinship continued to be vital to industry and entrepreneurship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when assorted industrial enterprises emerged as family firms established through ties of marriage and kinship which provided indispensable loans, credit and sureties. The role played by kin in the formation and proliferation of early banks has also been revealed.[8] Among the poorer sections of the population, kinship ties proved all-important in rural areas where they were enmeshed within

[6] Mauss, *The Gift*, 91–100; Davis, *The Gift*, 128–32; Silber, 'Modern philanthropy', 134–50.

[7] Ottaway, *The Decline of Life*, ch. 4; M. W. Dupree, *Family Structure in the Staffordshire Potteries* (Oxford, 1995), 271–345, esp. 324, 334; Thane, *Old Age*, 287–307; Avner Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain since 1950* (Oxford, 2006), 83–9. See also, Janet Finch, *Family Obligations and Social Change* (Cambridge, 1989); Alice S. Rossi and Peter H. Rossi, *Of Human Bonding: Parent–Child Relations across the Life Course* (New York, 1990).

[8] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 198–228; Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England*, 318–46.; Sabean, *Kinship in Neckarhausen*, 449–89, esp. 465, 468; Naomi R. Lamoreaux, *Insider Lending: Banks, Personal Connections and Economic Development* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. 1–9, 22–7. See also Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence*, 96.

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neighbourhoods; there craft and trade families sometimes congregated in nearby parishes or in the streets of local market towns, offering varied and mutual forms of support and safety nets. Particularly well documented is the crucial and continuously revitalized role of kinship in migration, where kin helped each other out and enabled the transition from the countryside to towns, as can be observed in the industrialized north as well as other places on the continent or in North America.[9] Urban neighbourhoods also continued to afford reciprocal exchanges and varied forms of gift exchange among the working classes, where close proximity and daily encounters induced different forms of exchange, casual support, intervention in abusive marriages and other forms of services and support.[10]

Some of the configurations that nourished intensive reciprocities and gift exchange were sustained and reinvigorated over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but subsequently disappeared under the impact of state institutions, banks, economies of scale and other social transformations. Open hospitality remained the hallmark of gentry and aristocratic domesticity, and it proved vital through the mid- and late nineteenth century.[11] Alms and hospitality offered in barns to vagrants and the poor were common features of the rural countryside

[9] Reay, 'Kinship and neighbourhood', esp. 95–8; Colin G. Pooley and Shani D'Cruze, 'Migration and urbanization in north-west England circa 1760–1830', *Social History*, 19 (1994), 227–53; Di Cooper and Moira Donald, 'Household and "hidden" kin in early-nineteenth-century England: four case studies in suburban Exeter, 1821–1861', *Continuity and Change*, 10 (1995), 257–78. See also Michael Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971); Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge, 1982); Janssens, *Family and Social Change*, 160–92. For sociological findings regarding the important role of kinship in modern urban contexts, see also B. Wellman, 'The place of kinfolk in personal community networks', in John Scott (ed.), *Social Networks: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, 3 vols. (London and New York, 2002; vol. 3), 82–107; M. Anwar, 'Social networks of Pakistani in the UK: a re-evaluation', in Scott (ed.), *Social Networks* (vol. 3), 128–44.

[10] Dupree, *Family Structure*, 275–9; Foyster, *Marital Violence*, 194–204; F. K. Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', in Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History* (vol. 3), 363–4; B. Bramwell, 'Public space and local communities: the example of Birmingham, 1840–1880', in G. Kearns and C. W. J. Withers (eds.), *Urbanizing Britain: Essays in Class and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1991), 31–54; Martin Bulmer, *Neighbours: The Work of Philip Abrams* (Cambridge, 1986). See also David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740–1790* (Cambridge, 1986); Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, 'Neighbourhood social change in west European cities, sixteenth to nineteenth centuries', *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), 1–30. For sociological studies of neighbourhoods in modern urban contexts, see C. S. Fischer, *To Dwell among Friends* (Chicago, 1982); Wellman, 'The place of kinfolk', 82–107; C. Kadushin and D. J. Jones 'Social networks and urban neighbourhoods in New York city', in Scott (ed.), *Social Networks* (vol. 3), 108–27.

[11] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 195–6, 332, nn. 4–6.

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throughout the nineteenth century, as is indicated by the census of 1851, which included a separate occupational category for 'vagrants and others in barns'.[12] Patterns of employment based on the institution of service, with its distinctive form of contract welded within intensive reciprocal exchange, were maintained in crafts, agriculture and domestic sectors throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when they invariably began to decline or became extinct.[13] Mutual aid and benefit societies flourished over the course of the nineteenth century, offering their members various forms of support and financial protection against sickness and unemployment. By the 1870s it was calculated that large segments among British adults belonged to an average of between five or six voluntary organizations, which included trade unions as well as friendly and saving societies of all kinds.[14] Personal credit also remained pivotal in offering support that inextricably implied binding commitments and dependencies. Informal retail credit flourished in the burgeoning consumer markets of the late nineteenth century. While men were frequently being imprisoned in the event that they were unable to pay their debts, women, children and servants, who were exempt from imprisonment, routinely purchased goods on credit for the male heads of their households.[15]

Other socio-economic configurations affected the transmutation of varied practices of giving that persevered and flourished through the mid- and late twentieth century. Of the practices studied here, philanthropy and charitable offering, with their varied textures and modern figurations, bulked large in social provision throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with modern philanthropy being linked in tangled ways to both markets as well as a centralized welfare state.[16] No

[12] *British Parliamentary Papers 1852–53* (vol. 88), ccxx, ccxxv, ccxxvii.

[13] Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 120–34; Brooks, 'Apprenticeship, social mobility and the middling sort', 65–9; Cooper and Donald, 'Household and 'hidden' kin', 269–76; Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation,* 45–8, 216–21.

[14] Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector,* 5; Innes, 'The state and the poor', 236; Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare,* 24–45, 125–8. For the vitality of old and new voluntary associations aimed at reducing risks, in the nineteenth-century French rural context, see also Baker, *Fraternity among the French Peasantry*, 300–1, 310–20.

[15] Finn, *The Character of Credit,* 4–11.

[16] Barry and Jones (eds.), *Medicine and Charity*, 2–4; Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy*; G. R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), 145–6, 179–97; Waddington, *Charity and the London Hospitals*; Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', 357–94; M. J. D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England 1787–1886* (Cambridge, 2004), esp. 246–50. For the argument about voluntarism acting in tandem with the state rather as an alternative to it, see Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector,* 8; Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, ch. 4; Joseph Bradley, 'Subjects into citizens: societies, civil society, and autocracy in Tsarist Russia', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 1094–123; I. F. Silber, 'The gift-relationship in an era of

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less important are the varied forms of gift exchange and personal help that can be observed within diversified modern settings and working environments, embedded as these often are in personal networks and interactions. Small production units based on household, family or small firms were sustained in agriculture and industries over the course of the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century. These work environments were not simply a 'relic' of the past; while they did not necessarily imply idyllic working conditions, they inextricably involved personal interactions likely to promote reciprocal exchange and the provision of varied forms of support, contacts, information, favours, sociability and gifts.[17] Amidst other institutional settings and domains – in businesses and entrepreneurship, within the professions and in the scientific community – dense personal interactions and configurations have continued to induce diverse forms of exchange, favours, information and sociability with loyalty, trust and informal settlement of disputes sometimes preferred over contracts and the use of the courts.[18] There is also the continued and intensely viable role of gift giving in signalling and cementing ties and obligations in varied contexts and social interactions. In addition to extensive and expansive use of Christmas presents and other types of gifts, monetary donations and 'gifted money' – money turned into a gift – play a role in creating bonds between parents and offspring, marking rites of passage, establishing honour or delicate status distinctions, and expressing group identity as well as managing intimate relations.[19]

These glimpses of modern settings and modes of operation within which informal support and gifts flourish point to the power and 'lure' of these modes, to their pervasiveness and the diverse social configurations – including those involving state action, the public sphere or the marketplace – within which the culture of giving might thrive. The powerful ramifications of gift relations in inducing social bonds or trust, material support and benefits, power, prestige, self-esteem and regard – all these ensure a certain capacity for infiltrating and surmounting the

"loose" solidarities', in E. Ben-Rafael and Y. Sternberg (eds.), *Identity, Culture and Globalization* (Leiden, 2001), 385–400, esp. 390–2.

[17] Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, 'Historical alternatives to mass production: politics, markets and technology in nineteenth-century industrialization', *Past and Present*, 108 (1985), 133–76, esp. 142–55; Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence*, 91–2, 96; Mark Granovetter, 'Small is bountiful: labor markets and establishment size', *American Sociological Review*, 49 (1984), 323–34, esp. 333–4.

[18] Granovetter, 'Economic action and social structure', 495–6; Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence*, 90, 94–5; Scott (ed.), *Social Networks* (vol. 1), 16–19.

[19] Zelizer, *The Social Meaning of Money*, 25–6, 71–118, 239–40, nn. 11–13. See also Finn, *The Character of Credit*, 29–45; Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities*.

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anonymity of markets and rigid bureaucracies that are otherwise less likely to sustain modes of informal support. In early modern England, gift relations and patterns of giving permeated the parochial administration of poor relief, marked as it was by a great deal of personal interaction, discretion and negotiations between the poor and the local officials. In more modern contexts, gift giving and exchange might still infiltrate relations between citizens and bureaucrats, marketing techniques, selling and buying, advertisements and other social interactions.[20]

The line of reasoning pertaining to the vigour and pervasiveness of practices of informal giving and binding commitments is not necessarily a claim in their 'favour'. The advantages of informal support that are pertinent in a certain historical context may not be feasible or preferred in another; at all times gifts and informal help have inherent costs and perils which would be best eliminated or overrode. Throughout this study the strengths and also the weaknesses and boundaries of informal support were emphasized; its innate inclination towards exclusion, the inextricable links to inequalities and status, the quest for power and prestige, or for the gratification that came with gratitude and the binding dependencies of the weak upon the powerful. Charitable offering often entailed degradation, and even in the best circumstances – that is, when the offering was compassionate and degradation unintended – the beneficiary's experience may still have been burdensome and humiliating. Even within more symmetrical relations based on trust and affection, informal support might still prove hazardous and irregular, or generate dynamics of escalation and temptations to violate or abandon obligations and ties. Informal giving and support also required, or at least benefited from, elaborate formulations and discursive practices – conceptions of duty, compassion, good works and so on – sustained by institutions and beliefs that eroded and diminished over time.

Conspicuously absent in the practices and discourses studied in this book were the notions of social rights and entitlements to certain types of 'gifts'.[21] From the perspective of our own modern society, one might still wish to insist that at least some types of giving that affect the welfare and well-being of individuals – material well-being, health and education – ought to be based neither on reciprocity nor on obligations and personal commitments, but rather on social rights that recognize the individual's dignity and his or her right to be protected from deprivation

[20] Boulton, 'Going on the parish', 32; Hindle, *On the Parish?* 398, 445–9; Offer; *The Challenge of Affluence,* 92–6, 103–37, esp. 117.

[21] For a concise discussion of the issue of 'entitlement' in the context of the old poor laws, which shows that in theory as well as in practice the Elizabethan legislation implied extremely limited conceptions of 'entitlement', see Hindle, *On the Parish?* 398–449.

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and humiliation. Modern welfare systems and the notions of social rights and entitlements implicit in them may not have wholly eradicated or resolved the dilemmas and perils of gift giving, nor have they offered wholesome alternatives to it, especially if one thinks of welfare broadly and not solely in terms of access to commodities. But these systems did manage to forge a path leading to a more decent society, one that is less inequitable and, from the point of view of the recipient of 'gifts', less degrading than the one examined in this book. Given the dramatic shifts of recent decades and the inclination of welfare states to infringe on these rights, the goal of safeguarding a culture of giving that is based on social rights and entitlements rather than solely on gifts and binding obligations continues to be worthy of pursuit.[22]

[22] Margalit, *The Decent Society*, chaps. 1–2, 14; Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence*, 236–7; Neil Gilbert, *Transformation of the Welfare State: The Silent Surrender of Public Responsibility* (Oxford, 2004).

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