

# The Routledge History of Poverty, c.1450–1800



Edited by David Hitchcock and Julia McClure

# THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF POVERTY, c.1450–1800

*The Routledge History of Poverty, c.1450–1800* is a pioneering exploration of both the lives of the very poorest during the early modern period, and of the vast edifices of compassion and coercion erected around them by individuals, institutions, and states.

The essays chart critical new directions in poverty scholarship and connect poverty to the environment, debt and downward social mobility, material culture, empires, informal economies, disability, veterancy, and more. The volume contributes to the understanding of societal transformations across the early modern period, and places poverty and the poor at the centre of these transformations. It also argues for a wider definition of poverty in history which accounts for much more than economic and social circumstance and provides both analytically critical overviews and detailed case studies.

By exploring poverty and the poor across early modern Europe, this study is essential reading for students and researchers of early modern society, economic history, state formation and empire, cultural representation, and mobility.

**David Hitchcock** is a Senior Lecturer in Early Modern History at Canterbury Christ Church University. His research focuses on poverty and vagrancy in Britain and the Atlantic world. He is the author of *Vagrancy in English Culture and Society, 1650–1750* (2016), and is working on a new book-length history of British welfare colonialism.

**Julia McClure** is a Lecturer in Late Medieval and Early Modern Global History at the University of Glasgow. Her research explores the global history of poverty and charity, with a particular focus on the Spanish Empire. She is the author of *The Franciscan Invention of the New World* (2016), and is working on a new monograph on the moral economy of poverty and the making of the Spanish Empire.

## THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORIES

*The Routledge Histories* is a series of landmark books surveying some of the most important topics and themes in history today. Edited and written by an international team of world-renowned experts, they are the works against which all future books on their subjects will be judged.

### **The Routledge History of Medieval Magic**

*Edited by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider*

### **The Routledge History of Monarchy**

*Edited by Elena Woodacre, Lucinda H.S. Dean, Chris Jones, Russell E. Martin and Zita Eva Rohr*

### **The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe, 1100–1700**

*Edited by Andrew Lynch and Susan Broomhall*

### **The Routledge History of Human Rights**

*Edited by Jean H. Quataert and Lora Wildenthal*

### **The Routledge History of Women in Early Modern Europe**

*Edited by Amanda L. Capern*

### **The Routledge History of Witchcraft**

*Edited by Johannes Dillinger*

### **The Routledge History of American Sexuality**

*Edited by Kevin P. Murphy, Jason Ruiz and David Serlin*

### **The Routledge History of Death since 1800**

*Edited by Peter N. Stearns*

### **The Routledge History of the Domestic Sphere in Europe**

*Edited by Joachim Eibach and Margareth Lanzinger*

### **The Routledge History of Poverty, c.1450–1800**

*Edited by David Hitchcock and Julia McClure*

For more information about this series, please visit: [www.routledge.com/Routledge-Histories/book-series/RHISTS](http://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Histories/book-series/RHISTS)

# THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF POVERTY, c.1450–1800

*Edited by David Hitchcock and Julia McClure*

First published 2021  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2021 selection and editorial matter, David Hitchcock and Julia McClure; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of David Hitchcock and Julia McClure to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Hitchcock, David J., editor. | McClure, Julia, editor.

Title: The Routledge history of poverty in Europe, c.1450-1800 / edited by David Hitchcock and Julia McClure.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020035333 | ISBN 9781138555006 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315149271 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Poverty—Europe—History. | Poor—Europe—History. | Poor—Europe—Social conditions. | Europe—Economic conditions. | Europe—History—1492–1648. | Europe—History—1648–1789.

Classification: LCC HC240.9.P6 R49 2021 | DDC 339.4/60940903—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020035333>

ISBN: 978-1-138-55500-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-14927-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo  
by River Editorial Ltd, Devon, UK

For the poor and marginalised; so often missing from history.



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>List of contributors</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Introduction: poverty in early modern history</i>	<i>xvi</i>
David Hitchcock and Julia McClure	
 <b>PART I</b>	
<b>Structures</b>	<b>1</b>
 1 The regulation of charity and the rise of the state	3
<i>Joanna Innes</i>	
 2 The economic history of poverty, 1450–1800	21
<i>Guido Alfani</i>	
 3 Poverty and empire	39
<i>Julia McClure</i>	
 4 The vagrant poor	60
<i>David Hitchcock</i>	
 5 Poverty and environment in early modern England	79
<i>John Emrys Morgan</i>	



<b>PART II</b>	
<b>Impacts</b>	<b>101</b>
6 Losing wealth: debt and downward mobility in eighteenth-century England <i>Tawny Paul</i>	103
7 Poor bodies and disease <i>Kevin Siena</i>	120
8 Motives of control/motifs of creativity: the visual imagery of poverty in early modern Europe <i>Tom Nichols</i>	138
9 The worthiest to be relieved: disabled veterans in England, c. 1580–1630 <i>Abby Lagemann</i>	164
10 Consumption and material culture of poverty in early-modern Europe, c1450–1800 <i>Joseph Harley</i>	185
<b>PART III</b>	
<b>Institutions</b>	<b>207</b>
11 Institutional care for the sick and aged poor in later medieval England <i>Carole Rawcliffe</i>	209
12 Poverty and the workhouse <i>Alannah Tomkins</i>	234
13 Relief for the body, comfort for the soul: the case of Portuguese <i>Misericórdias</i> <i>Sara Pinto</i>	250
14 Architecture in relief: hospitals for the poor in Venice and Lisbon <i>Danielle Abdon</i>	265
<b>PART IV</b>	
<b>Connections</b>	<b>291</b>
15 Peddling and the makeshift economy <i>Rosa Salzberg</i>	293

## *Contents*

16	Poverty, law and labour in the Ottoman Empire <i>Hayri Gökşin Özkoray</i>	309
17	Spas for the sick poor in the early modern British Atlantic world <i>Amanda Herbert</i>	329
18	Barefoot children in a ‘fine room’: Robert Owen, Adam Smith, and social regeneration in Scotland <i>Cornelia Lambert</i>	345
	<i>Further reading</i>	364
	<i>Index</i>	371

# FIGURES

2.1	Prevalence of poverty in England, 1290–1801/03 (% of households with income insufficient for having access to a ‘respectability basket’)	30
2.2	Absolute poverty in the Republic of Venice ( <i>Terraferma</i> ), 1500–1750 (% of propertyless households)	32
2.3	Relative poverty in Italy and the low Countries, 1500–1800 (% of households)	35
4.1	Jacques Callot, ‘ <i>L’hôpital</i> (The hospital)’, <i>The Large Miseries of War</i> , Plate 15, Paris, 1633	65
4.2	Charles McGee, one-eyed Jamaican beggar aged 73 who stands at the Obelisk, Ludgate Hill	66
6.1	Estimated commitment rates, London	112
8.1	Attributed to Fra Carnevale, <i>Ideal City</i> , c. 1480–1484	143
8.2	Hieronymus Bosch, <i>Disabled Beggars</i> , 1500–1510	145
8.3	Lucas van Leyden, <i>The Beggars</i> , 1520	147
8.4	Titian, <i>St John the Almsgiver</i> , c. 1540	149
8.5	Jacopo Tintoretto, <i>St Roch Healing the Plague-Stricken</i> , 1549	150
8.6	Rembrandt van Rijn, <i>The Rat Catcher</i> , 1632	152
8.7	Rembrandt van Rijn, <i>A Blind Hurdy Gurdy Player and his Family Receiving Alms</i> , 1648	153
8.8	Jusepe de Ribera, <i>Blind Beggar and his Boy</i> , c. 1632	155
8.9	Georges de La Tour, <i>Hurdy Gurdy Man</i> , c. 1625–1630	156
8.10	Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, <i>Three Boys Playing Dice</i> , c. 1675–1680	157
8.11	Leone Leoni, <i>Michelangelo as Blind Beggar</i> , c. 1560	159
8.12	Niccolò Schiavonetti after Frances Wheatley, <i>New Mackrel, New Mackrel</i> , 1796	161
9.1	Privy Council orders for soldiers’ relief, 1595–1601	176
9.2	Average annual pension in Cheshire	180
10.1	T. L. Busby, <i>The blue devils</i> , c.1826	195
10.2	London street seller. Source: <i>The cries of London</i> (London: E. Newbery, 1796)	196

*List of figures*

10.3	Pauper's badge, Fletching parish, Sussex, c.1815–1816	197
10.4	William Hogarth, <i>Gin Lane</i> , 1751	200
11.1	St Giles's hospital, Norwich, was extensively rebuilt in the late fourteenth century	216
11.2	The richly illuminated foundation charter (1437) of the reconstituted almshouse of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist, Sherborne, Dorset	220
11.3	William Ford's almshouse in Coventry, built in the early sixteenth century in the style of a merchant's house	222
11.4	Beadsmen, holding their rosaries, stand ready beside the deathbed of Richard Whittington to pray for his soul in this image from the foundation charter of the almshouse where they lived	226
14.1	Antonio di Pietro Averlino (Filarete), Drawing of plan for Ospedale Maggiore, 1460–1464	267
14.2	Interior view of former infirmary, Ospedale Maggiore, present-day Sala Crociera, Biblioteca dell'Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan	268
14.3	Jacopo de' Barbari, detail of <i>View of Venice</i> , 1500	270
14.4	Digital map showing 29 out of 42 hospitals that existed in Venice prior to the establishment of the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo	272
14.5	Vittore Carpaccio, detail of <i>Apparition of the Crucified of Mount Ararat in the Church of Sant'Antonio di Castello</i> , c. 1512	280
14.6	Anonymous, possibly Portuguese, <i>Hospital Real de Todos-os-Santos (View of Rossio)</i> , eighteenth century	282
14.7	Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg, detail of <i>Lisbon, Civitates Orbis Terrarum</i> , Vol. 1, 1572	283
14.8	Digital map showing which charitable institutions were incorporated into the Hospital Real de Todos-os-Santos	284
14.9	Reconstruction of the Hospital Complex in 1755	287

# TABLES

6.1	Occupational status of imprisoned debtors, London	108
13.1	The Fourteen Works of Mercy	258

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Danielle Abdon** has recently been awarded her PhD in Art History from Temple University, where she examined hospital architecture across both early modern Iberian and South American geographies. She has published on charity in fourteenth-century Venice, and in a range of venues on medieval and early modern hospital architecture. She has also held visiting fellowships at the Max Planck Institute for Art History, the John Carter Brown Library, and the Huntington Library.

**Guido Alfani** is Professor of Economic History at Bocconi University and an Affiliated Scholar of the Stone Center on Socio-Economic Inequality. He has published extensively on inequality and social mobility in the long run, on the history of epidemics (especially of plague) and of famines, and on systems of social alliance. Recent works include *The Lion's Share: Inequality and the Rise of the Fiscal State in Preindustrial Europe* (2019, with Matteo Di Tullio).

**Joseph Harley** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Derby. Prior to this he held an Economic History Society fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research, London, and taught at the universities of Leicester and Loughborough. He is an expert in poverty, consumption, and welfare over the early modern, Georgian, and Victorian periods. Joseph recently published *Norfolk Pauper Inventories, c.1690–1834* (2020) and has published articles in *Historical Journal*, *Social History*, and *Continuity and Change*.

**Amanda Herbert** is Associate Director at the Folger Institute of the Folger Shakespeare Library, where she runs the Fellowships Program, and is Co-Director for Before 'Farm to Table': Early Modern Foodways and Cultures, a \$1.5 million Mellon Foundation initiative in collaborative research. She studies the history of the body: gender and sexuality; health and wellness; food, drink, and appetite. She is at work on a book about spas and body politics in the British Atlantic.

**David Hitchcock** is a Senior Lecturer in Early Modern History at Canterbury Christ Church University. His research and publications focus on poverty and vagrancy in Britain and the Atlantic world, and he is the author of *Vagrancy in English Culture and Society*,

1650–1750, which came out in 2016. He is now working on a new book-length history of British welfare colonialism from 1600.

**Joanna Innes** has retired from her tutorial fellowship at Somerville College Oxford but remains a Professor of Modern History and Senior Research Fellow. Much of her work has focused on English social policy, sometimes in a comparative context. Poverty has been a recurrent theme: in 2008 she published, with Hugh Cunningham, *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform in Europe and North America 1690–1850*, in which her own chapter surveyed European developments. She is now researching changes in English social policy-making 1780–1830, and pursuing collaborative research into ideas and practices associated with ‘democracy’ in Europe and the Americas during the age of revolutions.

**Abby Lagemann** is a PhD candidate at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her dissertation examines the long-term domestic effects of England’s late sixteenth-century wars through the lens of veterans and those with whom they interacted. Her previous publications include an article assessing the relationship between the economic crisis of the 1590s and non-felony crime in the English Northwest and a co-authored pedagogical article on the use of myths in the college classroom.

**Cornelia Lambert** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History, Anthropology, and Philosophy at the University of North Georgia. Her work straddles the history of the social sciences and the history of the body, with particular attention to Scottish moral philosophy and the history of visual strategies. Her doctorate is from the Department of the History of Science, University of Oklahoma (2010).

**Julia McClure** is a Lecturer in Late Medieval and Early Modern Global History at the University of Glasgow. She directs the Poverty Research Network, which partners with a range of institutions. Her research and publications explore the global history of poverty and charity, with a particular focus on the Spanish Empire, and she is the author of *The Franciscan Invention of the New World*, which came out in 2016. She is working on a new monograph on the moral economy of poverty and the making of the Spanish Empire.

**John Emrys Morgan** is a Lecturer in the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol. He works on the environmental history of early modern England, has published articles on flooding, water management, and disasters, and together with Sara Miglietti edited the collection of essays *Governing the Environment in the Early Modern World: Theory and Practice* (2017).

**Tom Nichols** is Reader in Art History at the University of Glasgow. He has published several monographs exploring questions of artistic identity in Venetian Renaissance art including, most recently, *Giorgione’s Ambiguity* (2020). He also works on the visual imagery of poverty and social outsiders in the early modern centuries (see, for example, *The Art of Poverty: Irony and Ideal in Sixteenth-Century Beggar Imagery* (2007)) and is currently developing a new research project devoted to a comparison of peasant art with images of peasants across the early modern centuries.

**Hayri Gökşin Özkoray** is Assistant Professor of Early Modern History at Aix-Marseille University and member of the COST Action ‘Worlds of Related Coercions in Work’

(WORCK). He is the author of a thesis on slavery in the Ottoman Empire (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries). His current research endeavours focus on Ottoman labour history (fifteenth to seventeenth centuries), with a particular interest in forms of coercion in construction, mining, salt extraction, and rice cultivation in Istanbul, the Balkans, and Anatolia.

**Tawny Paul**, previously Lecturer in Early Modern Social and Economic History at the University of Exeter, is now Director of Public History at University of California, Los Angeles. She is the author of numerous articles and book chapters on imprisonment for debt, middle class finances and risk, and downward social mobility. Her first book, *The Poverty of Disaster*, came out in 2019, examining the role that debt insecurity played in British society and how it shaped the identity of the middle class.

**Sara Pinto** holds a PhD in History and specialises in early modern maritime history and trade networks. She is a researcher and integrated member of the Transdisciplinary Research Centre on Culture, Space and Memory, a Research unit based in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Porto. She is author and co-author of published books on *Misericórdias* history. Currently a post-doctoral fellow at University of Porto studying the local credit market and the role of charity houses in microcredit, Sara is also editorial assistant of the Portuguese Environmental History Network.

**Carole Rawcliffe** is Professor Emeritus of Medieval History at the University of East Anglia. She has published widely on medicine, health, disease, and urban life in later medieval and sixteenth-century England, with a focus on hospitals, almshouses, and the impact of religious belief on the development of charitable foundations. Her most recent book is a collection of essays, edited with Clare Weedon, on *Policing the Urban Environment in Premodern Europe* (2019).

**Rosa Salzberg** is Associate Professor of Italian Renaissance History at the University of Warwick. She is the author of *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (2014), which was awarded the Gladys Krieble Delmas Prize from the Renaissance Society of America. Her research focuses on the history of mobility, migration, and communication in Venice and northern Italian cities in the early modern period.

**Kevin Siena** is Professor of History at Trent University. He specialises in medical history during the British long eighteenth century, exploring class, welfare, sexuality, and the urban poor through such diseases as syphilis, plague, and typhus. His books include *Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor: London's 'Foul Wards' 1600–1800* (2004), and most recently *Rotten Bodies: Class and Contagion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2019).

**Alannah Tomkins** is a Professor of Social History at Keele University, with research interests in the English poor laws, medical professionals, and the history of nursing before Nightingale. Her most recent book, *Medical Misadventure in an Age of Professionalisation 1780–1890*, was published in 2017. She is the principal investigator on the AHRC-funded project ‘Small Bills and Petty Finance: co-creating the history of the old poor law’.



# INTRODUCTION

## Poverty in early modern history

*David Hitchcock and Julia McClure*

Far from being timeless universals, the concept of poverty and the composition of ‘the poor’ are continuously made and remade by every society. How a society creates poverty or ameliorates it, and how it treats the poor and explains their presence, are each and all reflections of the politics and values of that society. This volume examines the history of poverty during the early modern period and, in doing so, not only deepens understandings of poverty but also offers critical reflections on the changes taking place between approximately 1450 and 1800. The early modern period is often conceptualised as a ‘developmental’ span of history, a time somehow caught between the ostensible twilight of the Middle Ages and the dawn of modernity. These two transitional moments were themselves characterised by changes in the nature of poverty and in attitudes towards the poor. How poverty changed over time forms a kind of historical index of social priorities; by studying it we can understand wider societal transformations, such as the reorganisation of economic conditions and social relations often characterised as the transition to capitalism, and the political and ideological projects of state and empire formation. Poverty is not now, nor has it ever been, solely an economic condition. Reducing poverty to its economic indicators is itself the result of a historical process, and this narrowing has helped produce a social and economic system which values only certain types of production and consumption. As a basic element of human experience, poverty is also a social and political construct which reflects the values of human societies, past and present. Poverty is also a dynamic and not a static concept. The valorisation, condemnation, amelioration, and even eradication of poverty have all been central to numerous religious and political projects, and poverty has been the focal point of many laws and institutions. There is a great deal to cover in any history of poverty. Such a history must address a vast landscape which encompasses spaces that stretch from the hyperlocal, such as poor bodies—where malnourishment, disability, and hard labour map out experiences intrinsic to inequality—to global spaces such as transregional empires, where entirely new forms of poverty were created in the crucibles of conflict and expansion.

The historian Bronislaw Geremek noted how in all the past societies he studied, but also in twentieth-century Europe, ‘a peculiar harmony exists between the degrading material and physical effect of poverty, on the one hand, and the negative or pejorative place assigned to

poverty in the opinion of society' on the other.<sup>1</sup> In the European past this strange harmony was generally—but not exclusively—connected to Christian theology, which naturalised the place of the poor in society.<sup>2</sup> This volume focuses on Europe c. 1450–1800, but it also signposts the ways in which poverty regimes became globalised. The volume brings together different examples of early modern poverty history that offer new insights into the many meanings of this complicated concept; it examines poverty's causes; the lived experiences of the poor; the different ways in which societies conceptualised poverty; and those individuals and institutions that cared for, controlled, and criminalised the poor. The volume's purpose is to contribute to our understanding of societal transformations across the early modern period, and to help place poverty and the poor at the heart of historical accounts of these transformations.

The early modern period offers a window onto understandings of poverty very different from those which have become dominant in modernity. Towards the end of Second World War, in 1944, the allied nations met at the Mount Washington Hotel in the heart of the United States for the Bretton Woods Conference. Bretton Woods heralded the start of a new global order and established financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Along with the United Nations (UN), founded in 1945, these institutions have established a monopoly on modern definitions of poverty. The World Bank defines poverty in monetary terms and distinguishes between absolute poverty, where income is below the level needed for basic subsistence, and relative poverty, where income is well below the median level in any given country.<sup>3</sup> This definition of absolute and relative poverty was developed by the sociologist Peter Townsend. The economist and philosopher Amartyr Sen also developed a 'capabilities' approach to poverty in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Sen's capabilities approach, organised around 'beings', such as being well-fed, and 'doings', such as voting or caring for a child, influenced the development of the multi-dimensional poverty index presently in use. This index now incorporates health, education, and living standards as additional indicators of poverty across the globe. The UN development programmes have made use of the multi-dimensional poverty index since 2010, and the UN's definition of poverty now includes 'access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making'.<sup>5</sup> Both the monetary and the capability measurements of poverty are based upon empirical metrics related to material conditions. Poverty is seen to be the problem itself, rather than the worst symptom of an intricate and interconnected matrix of problems. This empirical approach to poverty is important for understanding the scale of its global economic dimensions and it is useful in order to identify people in material need around the world, but the approach also flattens the socio-cultural complexities of poverty and obscures its political dimensions. This flattening of poverty to a matter of economics is itself a product of history, and its representation by international institutions is not ideologically neutral. Poverty as mere economics is instead a concept entangled with the political economy of liberalism, where poverty is necessarily defined in relation to the values and measurements of capitalist

1 Bronislaw Geremek, *Poverty: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 6.

2 Mark R. Cohen, 'Introduction: Poverty and Charity in Past Times', in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35:3 (2005), 348.

3 See the World Bank website: [www.worldbank.org/en/topic/measuringpoverty](http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/measuringpoverty)

4 Amartyr Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishers, 1985).

5 <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/poverty/>

economics. For instance, people are considered poor if they lack consumer power, and poverty rates across countries with radically different economic contexts are measured in terms of purchase-power parity (PPP). Moreover, capitalism, rather than being analysed as a possible cause of poverty, is often platformed by the post-Bretton Woods financial institutions as offering the only tenable solutions to it. The shallowness of these interpretations, particularly in the field of economics and in the social sciences, has obscured the many uncomfortable indicators which show that processes and priorities often heralded as solutions to poverty can cause it instead.

As Quinn Slobodian has shown, the new international institutions that emerged in the mid-twentieth century were firmly embedded in the ideology of neoliberalism and reflected neoliberal beliefs about the functions of capitalism and the market.<sup>6</sup> As these international institutions monopolise internationally recognised definitions of poverty, it follows that, generally speaking, current understandings of poverty at the level of policy have been shaped by neoliberal beliefs. This consensus has only strengthened since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This event was once seen as the end of a titanic ideological and geopolitical battle between state-controlled communism and free-market capitalism, heralded thereafter by Francis Fukuyama as the ‘the end of history’.<sup>7</sup> But history rather obviously continued, and the lengthening of time has cast shadows over both classical Marxist and liberal understandings of the relationship between capitalism and poverty. Today’s trajectories of increased inequality throughout both the Global North and the Global South—and the continued prevalence of abject poverty in material-rich societies—call into question liberal and neoliberal beliefs about the relationship between poverty and economic growth and the relationship between states and markets. At this crossroads we urgently require a new understanding of the meanings and causes of poverty that is rooted in poverty’s history.

Many theories of social change, including several fully fledged philosophical traditions, have already been rooted in a certain understanding of poverty and in an explanation of the historical factors that have driven its increase or decrease. Many histories and theories of poverty also have ideological implications. Some have seen poverty as natural, linked to the relative scarcity or abundance of natural resources and the presence or absence of ‘natural disasters’, while others have described poverty as man-made—the result of human choices, social structures, and modes of economic practice.

In the nineteenth century Karl Marx (1818–1883) provided perhaps the most enduring and influential theory of historical change. From an orthodox Marxist perspective, material conditions are the drivers of history. For Marx himself, the early modern period was characterised by the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Poverty in these periods of transition was necessarily conditioned by—functionally a product of—profound material transformations. The transition from feudalism to capitalism was also characterised by the transition to a wage labour economy which placed workers at the mercy of those who owned the means of production, which we can generally take to mean owning property, particularly land. The capitalisation of agriculture in enclosed fields and fens placed former freeholders at the mercy of landlords as new tenants, and former tenants at the mercy of wages as landless labourers. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly have surveyed how this transition increased poverty in the sixteenth century, albeit at different rates for different parts of

6 Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard, 2018).

7 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

Europe.<sup>8</sup> Writing in 1979, Lis and Soly also chided historians for their predisposition to reduce poverty to a phenomenon ‘inherent in a society of scarcity which was characterised by technological backwardness and a tendency towards uncontrolled demographic growth’. They noted this account was ‘merely description; it certainly cannot be deemed an explanation’ and castigated what they saw as a ‘deterministic’ and ‘neo-Malthusian’ model of poverty in society—a model ultimately guilty of ‘historicist fatalism’.<sup>9</sup> Marx had also explained that the next significant transition, to industrial capitalism, was taking place around him in the nineteenth century, and that this transition was also creating a newer and more radical class of poor worker: the proletariat. This was a transition away from, in E.A. Wrigley’s words, an ‘organic economy’ that had been powered by natural forces like wind, water, and muscle towards a mechanised economy powered by inorganic means.<sup>10</sup> Karl Polanyi (1886–1964) famously labelled this second economic upheaval as ‘The Great Transformation’.<sup>11</sup> Polanyi described this as a period of the ‘pauperisation’ of the working classes as market processes were increasingly ‘disembedded’ from social institutions, leading to the collapse of the moral economy that had previously placed strict limitations on the levels of poverty which societies were meant to reflect.

Histories of poverty and theories of historical transformation are clearly and inextricably linked, but the prevailing interpretation of these links continuously changes. Twenty-two years after the death of Marx, Max Weber composed his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (written between 1904 and 1905 and first translated into English in 1930, by Talcott Parsons). Weber went against the orthodox Marxist perspective that material conditions were the ultimate drivers of change and instead made a compelling argument for the importance of religious beliefs in a wide range of human affairs. Weber posited that Protestant religious beliefs engendered certain societal norms about the importance of labour productivity that facilitated the transition to capitalism and the primacy of economic growth. For Weber this shift was characterised by a rejection of medieval beliefs about the sacredness of poverty, embodied by the Franciscan Order, and tighter control of the poor through institutions which were increasingly secular, rational, and bureaucratic. Marxist theories of material conditions and Weberian theories of religion and rationality have had perhaps the biggest collective impact on historical understandings of poverty. Understanding these conceptual foundations is important for orientating oneself in the historiography of poverty. But in the period this volume concentrates on, what changed? What were the actual historical characteristics of poverty that demarcated the two great transformations that both Marx and Weber did so much to articulate?

### **The first transformation: the end of the Middle Ages**

Historians have debated the causes for the sixteenth-century transformation of society and changing attitudes towards poverty and the poor. Marxist understandings of poverty fell out of fashion in mainstream historiography after the 1970s, but the global turn has renewed interest in the history of capitalism, and we may see renewed interest in heterodox Marxism

8 Catharina Lis, and Hugo Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-industrial Europe* (Harvester Press, 1979).

9 Lis and Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism*, xii, and xiv.

10 E. A. Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9–15.

11 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times* (Boston, 2001, 2nd edn).

cascade to the early modern period. The last decades have also seen slow and long-overdue attempts to move away from Weberian explanatory paradigms, which had emphasised the importance of the Protestant Reformation. Historians have increasingly recognised both that the origins of changing early modern ideas about poverty can be traced into pre-Reformation Europe and that institutional changes developed apace in both the Protestant and the Catholic worlds. Robert Jütte summarised that ‘recent studies on poor relief emphasize that the actual welfare policies of European cities cut across religious boundaries and followed a pattern which was adjusted to local circumstances’.<sup>12</sup> Cultural and intellectual historians have looked to other sources to explain changes in ideas and attitudes. Natalie Zemon-Davis offered a way to move past the confessional divide by emphasising the importance of humanism in changing attitudes towards poverty—an intellectual trend common in both Protestant and Catholic countries.<sup>13</sup> Religion was important to the transformations in understandings of poverty taking place in the sixteenth century, but these were informed by cultures of humanism and forms of early modern state-making that enable us to see commonalities across early modern Europe.

Poverty became a concept on the move in the sixteenth century. Changes to the concept of poverty signified and reflected the deeper structural transformations of both the material basis and the cultural fabric of society; namely of its intellectual, religious, and moral landscapes. Uncoincidentally, sixteenth-century European societies experienced the birth pangs of capitalism at the same time as they began to build their global empires. The resulting movement of goods and peoples changed the composition of societies around the world forever. As the world underwent these transformations, which, it should be noted, were experienced differently in different places and at different times, the place of the poor in society, and how poverty was conceptualised, valued, and controlled, also changed.

Generally speaking, Christian beliefs governed understandings of poverty in medieval Europe. These Christian beliefs naturalised poverty in society, following the religion’s founder’s statement that the ‘the poor are always with you’ (Matthew 26:11).<sup>14</sup> In medieval Christendom, poverty was seen as a sacred condition.<sup>15</sup> According to Christian beliefs, during the incarnation the founder of Christianity was thought to have walked the earth as a poor man, establishing the idea that the poor were spiritually pure and closer to God. The poor had a mystique in Christianity as followers believed that God was somehow hidden in the ranks of the poor and that giving to them was the akin to giving to God. In the Gospels, Christ also explained the importance of giving to strangers, stating that ‘whenever you give unto the least of my brothers you give unto me’ (Matthew 25:40–45). The poor were thus the social glue of Christian society. In the sixteenth century, the poor continued to be central to the structures of social order, but how that social order was actually constituted began to change.

12 Robert Jütte, ‘Poor Relief and Social Discipline in Sixteenth Century Europe’, *European Studies Review* 11:1 (1981), 25–52, 26.

13 Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘Poor Relief, Humanism and Heresy: The Case of Lyon’, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 5 (1968) 217–275 (reprinted in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1975).

14 Mark R. Cohen, ‘Introduction: Poverty and Charity in Past Times’, in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35:3 (2005), 347–360, 348.

15 Historians often refer to Christian Europe, but in the Middle Ages Christianity transcended what are now thought of as the boundaries of Europe, and at times during the Middle Ages Islam was the dominant religion in both Spain and in other parts of Europe.

While poverty in the Middle Ages was seen as a sacred condition, in the sixteenth century it was increasingly viewed as a social problem. Some precursors to this new attitude are visible in the preceding period; for instance, the poor were a common, and commonly remarked on, sight on the streets of medieval towns. And a new religious movement, the mendicant Orders, emerged in the thirteenth century to draw attention to the poor, with itinerant mendicants acting as a reminder of the spiritual importance of poverty in public settings. By the sixteenth century, the poor were increasingly viewed as a social threat, a source of crime and contagion. There were many precedents for these ideas in medieval society, but they gained new traction in the sixteenth century as civic authorities began to design new social policies to differentiate between groups of poor and to regulate their daily lives, including when, where, and how they could receive resources. The new policies for welfare provision were not designed to oppose or replace charity, but rather to leverage the distribution of goods as a way of restricting the movement of the poor and to subject them to closer scrutiny, in particular by investigating their capacity to work. The steady desacralisation of poverty is accordingly a common theme in early modern poverty studies.

While the spiritual meaning of poverty inherited from medieval society was certainly not erased, the sixteenth-century poor were increasingly scrutinised and differentiated. This differentiation has often been generalised as a split between the ‘deserving’ poor and the ‘undeserving’, but actual differentiations were often more finely stratified and strategic. The differentiations followed proto-racial and gendered fault lines and were focused upon anyone seen to be non-compliant with social and moral norms.<sup>16</sup> These categorisations of the poor targeted minorities and those who were on the fringes of communities. For example, across the early modern world Roma communities were often identified as vagrants and conscripted into penal labour. Those on the edge of society were classed as immoral, socially deviant, and possibly criminal. Poor people who did not comply with new regulations or social control measures were increasingly subject to criminal investigation and sentenced to forced labour, with their work used to build the states and empires which had denied them belonging. In this way the categorisation and policing of the poor contributed to the formation of early modern states and empires, to their processes of inclusion and exclusion, and to their access to human capital.

### **The second transformation: on the threshold of modernity**

By the beginning of the seventeenth century most European states possessed some form of centrally legislated welfare regime, and virtually every city-state administered to broadly similar programmes of urban relief. These systems of welfare, work provision, and discipline still did not replace traditional forms of charity and almsgiving; rather they sat alongside confessional and private charitable initiatives and were often administered to by the same class of individuals. A shared theological and political inheritance meant that European states tended to provide similar relief measures and to articulate the same conceptual distinctions between those who did and did not deserve assistance. Across early modern Europe, poor relief systems generally provided some mixture of the following: casual payments in cash or in kind, on a regular schedule and for considerable durations; subsidised wage labour and the provision of local care work; subsidised housing; occasional sundries such as food and

16 See Julia McClure, ‘Poverty and Race’, in Nicholas Terpstra (ed), *The Cultural History of Poverty, 1450–1650* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2021).

clothing; and medical care in moments of distress or across a longer chronic span.<sup>17</sup> These initiatives were further bolstered by both private charities, which tended to take the form of periodic doles, and, increasingly in eighteenth century, education, and by customary access to dwindling supplies of common land and to the resources of forests and fenlands. While this provision sounds extensive, most of it was seen as a refuge of last resort by both ‘ratepayers’ (members of local elites and the middling classes across Europe who paid the taxes which funded welfare) and by the poor themselves, and it was tightly controlled by local officials, with relief subject to an intricate ‘calculus of eligibility’ based on industry, deference to authority, and community belonging, among other characteristics.<sup>18</sup> The second great transitional moment in the early modern history of poverty was not about the wholesale transformation of these relief systems, or even about how eligibility for assistance was determined, as these remained largely stable across the period. It was instead about the fundamental redefinition of poverty as a ‘problem’ of economic life and of statecraft, a problem that needed to be solved. Ending poverty became an Enlightenment project.

By the seventeenth century, ‘it was widely accepted that personal morality was a public matter’ across Europe, that those found lacking tended to be poorer due to their laziness, and that this unrepentantly idle population was an acute ‘drain’ on the state.<sup>19</sup> As a result, many initiatives that were aimed at the promotion of industry and preservation of order focused on categories of the poor, whose personal moral reformation and eventual transformation into industrious labourers increasingly stood as a symbol of the general strengthening of the state.<sup>20</sup> Paul Slack, an influential historian of early modern English poverty, characterised this ideological shift as one which moved from ‘Reformation to Improvement’ in his 1994–1995 Ford lectures, and Slack placed the seventeenth century at the heart of his account.<sup>21</sup> Across this century, ‘projects’ designed to ‘improve’ matters as diverse as crop yields, crown tax revenues, and childhood education became the definitive register of social, economic, and even imperial and military policy, not simply in England but in France, the Dutch Republic, and later in Italian republics and imperial Spain too.<sup>22</sup>

17 On housing see Joanne McEwan and Pamela Sharpe (eds), *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1600–1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); on medical care see Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (eds), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Protestant Europe, 1500–1700* (London: Routledge, 1997).

18 The phrase ‘calculus of eligibility’ comes from Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c. 1550–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 379.

19 Michael Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c. 1550–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101. And see Gregory King’s backdated 1688 calculations of the national wealth for an example of how the poor ‘decreased the wealth’ of the kingdom.

20 See chapters two and three of Joyce Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

21 Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (New York: The Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1999).

22 See the introduction to Koji Yamamoto, *Taming Capitalism Before Its Triumph: Public Service, Distrust, and ‘Projecting’ in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Paul Slack, *The Invention of Improvement: Information and Material Progress in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). A truly global history of early modern improvement remains to be written but articles are starting to excavate its outlines: see Michael B. Guenther, ‘Northern Designs: British Science, Imperialism, and Improvement at the Dawn of the Anthropocene’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 46 (2017), 123–145; and Karly S. Kehoe, ‘From the Caribbean to the Scottish Highlands: Charitable Enterprise in the Age of Improvement, c.1750 to c.1820’, *Rural History* 27:1 (2016), 37–59.

Poverty was subject to this self-same logic of improvement, and it became commonplace to conceive of it as a social problem requiring state intervention rather than as a question of individuated charity and morality.

This shift is typified by the title of an anonymous 1681 pamphlet: *Proposals for the Better Management of the Affairs of the Poor*.<sup>23</sup> As an expression, ‘better management’ borrowed heavily from the lexicon of early modern beekeeping, itself an increasingly common metaphor for the management of society, where the task of any keeper was best expressed as ‘managing the hive’.<sup>24</sup> It is instructive that the seal of John Cary’s 1696 Bristol workhouse for the poor incorporated a beehive as its principal symbol.<sup>25</sup> ‘Better management’ of the poor meant increasing their productivity—their capacity to labour—in order to improve both the overall economic output, and in due course the military capacities, of the state. Readers will hopefully notice one glaring absence in this schematic to grow state power: advocacy for any ‘cultural improvement’ of the poor, for their transformation into a kind of ‘citizenry’, generally imagined as broadly informed but also broadly compliant. Cultural betterment emerges at a somewhat later date in the vast early modern discourse of improvement, and it tended to be associated with the most radical proposals to end poverty for good.<sup>26</sup> A combination of limited education, frequent institutionalisation, and constant forced labour was generally favoured as the most appropriate means of pauper transformation, and Enlightenment thinkers argued the state should favour all three. In 1789 Jeremy Bentham thought that the ‘expence which it can be necessary or useful for the nation to bestow upon the education of individuals’, even in Revolutionary France, was generally ‘but a small concern’, and that the state should fund ‘only so much as concerns the providing instruction for the poor’ which should be ‘considered as part of the provision made in a remote way for protection against malefactors’.<sup>27</sup> Historians tend to identify the eventual resurgence of education as the preferred vehicle of social and moral betterment of the poor with key religious and philanthropic figures such as Hannah More (1745–1833) and Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845), and with the Sunday Schools movement.<sup>28</sup>

By the time Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* was published in 1776, poverty was widely described using terms of reference that economists today would recognise. Smith had more than a century of writings on political economy (also called ‘political arithmetick’) bolstering his exploration of the ‘natural laws’ of human economic activity, with previous thinkers such as Bernard Mandeville having already posited an intimate relationship between self-interested individuals, the desire for luxury and material comforts, the utility of a class of

23 Anonymous, *Proposals for the Better Management of the Affairs of the Poor* (London, 1681).

24 For instance, John Worlidge, *The Compleat Bee-master; Or, A Discourse of Bees Shewing the Best Way of Improving Them* (London, 1695), A5v.

25 Slack, *Invention of Improvement*, 207.

26 See the introduction to Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (London: Profile Books, 2004); and for a detailed study of selected eighteenth-century proposals, see Sarah Lloyd, *Charity and Poverty in England, c. 1680–1820: Wild and Visionary Schemes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

27 Item 29 in Jeremy Bentham, ‘Short Views of Economy for the Use of the French Nation but Not Unapplicable to the English (1789)’ in Philip Schofield, Catherine Pease-Watkin, and Cyprian Blamires (eds), *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: Rights, Representation, and Reform: Nonsense upon Stilts and Other Writings on the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

28 Connections between More, Fry, education, poverty, and empire are all featured prominently in Hilary Carey, *Empire of Hell: Religion and the Campaign to End Convict Transportation in the British Empire, 1788–1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), and it is connected usefully to More’s anti-slavery circle, 78–80.



poor workers, and the economic activities of a commercial society.<sup>29</sup> Smith cemented this relationship built on self-interest in his doctrine of market forces, but reversed the moral sentiment with respect to the utility of the poor, in one of the most oft-quoted passages in *Wealth Of Nations*:

No society can surely be flourishing and happy of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloath, and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, cloathed and lodged.<sup>30</sup>

This passage exposes a contradiction at the heart of Enlightenment political economy: poverty might have been written about in a naturalistic framework, governed increasingly by ‘laws’, but it was *understood* fundamentally in moral terms, at least until (arguably, including) the population theories of Thomas Malthus which became popular in England and elsewhere at the end of the century.<sup>31</sup> Even Smith, the posthumously adopted father of capitalism’s ‘laws’, took pains to describe poverty’s amelioration as an index of social betterment, and as a principle of basic equity.

### The structure of this volume

This volume is divided into four sections, looking at structures, impacts, institutions, and connections. ‘Structures’ focuses on the broad contexts of poverty in Europe and in connected regions, and it aims to introduce readers to the central elements of poverty as it was experienced and debated across the period c. 1450–1800. Its five chapters focus on charity and the rise of the state, economics, poverty and the environment, vagrancy, and empire, and the section is designed both to lay out a broad sweep of poverty history and historiography, and to introduce new trends. The second section, on ‘Impacts’, focuses on a range of ways that we can assess the material, cultural, and biological impact of poverty in history. The section has five chapters, covering disease, visual representations, material culture, soldiering, and the poverty of debt, and each chapter addresses the key theme of poverty’s ‘(in)visibility’ in distinctive ways. The third section, on ‘Institutions’, holds four chapters on key institutional focal points, which include Portuguese *misericordias*, workhouses across England and Europe, the social and architectural context of hospitals, and the plethora of late medieval institutions. This section interrogates the traditional ‘confessional division’ of relief in Protestant and Catholic states by deploying a range of evidence that cuts across both state archives and religious lines. The final section, ‘Connections’, offers four chapters that focus on histories which cut across important regions of Europe and beyond. Chapters on the architectural history of poverty in Italy and Iberia, labour and taxation in the Ottoman Empire, the wandering and sick poor in the Atlantic world, and regenerative

29 See Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (London, 1714 and 1723). Mandeville is first famously credited with developing the doctrine of laissez-faire in 1924 by F. B. Kaye: see Renee Prendergast, ‘Bernard Mandeville and the Doctrine of Laissez-Faire’, *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics* 9:1 (2016), 101–123, cf. 102.

30 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations, Volume I: Of the Causes of Improvement in the Productive Powers of Labour* (London, 1776), chapters 8, 36.

31 Stedman Jones sees the *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) as the conservative and ‘anti-utopian’ bulwark which held back further welfare provision for almost a century: see Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty?* 3.

social projects in Scotland all highlight the powerful effects of geography and of regional cultures of relief and incorporation. Each of the eighteen chapters is generally self-contained and both specialist and generalist readers will be able to use individual chapters for their own work without recourse to other parts of the volume.

The volume is divided thematically in this way for two principal reasons. Firstly, thematic organisation highlights how extensive the overlap and cross-fertilisation are between different subject areas in poverty history: for instance, charitable and punitive institutions consciously imitated each other across Europe and often beyond its shores, and vagrancy legislation developed similarly. Secondly, each of the eighteen chapters offers a distinctive chronology of change over time specific to its contexts, and by devoting each chapter to themes rather than to periods, the volume's structure encourages readers to engage with each different but important chronological emphasis in turn. Readers will therefore encounter divergent emphases across the chapters: the early sixteenth century emerges as a watershed moment in the histories of vagrancy, institutional development, and confessional division, but it is the seventeenth century which proves pivotal in histories of poverty and disease, and the eighteenth century which emerges as central in accounts of the rise of social regeneration projects. These different chronological emphases are further informed by regional differentiation, and none are intended as the final word on when a particularly important shift began or ended in Europe, or as the only available map to crucial historical developments. It is also important to note that, while this volume amounts to a history of poverty centered around Europe, it makes no claims to comprehensively cover European geography or practices. On balance the bulk of the evidence stems from well-documented societies in Western and Central Europe, and while departures into Ottoman and Atlantic welfare history is hopefully a welcome addition for readers, most chapters tend to base their claims on evidence from a handful of European states: France, England, Scotland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal feature prominently.

### **Towards a new definition of poverty**

This volume proposes a working definition of poverty in history, a definition which has crystallised from decades of extant scholarship. Although it has since languished in more recent scholarship in favour of manifold studies of rational consumerism, basic social and economic equity has long been a central facet of economic scholarship. In 1890, in his *Principles of Economics*, Alfred Marshall asked whether humanity would ever 'outgrow the belief that poverty is necessary'.<sup>32</sup> 'Broadly speaking', wrote the distinguished economist, 'the destruction of the poor is their poverty, and the study of the causes of poverty is the study of the causes of the degradation of a large part of mankind'. In 1958, John Kenneth Galbraith wrote that any affluent society that is also 'both compassionate and rational' would provide to *all* of its inhabitants 'the minimum income essential for decency and comfort', which would in turn ensure that 'poverty was not self-perpetuating'.<sup>33</sup> While there is generally a scholarly consensus that reducing, even eradicating, poverty ought to be the principal goal of social policy-making, the political will to achieve that goal remains largely absent.

32 Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics: An Introductory Volume* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1890), 4 for both quotations.

33 John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (New York: Mariner, 1958), 209.

How poverty is managed—how its effects are distributed unevenly across genders, races, and regions—amounts to what Peter Brown has described as the ‘aesthetic of society’. For Brown, this aesthetic ‘amounted to a sharp sense of what constituted a good society and what constituted an ugly society, namely, one that neglected the poor or treated them inappropriately’.<sup>34</sup> This aesthetic has been personalised in other publications. In *The Needs of Strangers*, Michael Ignatieff personalises poverty and assistance when he imagines the modern welfare state from the point of view of standing in a post office line. People in that line along with him, when they cash their pension cheques, receive some portion of his income through the ‘numberless capillaries’ of the state. ‘They are dependent on the state, not upon me’, he writes, ‘and we are both glad of it’.<sup>35</sup> Of course, the point is that pensioners *are* dependent on Ignatieff in a way, particularly on him paying his taxes. But Ignatieff cannot know what the pensioners in the post office actually need, only what he thinks they ought to need, and ‘there are few presumptions in human relations more dangerous than the idea that one knows what another human being needs better than they do themselves’.<sup>36</sup> Conversely, ‘there are people who have had to survive on so little for so long their needs have withered away to barest necessity’, he writes, and, if politics would aim to improve their lives, it must articulate a fuller range of the needs of the poorest even if they themselves cannot. We might say that the whole history of poverty—including the sharp disagreements over what it is and whether those who suffered it publicly were ‘genuinely poor’—has been in practice a history of how this dangerous presumption about the needs of others has operated in human affairs.

A concept at once thoroughly relative and urgently real, in this volume we define poverty as a range of dearths, absences, and inequalities that deprive a human being of the essential ability to live to their full social potential without assistance; a condition that effectively lowers the ceiling of the possible in a person’s life. We can accordingly speak of a poverty of **rights** (as in servitude or slavery), a poverty of **want** (most often the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, and clothing), or a poverty of **opportunity** (lack of access to education, negligible prospects of social mobility across generations). Poverty has many facets: it can be defined economically in terms of a lack of wealth or income, materially in terms of bodily needs for food, shelter, and clothing and susceptibility to illness, disability, and death. It can be defined socially in terms of the need for human relations, community acceptance, and respect. It can be defined politically in terms of representation, rights, and access to law and lawmakers, and to justice. It can also be defined culturally in terms of access to music and the arts and by the opportunities to produce and inform culture in each society. Any robust definition of poverty must find ways to bridge these different dimensions and to consider the politics of the production of understandings of poverty. History can help to form this bridge by providing insights into how transformations of poverty were embedded within broader processes of change over time. Poverty signifies both a material condition and a concept, a discursive process. It is both base and superstructure. It is separate from, but related to, the category of ‘the poor’, a term used to describe people in a state of poverty. Like poverty itself, the poor have been

34 Peter Brown, ‘Remembering the Poor and the Aesthetic of Society’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35: 3 (2005), 513–522, quote on 515.

35 Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (London: Picador, 1984), 10.

36 *Ibid.*, 11.

invented and reinvented by historical processes. Poverty is thus necessarily both a social phenomenon, and an economic one.

In 2018, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, visited the United Kingdom and concluded that, amidst a society clearly capable of providing for all of its inhabitants, but refusing to do so: ‘poverty is a political choice’.<sup>37</sup> From this perspective, poverty is an ongoing violation of socio-economic rights.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, all these definitions of poverty come down to what we value, and what we think of as the meaning and condition of being human, of living out a basically dignified life. A ‘dignified life’ is itself a concept on the move as we write history in an age of climate collapse. We need to think about poverty now not just as something we ourselves might experience, or that we might see others suffering through, but also in terms of our planet and its ecosystems, the corrosion of which already impoverishes us all, again at an uneven pace. In this new context we must reassess our mutual horizon of needs and wants, which has for so long been governed by the values of a capitalist system predicated on endless economic growth. The worst poverty in our future might well be a poverty of imagination; if we fail to re-imagine our societies and their economic foundations, we are all the poorer for it. To prevent this future poverty, we should look to the past and learn from the complexities of historical poverty and from the lived experiences of the poor.

37 The phrase appears in a statement released on 16 November 2018 by the Special Rapporteur, available here: [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM\\_GB\\_16Nov2018.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf). Also see: Philip Alston, et al. ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on his visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland’, United Nations General Assembly, A/HRC/41/39/Add.1 (23 April 2019), <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1>

38 See Julia McClure, ‘The Legal Construction of Poverty: Examining Historic Tensions Between Property Rights and Subsistence Rights’, in Anna Chadwick and Suzanne Egan (eds), *Poverty and Human Rights* (Cheltenham: Elgar Press, 2021).



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

**PART I**

**Structures**



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# 1

## THE REGULATION OF CHARITY AND THE RISE OF THE STATE

*Joanna Innes*

From the fifteenth century, states increasingly emerged in Europe as promulgators of wide-ranging laws regulating the treatment of the poor – not just the idle, vagabond poor, who had earlier attracted their attention, but also those poor people (especially the old, young, and sick and sometimes the willing but workless) who were deemed to be proper objects of benevolent giving: of charity. The emergence of states in this arena has been suggested to mark a step along the path towards the modern welfare state. Thus, Robert Jütte, in his 1994 overview of the then-current state of research on early modern poverty and deviance, identified ‘the growth and development of the welfare state’ as a framing narrative, although for his part he was keen to complicate that story by stressing the importance of ‘decentralized’ alongside ‘centralized’ relief, and of informal community action and choices made by the poor in shaping that ‘growth and development’.<sup>1</sup>

Modern states do much more than just regulate welfare provision: they also organise and help to finance it. But even in the present day, they operate alongside other players within what have been termed ‘mixed economies of welfare’. These other players include international organisations; local authorities who bear some responsibility for distributing welfare benefits, and in that context perhaps run their own variations on central policies; religious organisations; organised charities; and private donors – including people who give coins to beggars on the street. Individuals provide for their own support, by saving or investing in pension and health schemes; families support family members; neighbours may support each other. Well-being is shaped by the condition of the natural, built, and disease environment, by employment opportunities, and by the prevalence of violence: state policies often attempt to grapple with these conditioning circumstances, although they are never wholly controllable.

Even allowing for these limits to state power, nonetheless in the modern developed world states play an important role in allocating benefits and shaping needs. The late twentieth century saw a drive to reduce their role; the phrase ‘mixed economy of welfare’ was first popularised in that context to denote a direction in which many policy-makers hoped to travel – and in which

1 Robert Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.



indeed they have travelled, although, by historic standards, the welfare role of modern states remains large.<sup>2</sup> Historians have adopted the phrase less programmatically, to denote a field of enquiry: how exactly do states figure alongside other welfare providers?<sup>3</sup> It was not perhaps inevitable that European states should have come to play as large a welfare role as they do. One can imagine alternative histories in which more power and responsibility ended up with churches, with substantially autonomous local bodies or with private providers. The fact that states took on and developed their role in this sphere represents a choice made between forking paths. In Europe, the early modern period saw this path embarked upon.

Still, an animating idea of this chapter is that, even if choices made in this period were fateful, early modern states were yet different from modern states in key respects. Even as they assumed a legislative role, they were slow to acquire an administrative one, and this partly reflected their limited capacities. Early modern states had relatively few officials at their beck and call; central-state budgets were relatively small, and no more than trivial fractions of these were allocated to welfare programmes. Although states began prescribing good practice in relation to relieving the poor (sometimes to quite a high level of abstraction), they largely depended on others – churches, local communities, sponsors of institutions – to act on their prescriptions. This was not just a matter of whistling in the wind: they often achieved at least part of what they sought, because others thought it useful to collaborate to solve problems. That being so, states increasingly moved to try to direct innovation in welfare provision. Some states developed relatively robust hierarchies of state officials, giving them more power to drive change. All the same, compliance – initially sometimes transient, specific to the moment – was persistently slow and patchy. As we shall see, even the relatively powerful and effective English state recognised limits to its power and, once it had a tax-financed poor-relief system up and running across the kingdom (by the end of the seventeenth century), tailored the further development of this system to what local communities proved willing to accept.

Before states tried to regulate charitable practice, the Catholic Church, through its corpus of law and its hierarchical structures, had made a similar attempt (and there were also Jewish and Islamic laws relating to charity). The rise of states, even when this took place against the background of the Reformation, did not automatically entail the sweeping aside of religious laws and power systems: they sometimes thereafter operated side by side. State–church co-existence in regulating and providing charity was sometimes explicitly negotiated, sometimes improvised. Sometimes states chose to act through church machinery; sometimes confessional groups colonised supposedly public systems. All over Europe, even when states aimed to work through lay officials in implementing their policies, the parish was often the base unit, and in that context, *de facto* if not *de jure*, clerics maintained a role in deciding how things got done. Because churches were important players, changes in relationships between states and churches often provoked re-thinking about how relief should be regulated, or what form it should take – not only at the Reformation but thereafter: for example, in Austria in the 1780s and in France following the Revolution.

If states emerged initially as regulators – and not necessarily as the only high-order regulators – then it is important that we position them in relation to the bodies that they sought to regulate. Some of these were also regulators, and not direct service providers: thus, town councils often emerged, in the course of the middle ages, as regulators of provision within

2 For example, Norman Johnson, *Mixed Economies of Welfare: A Comparative Perspective* (London: Prentice Hall Europe, 1999).

3 The phrase seems to have caught on in social policy analysis in the 1980s; historians took it up the mid-1990s.

their walls, as well as occasional initiators and directors of relief in times of crisis. One step closer to actual provision, we find further rule-bound bodies, such as hospitals and confraternities – themselves sometimes linked into rule-bound religious orders – and also parishes, historically constituted as cells within larger, rule-bound church systems. Territorially extensive state regulation often rested upon layer after layer of common practice, all the way down to the level of the neighbourhood. Surviving records do not always reveal how charity-dispensing institutions worked on the ground, and we might suspect that some operated in quite ad hoc ways. But surviving late-medieval records show us that some had elaborate procedures. Even the distribution of occasional doles might entail the compiling of lists and issuing of chits. Organised charity implies rules, and states emerged as regulators in a landscape already densely occupied by multiple forms of organised charity.

This chapter charts the rise of states as would-be regulators of welfare provision across three periods, but throughout emphasises their structural weakness, and the many forms of collaboration into which they entered and upon which they depended for such efficacy as they had.<sup>4</sup>

### **The medieval inheritance**

In principle, a history of institutional responses to poverty could devote much attention to large framing policies, concerning the allocation and transfer of land and other property, terms of work, and family obligations. This chapter follows the common course in focusing more narrowly on organisations and practices that were coloured by religious values enjoining mutual support and care for the less fortunate. Such values characterised Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. In Christianity, they came under the general umbrella of ‘charity’.<sup>5</sup> These traditions all to some extent hallowed poverty, especially voluntary poverty; in Christianity, this cast of mind spurred philosophical and legal attention to what constituted ownership, as well as the development of several kinds of stylised poor lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> The suffusion of charitable activity with pious ideas created at a minimum symbolic and discursive links between organised charity and other forms of religious institution, whatever material form these linkages took in practice. A different spur to the development of organised responses to poverty was provided by perceptions of the poor as a threat. In practice, charitable and disciplinary impulses were often intertwined, as those who wanted to dispense charity worried about how to target it, and what to do with poor deemed unworthy to receive it.<sup>7</sup>

4 I trace developments into the nineteenth century in ‘Church, state and voluntarism in European welfare’, in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes eds, *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: From the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 15–65.

5 There exists no inclusive early modern survey. Mark R. Cohen ed., ‘Poverty and charity: Judaism, Christianity and Islam’, special issue of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35, 2005, 347–522, focuses on Christian activity in the early modern period. For broad surveys, see J.A. Self, ‘Charity and Poor Law in the High Middle Ages: Jewish and Christian Approaches’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2013) and Michael Bonner, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer eds, *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

6 Brian Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); Constance H. Berman, ‘Monastic and mendicant communities’, in Carole Lansing and Edward D. English eds, *Companion to the Medieval World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 231–256.

7 Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, emphasises traditions of discrimination.

Any search for the ‘origins’ of charitable institutions tends to end up with arguments about definition, but the origins of the hospital have been traced to the fifth century.<sup>8</sup> Whereas hospitals embodied a vertical form of charity, more horizontal confraternities arguably had roots in the same period, but are more confidently identified from the eighth century.<sup>9</sup> Each had Jewish and Islamic counterparts. All such institutions proliferated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and weathered the challenging conditions of the fourteenth century. Their heartland was southern Europe, but ultimately they were replicated also across the north and east. By the fifteenth century they were ubiquitous in towns and widely if unevenly dispersed across the countryside. Hospitals could be found from Norway to Dalmatia; there were confraternities affiliated to religious orders in Gaelic Ireland, and orthodox confraternities in eastern Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Hospitals and confraternities were distinct but overlapping forms. Hospitals took material form in buildings. They offered short- or long-term shelter to a variety of disadvantaged groups, including widows and the sick. They were supposed both to reflect pious aspirations and to encourage piety among their inmates. There were variations by region. It has been suggested that ‘almshouses’, a form of hospital that offered the elderly housing where they could live independently, were a north-west European peculiarity.<sup>11</sup> Confraternities were above all networks of people who combined religious observance with mutual support. They were particularly concerned with organising the burials of members and praying for them when dead, but they might offer other support to members or charity to others. Some confraternities ran hospitals, and this is said to have been a speciality of Bohemian and Polish confraternities.<sup>12</sup>

The more generic parish also had the potential to provide a vehicle for charitable activity, and synagogues and mosques sometimes played related roles. Parishes were established across most of Christian Europe by the end of the thirteenth century (although were not general until the fifteenth century in reconquered Andalusia).<sup>13</sup> It is often said that the nature and extent of their charitable activity deserves more study. Not only casual alms but also more significant gifts, including testamentary gifts, could be channelled through the parish. In cities especially, by the fifteenth century, payments to the poor were sometimes made at

8 Peregrine Horden, ‘The earliest hospitals in Byzantium, Western Europe, and Islam’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35, 2005, 361–389.

9 Konrad Eisenbichler ed., *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

10 Eljas Orrman, ‘Church and society’ in Knut Helle ed., *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia, Vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 460; Jadranka Neralic, ‘Late medieval hospitals in Dalmatia’, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 115, 2007, 217–289; chapters by Lennon and Burdzy in Eisenbichler, *Companion*.

11 James Brodman, ‘Hospitals in the middle ages’, in Lansing and English, *Companion to the Medieval World*, 257–275; Martin Scheutz ed., *Europäisches Spitalwesen: institutionelle Fürsorge in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit/Hospitals and institutional care in medieval and early modern Europe* (Vienna: R. Oldenbourg, 2008).

Marco van Leeuwen, E. van Nederveen Meerkerk and L. Heerma van Voss, ‘Provisions for the elderly in North-Western Europe: an international comparison of almshouses, sixteenth–twentieth centuries’, *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 62, 2014, 1–16.

12 Beata Wojciechowska, ‘The development of confraternities in Central Europe in the middle ages and early modern period’, in Eisenbichler, *Companion*, 68.

13 Beat Kümin, ‘The English parish in European perspective’, in K. French, G. Gibbs, and B. Kümin eds, *The Parish in English Life 1400–1600* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 15–32; Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Roubi, *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Seville* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 54–56.

'pay tables' near the church. This practice is documented in Italian, and even in Livonian (Baltic) towns, but not in Paris until later.<sup>14</sup>

Other forms of religious community, including rule-bound religious orders, often looked to gifts from the laity for their own support, and were expected to redistribute some of these gifts to the poor – either to local residents, or to travellers – and perhaps also to provide them with hospitality, such that a hospital could be an adjunct of a such an institution. Mendicant orders also begged to support themselves, and some religious orders had charity to others as their *raison d'être*. Historians now stress that these, like other religious communities, were very ready to discriminate between more and less deserving poor.<sup>15</sup>

How commonly and in what ways did any among this range of institutions govern their own practices by ordinances or regulations? Of course, our ability to judge this is complicated by the vagaries of record survival. 'Rules' were intrinsic to the very idea of the 'regular' religious order, and may also have been or become common for confraternities.<sup>16</sup> Not all hospitals had foundation deeds setting out the intentions of their donors, or rules to govern their functioning, but many did.<sup>17</sup> Brian Pullan suggests that travelling preachers were able to instigate new foundations of confraternities and hospitals quickly because their standardised rules and statutes could easily be transplanted.<sup>18</sup> Provisions in such documents ranged from the generic to the highly procedurally specific. Parishes' generic purposes were always determined at higher levels, by popes, councils, synods, bishops, etc, via various forms of church order, though inasmuch as the parish provided a vehicle for particular local projects – side chapels, chantries, charitable gifts – these might be recorded.<sup>19</sup>

Surviving records attest to watchful supervision and account keeping, at least in larger institutions. Decision-making about who received welfare was sometimes delegated to special officers. Residential institutions clearly at least sometimes and perhaps normally kept

14 Christopher Dyer, 'Poverty and its relief in late medieval England', *Past and Present*, 216, 2012, 41–78; John Henderson, 'The parish and the poor in Florence at the time of the Black Death: the case of S. Frediano', *Continuity and Change*, 3, 1988, 247–272; Anu Mänd, 'Hospitals and tables for the poor in medieval Livonia', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 115, 2007, 234–270; Sharon Farmer, 'From personal charity to centralised poor relief: the evolution of responses to the poor in Paris, c. 1250–1600', in Anne M. Scott ed., *Experiences of Charity 1250–1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 22.

15 Berman, 'Monastic and mendicant communities'; Neil S. Rushton, 'The forms and functions of monastic poor relief in late medieval and early sixteenth-century England' in Scott, *Experiences of Charity*, 105–127; Francesco Tommasi, 'The female hospitallers of San Bevignate at Perugia: 1325–c.1507', in Anthony Luttrell and Helen J. Nicholson eds, *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 233–258.

16 Anna Esposito, 'Statuti confraternali italiani del tardo Medioevo: aspetti religiosi e comportamentali' and Thomas Frank, 'Rechtsgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zu spätmittelalterlichen Bruderschaftsstatuten in Deutschland und Italien', in Gisela Drossbach ed., *Von der Ordnung zur Norm: Statuten in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 281–325.

17 As Brodman, 'Hospitals' notes (257 and n. 1) it was with the study of such documents that the historical study of hospitals began. For a recent discussion, Gisela Drossbach, 'Hospitalstatuten im Spiegel von Norm und Wirklichkeit' in Gisela Drossbach ed., *Hospitäler in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit. Frankreich, Deutschland und Italien. Eine vergleichende Geschichte* (Munich: de Gruyter, 2007), 41–54.

18 Brian Pullan, 'Catholics and the poor in early modern Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26, 1976, 23; see also David d'Andrea, 'Charity and the Reformation in Italy: the case of Treviso', in Thomas Max Safley ed., *The Reformation of Charity: The Secular and the Religious in Early Modern Poor Relief* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 41–42.

19 Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, 70–79; Clive Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls: The Parish of All Saints' Bristol on the Eve of the Reformation* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018), an exceptionally full archive.

individual-level records, although these only occasionally survive. Insofar as demand even for occasional doles might be greater than supply, recipients were sometimes identified in advance, lists of the selected beneficiaries kept, and chits issued to them.<sup>20</sup> At parish level, Beat Kumin reports that in England, exceptionally, parochial churchwardens' accounts survive in some number from the fourteenth century. Nonetheless, Marjorie McIntosh, who has inspected these closely when looking for evidence of alms distribution, has found almost no alms lists: not, she thinks, because alms were not given, but because they were given ad hoc – although of course it is also possible that lists of approved recipients, though a feature of administrative process, were not preserved alongside accounts.<sup>21</sup>

State, urban, and other local authorities played a relatively greater part in dealing with poor people seen as able-bodied but idle than with those reckoned to have a better claim on charity. Such people might commit crimes such as theft and arson, or disorders more peculiar to themselves, such as begging with menaces, invading property to sleep rough, or just moving around in groups, clogging highways and streets, overstraining local resources, and spreading fear and perhaps disease. Historians often suggest that economic change, and in some contexts war, increased mobility among the poor from the thirteenth through to the sixteenth century, something evidenced by a rising tide of complaint, as well as by the enactment of penal ordinances. One aim of laws against the mobile poor was to husband resources for the local poor; to that end, incomers might be brutally handled, although sometimes alternative provision was made to house and feed travellers.<sup>22</sup>

By whom and in what ways were institutions which undertook charitable work externally regulated? The ecclesiastical apparatus, the supervisory organs of religious orders, parliaments and monarchs, and territorial lords, towns, and parishes all potentially had a role to play, alongside private donors, whose families or agents might maintain an interest. External sanction was often associated with the initial establishment of institutions. External bodies might maintain oversight, problem-solve in the face of specific difficulties or complaints, or take remedial or disciplinary action.<sup>23</sup> Having recognised charity as a religious duty, the church was inescapably involved: canon lawyers interpreted the duty; there were some relevant papal ordinances (such as Clement V's 1311 *Quia contingit*, 'The foundation of the hospital law of the later middle ages') and – proceeding down the church hierarchy – synodal

20 Philip L. Kintner, 'Welfare, reformation and dearth at Memmingen', 68; Nicholas Eckstein, "'Con buona affettione'", 53–61, both in Saffley ed., *Reformation of Charity*.

21 Beat Kumin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise & Reformation of the English Parish c. 1400–1560*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot and Brookfield: Scolar Press, 1996); Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England 1350–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 101–112.

22 Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Orig. French 1978), Part 4, 191–293 has been influential. Elaine Clark, 'Institutional and legal responses to begging in late medieval England', *Social Science History*, 26, 2002, 447–473. For spikes in concern see Trevor Dean ed., *The Towns of Italy in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 172–174; Claire Dickstein-Bernard, 'Paupérisme et secours aux pauvres à Bruxelles au XVe siècle', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 55, 1977, 390–415.

23 Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, ch. 6 on state interventions; Carole Rawcliffe, 'A crisis of confidence? Parliament and the demand for hospital reform in early-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century England', *Parliamentary History*, 35, 2016, 85–110; Susan Broomhall, 'The politics of charitable men: governing poverty in sixteenth-century Paris', in Anne M. Scott ed., *Experiences of Poverty in Late Medieval and Early Modern England and France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 137–139. For urban initiatives see for example Kintner, 'Welfare, reformation', 64–68.

decrees and episcopal orders. In principle, the church was prepared to enforce the duty of charity both on religious institutions and on parishes.<sup>24</sup>

In practice, hierarchies of authority were messy. States might act to correct deficiencies in ecclesiastical oversight; church officers often possessed territorial as well as ecclesiastical powers; parishes were cells in a hierarchical religious system but also provided a framework for community action. Almost any authority might be called upon to problem-solve or might see a chance to extend their own power by problem-solving. As local administrative units – parishes, towns – developed their general administrative competence, the trend was for them to play more of a role (perhaps because, insofar as they endured over time, they could pick up reins that others dropped).<sup>25</sup> Sponsors of institutions did not necessarily welcome petty interference, however, and might seek protection from very high levels in the form of privilege in order to achieve that: so Portuguese *misericórdia* (charitable fraternities founded in the wake of the 1492 decree expelling the Jews, partly in response to that event), obtained authorisation directly from the king, exempting them from local interference.<sup>26</sup> None of this was ever necessarily sorted out once and for all; instead, there were often on-going jurisdictional conflicts. Adam Davis writes

in the high and later Middle Ages, the creation of new religious institutions, such as hospital chapels or cemeteries, often sparked jurisdictional conflicts, with the holders of traditional parish rights feeling threatened. This could lead, as it did in thirteenth-century Cologne, to the plundering and burning of a hospital, with the hospital's poor and sick residents 'suffering from a power-struggle between religious and/or civic authorities.'<sup>27</sup>

## **Humanism and reformation**

The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw a variety of attempts to impose order on this complex institutional landscape. Ordinances issuing from kings, diets, parliaments, and towns, and from Catholic councils and Protestant authorities (themselves sometimes lay, sometimes clerical) drew distinctions between different categories of poor (the impotent, the able but workless, and sturdy vagabonds) and outlined how each category should be dealt with: through whose agency and by what measures. Towns sometimes asserted control over local charitable institutions (as some had done at various points during the previous three centuries); in newly Protestant towns, asserting control over the church or churches might be the larger project from which asserting control over charity followed. In some towns, efforts were made to consolidate

24 Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, 75–89; Jean Imbert, *Les hôpitaux en droit canonique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1947) – a classic study, now challenged in some respects; see also Sethina Watson, *On Hospitals: Welfare, Law, and Christianity in Western Europe, 400–1320* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Noël Coulet, *Les visites pastorales* (Louvain: Brepols, 1977).

25 Tiffany Ziegler, *Medieval Healthcare and the Rise of Charitable Institutions: The History of the Municipal Hospital* (Cham: Palgrave Pivot, 2018); Brodman, 'Hospitals', 263–264; Neralic, 'Late medieval hospitals';

26 Laurinda Abreu, *The Political and Social Dynamics of Poverty, Poor Relief and Health Care in Early-Modern Portugal* (London: Routledge, 2016); Isabel Dos Guimarães Sá, 'Managing social inequality: Confraternal charity in Portugal and its overseas colonies', *Social Science History*, 41, 2017, 121–135

27 Adam Davis, 'The social and religious meanings of charity in medieval Europe', *History Compass* 12, 2014, 944.

control over a whole range of charitable institutions, or to channel monetary resources into a common charity pot.<sup>28</sup>

These initiatives paved the way for a long line of subsequent, more and less successful attempts to coordinate provision for the poor. But they did not achieve all that they attempted. The very fact that so many different bodies issued such orders underlines the fact that, although general ordinances were clearly in fashion, sources of authority remained multiple, and potentially competing. Although general in form, some of these ordinances were designed primarily to deal with immediate, pressing crises, with challenges presented by dearth and disease, that set the poor into motion and put existing systems under pressure: they provided a template for action that might be referred to again, but were not coupled with immediate or sustained efforts to institutionalise new practices. Even when the intention was to institutionalise new practices, this did not always work, not least because the new measures often met with active or passive resistance from those charged with implementing them (as well as from some of the poor whom they targeted). Post-Reformation religious pluralism, where it endured, complicated matters further by encouraging parallel provision. Finally, if the key challenges were to mobilise resources sufficient to meet the scale of demand and at the same time to match provision to differing needs, then it was potentially counterproductive to insist that all provision emanate from the same source and conform to the same rules; there might be more to be gained from letting enthusiasts mobilise such human and material resources as they could, and experiment with new charitable practices. Accordingly, rationalisation was never, or never more than briefly, complete; it was always being disrupted by new initiatives, which in due course might be assigned their own place in a fresh rationalising drive.

Of course, the fashion for rationalisation is of historical interest in and of itself. Calls for 'reform', which preceded but then informed the drive for religious reformation, stimulated attacks on lax and corrupt practices, but also did their bit to inspire systematic efforts to recast governance.<sup>29</sup> Rationalisation also drew some energy from changing attitudes to law and legislation, and to a developing fashion for issuing what were sometimes termed 'police' orders, promoting the welfare of the polity.<sup>30</sup> These developments built on older church and lay interest in the Roman model of systematic law-making; the Reformation's weakening of the would-be-universal church further spurred the development of state-led alternatives.<sup>31</sup> Some historians suggest that lower social groups (craftsmen, peasants) were behind some calls

28 Bronislaw Geremek, *Poverty: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), ch. 4, 142–177, for the 1520s as turning point. Safley, *Reformation of Charity*, brings together the fruits of more recent local research.

29 Guido Ruggiero, *The Renaissance in Italy: A Social and Cultural History of the Rinascimento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), chs. 9–10; Jeffrey P. Jaynes, "'Ordo et libertas': Church Discipline and the Makers of Church Order in Sixteenth-Century North Germany" (unpublished PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 1993).

30 General: Antonio Padoa Schioppa ed., *Legislation and Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Police: Karl Härter, 'Security and "Gute policey" in early modern Europe: strategies, instruments, policies', *Historical Social Research*, 35, 2010, 41–66. Paolo Napoli, *Naissance de la police moderne: Pouvoir, norms, société* (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 2003) contrasts German and French understandings of police. Toomas Kotkas, *Royal Police Ordinances in Early Modern Sweden: The Emergence of Voluntaristic Understanding of Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). In relation to poverty more specifically: Alexander Wagner, 'Armenfürsorge in (Rechts)-theorie und Rechtsordnungen der frühen Neuzeit' in Sebastian Schmidt and Jens Aspelmeier eds, *Norm und Praxis der Armenfürsorge in Spätmittelalter und früherer Neuzeit* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006).

31 Gerald Strauss, *Law, Resistance, and the State: The Opposition to Roman Law in Reformation Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

for systematic action, because they did not believe that endemic problems were likely to be solved by ad hoc tinkering.<sup>32</sup> Inasmuch as the drive for 'order' sprang from multiple sources, ironically it too provided a site for competition.<sup>33</sup>

One important feature of articulated rules was that they provided models for imitation. Imitation could operate vertically – so for example German town councils developed local versions of imperial ordinances – or alternatively laterally, as one town obtained a copy of another's rules. We noted in the last section that mechanism of diffusion operated to spread the founding rules of charities. Imitation did not always entail slavish copying. A study of the German imperial city of Memmingen shows how closely and critically proposed regulations were debated. Rules that had been adopted by other cities could provide a bank of ideas, suggesting a way forward when local discussion hit a brick wall; yet, in the end, schemes had to be judged as compatible with local power structures and circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

Much ink has been spilt on the question of whether and in what ways developments in the period differed between Catholic and Protestant states. Some stories about difference have been effectively knocked on the head. It is now generally accepted that both Catholic and Protestant princely and town governments made efforts to regulate provision for the poor; that Catholic charity had traditionally been discriminating; and that 'secular' authorities continued to frame their activities in religious alongside other terms.<sup>35</sup> It is furthermore clear that Catholics as well as Protestants showed interest in setting the poor to work: sustained efforts to employ the able-bodied poor in public workhouses were made in Paris in the later sixteenth century, and it would be surprising if physically able orphans and widows in 'hospitals' elsewhere were not expected to work at, for example, spinning or other simple tasks commonly performed within homes (mending, laundry), even if this was not advertised as a key feature of their mission.<sup>36</sup>

Still, there surely were differences, greater and lesser, between the experiences of Catholic and Protestant states, and between different Catholic and different Protestant *milieux*. Insofar as Protestant rulers suppressed religious orders and lay confraternities, and disallowed some existing charitable practices as 'superstitious' (because, for example, they required prayers for the soul of the donor), the institutional matrix of charity in their states might undergo radical and abrupt change. Some institutions which had served a mix of religious and other purposes managed to recast themselves and survive; others did not. Marjorie

32 Peter Blickle, Stephen Ellis, and Eva Österberg, 'The commons and the state: representation, influence and the legislative process' in Peter Blickle ed., *Resistance, Representation and Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 115–153.

33 A theme favoured especially by historians of France: Daniel Hickey, *Local Hospitals in Ancien Regime France: Rationalization, Resistance, Renewal 1530–1789* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Tim McHugh, *Hospital Politics in Seventeenth-Century France: The Crown, Urban elites and the Poor* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). See also Charles H. Parker, 'Calvinism and poor relief in Reformation Holland', 114–119, in Safley, *Reformation of Charity*, 107–120.

34 Work by Peer Friess, summarised in Kintner, 'Welfare, reformation', 70–71. Nicholas Terpstra, *Cultures of Charity: Women, Politics and the Reform of Poor Relief in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 106–119, charts imitation and difference across northern Italian cities.

35 Pullan, 'Catholics and the poor' was an influential revisionist study; he revisited these themes in 'Catholics, Protestants and the poor in early modern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35, 2005, 441–456. The issue was a central concern for Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance*. For more recent interpretation and research, Safley, *Reformation of Charity*.

36 Broomhall, 'Politics of charitable men', 145–155.



McIntosh suggests that, of 600 hospitals operating in England in the 1520s, a third disappeared in ensuing decades.<sup>37</sup> In Protestant Germany, some confraternities were relatively quickly wound up, while others survived for much longer (in Lübeck as late as 1846).<sup>38</sup> Confiscated resources were sometimes redirected to new charitable purposes, but this was not always the case.<sup>39</sup> Some older forms of charity were disfavoured by Protestants, such as refuges for penitent prostitutes, which were argued to reward immorality.<sup>40</sup>

In the course of an epic battle for hearts and minds, there was reason for the Catholic Church to reassert its role as a sponsor of charity (and of course there was plenty of confusion on the ground to sort out). In 1563, the Council of Trent, among other decrees ‘concerning reformation’, reaffirmed the hospital ordinance, *Quia contingit* (they also ordered that those who wandered about as vagrants should not be ordained). This ecclesiastical initiative spurred action in some states.<sup>41</sup> In due course, some new charity-focused religious orders were founded to harness the zealous pious to labour charitably, including female ‘congregations’ dedicated to work in hospitals and schools.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, among Protestants charitable initiative did not pass entirely to the state. On the contrary: in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia, ‘church ordinances’ played an important role in directing what charity should be given by whom to whom. Some of these ‘church ordinances’ were issued by monarchs, as heads of churches, choosing to work through ecclesiastical machinery, and some by town governing bodies, but others were endogenous to churches, and were echoed in the same communion across state boundaries.<sup>43</sup> Calvinists, meanwhile, strove to defend a space for autonomous church action in relation to charity, sometimes coupling this with prioritising assistance for the ‘saved’. They thought that lay ‘deacons’ should be the prime agents of charity.<sup>44</sup> In the Netherlands, early tolerance for religious pluralism was associated with a degree of what would later be called ‘pillarisation’ in relief regimes: in a given place, the majority sect might assume responsibility for distributing ‘public’ relief, but other sects did what they could to maintain parallel systems.<sup>45</sup> Indeed,

37 McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, 124–127; for Scotland John McCallum, “‘Nurseries of the poor’: Hospitals and almshouses in early modern Scotland”, *Journal of Social History*, 48, (2014), 427–449.

38 Timothy G. Fehler, ‘Refashioning poor relief in early modern Emden’ in Safley, *Reformation of Charity*, 97–99, 106.

39 Pullan, ‘Catholics, Protestants’, 449.

40 Pullan, ‘Catholics, Protestants’, 451–456.

41 Linda Martz, *Poverty and Welfare in Habsburg Spain: The Example of Toledo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), ch. 2. For the survival of religious mendicancy, see Martin Elbel, ‘Early modern mendicancy: Franciscan practice in Bohemian lands’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 29, 2018, 39–56.

42 Pullan, ‘Catholics and the poor’, 22–23, 30–33; Alison Forrestal, *Vincent de Paul, the Lazarist Mission, and French Catholic Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); S.E. Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France: The Early History of the Daughters of Charity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), and also her chapter, ‘Motivations for Charity in Early Modern France’, in Safley, *Reformation of Charity*, 176–192.

43 ‘Church ordinances’, in Hans Joachim Hillebrand ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, online version, 2005). See two case studies in Safley, *Reformation of Charity*: Fehler, ‘Refashioning poor relief’, 94–97; Kotkas, *Royal Police Ordinances*, 129, notes that the Swedish Church order of 1686 included an entire chapter on hospitals.

44 Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Droz, 1984). See, for example, Robert M. Kingdon, ‘Calvin’s ideas about the diaconate: social or theological in origin’, in Carter Lindberg ed., *Piety, Politics and Ethics* (Kirkville: Sixteenth-Century Journal Publishers, 1984). For local studies, see Fehler, ‘Refashioning poor relief’, 101–104; Parker, ‘Calvinism and poor relief’, 114–119.

45 Genji Yasuhira, ‘Confessional coexistence and perceptions of the “public”: Catholics’ agency in negotiations on poverty and charity in Utrecht, 1620s–1670s’, *Low Countries Historical Review*, 132, 2017, 3–24.