

Poverty, savings banks **and the development** **of self-help,** **c. 1775-1834**

By David Filtness, Queens' College, University of Cambridge

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Summary

This thesis examines the development of self-help as an ideology and as an organisational principle for poor relief and how it came to dominate discussions over poverty and crucially inform the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The continuity of self-help with earlier discussions and reviews of the poor laws is explored and emphasised, as is the continuing moral core of poor relief despite historians' frequent ascription of de-moralisation to the new political economy that came to heavily influence poor law discourse.

The thesis analyses the evolution of the poor laws and of attitudes to poverty and begins with an examination of a divergence in the discourse relating to poverty between a more formal and centralised institutional approach and a more devolved, permissive institutional approach; the latter gained precedence due to its closer proximity to a dominant mode of thinking (as analysed by A. W. Coats) about the poor that held self-betterment as offering a solution to poverty most appropriate to the governance structures of the day. The greater role given to self-betterment and the natural affinity of more devolved schemes with a macroeconomic political economy framework pushed the evolution of poor law discourse along a route of emphasising individual probity and agency over the established model of community cohesion.

Parallel to this divergence was the development of distinct intellectual traditions within poor law discourse between the older natural-law tradition of a natural right to subsistence and a new ideology of the natural law of markets and of competition for resources. By analysis of the thought of writers such as Thomas Robert Malthus, Jeremy Bentham, Patrick Colquhoun, David Davies, Frederick Morton Eden, Edmund Burke, etc., it is shown that this newer conception of natural law, encompassing a less interventionist and more macroeconomic approach (involving the deployment of statistics and abstraction, as explored by S. Sherman), proved more compatible with the devolved, more permissive institutional approach and so came to take precedence over that of the natural right to subsistence, which was associated more with traditional paternalism and community-level responses to scarcity and poverty. The natural law tradition spoke more to the abstract conceptions of poverty associated at this time with the greater deployment of statistics and tables in the analysis of social problems. It is demonstrated how writers of the period utilised utilitarian conceptions and nascent political economic arguments to portray the greater good of the country as a whole as possessed of greater moral and economic authority than more traditional 'moral economy' responses, and that vocabularies of virtue and duty were used to illustrate and justify such a shift. This set the scene for self-betterment as an economic strategy to evolve into an ideology of self-help which was developed as the panacea of poverty and the answer to the social dislocations caused by industrialisation.

Self-help came to the fore as an approach that was more politically resonant in the era of revolutionary France and which enabled a more permissive institutional apparatus to be advanced. These institutions, such as allotments, savings banks and schools of industry, came to prominence in the period 1816-1820 and pertained more to macroeconomic understandings of poverty. They were expounded using a theme, that of 'character', that described poverty as the result of personal

imprudence and hence as treatable, the most appropriate level for this treatment being that of the individual. The reforms of 1818-19 and the debates that informed them are given an extended analysis as they formed the crucial juncture in the cohering of self-help as an ideology and a paradigmatic shift in poor law policy towards greater discrimination underwritten by self-help. Finally, the 1834 Poor law Reform Act is explained in terms of the ideological development of arguments of self-help and character towards a more punitive and disciplinarian platform for enforcing self-help, with the cost-efficient and systematic institutional approach of Bentham adapted to the purpose.

Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted or will be submitting for a degree or diploma or other qualification at any other University.

I wish to record my thanks to Dr Craig Muldrew, who has provided support, encouragement and excellent advice during the research and writing of this dissertation, and to all those at the History Faculty of the University of Cambridge and the Economic and Social Research Council, without whose support and funding this dissertation would not have been produced. I would also wish to express my gratitude to all those at Queens' College, Cambridge for all their support and help during the research and writing process.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, for their unwavering support, and secondly to Hayley Sae Kang, to Chihiro Watanabe and to James Brown for all their encouragement, and to my nephew Oscar – sorry there is not more material in it about anthropomorphic trains!

Statement of word length:

This dissertation does not exceed the University of Cambridge Faculty of History stipulated word limit for a PhD dissertation of 80,000 words.

Signed:

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DATE:

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Introduction

*At some given period...it would be reasonable and just to treat such as become chargeable from neglecting or refusing to contribute towards their support as 'culpable poor'. In proportion as the morals and sentiments of the labouring classes were improved and enlightened, so would the fear of disgrace operate as a punishment; and there would be, were the plan of benefit societies generally established, a fair criterion to distinguish between the meritorious and culpable poor, which does not at present exist, and which thereby renders the existing laws on that head nugatory.*¹

The issue of self-help is one that has captured the modern imagination. Redolent of more modern political creeds such as Thatcherism and conservative austerity rhetoric, it is perhaps principally recognised as one of the era-defining ideas of the Nineteenth Century, quintessentially Victorian with its laissez-faire overtones and replete with connotations of urban slums and associational culture. The classic text of the Victorian period on this theme is Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help, with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (1859), a didactic work designed to encourage ordinary working men to help themselves and, in the process, to improve society. Smiles (1802-1904), a biographer and writer, had been editor of the radical *Leeds Times* 1838-42 and first secretary of the Leeds Household Suffrage Association. A keen exponent of radical politics at this point in his life he nevertheless remained cautious of Chartism and came to see individual improvement as more important than structural change as the surest means of social progress. *Self-Help* was based on one (in March 1845) of a series of lectures delivered to a mutual improvement society in Leeds, with significant changes to reflect the calmer and more optimistic political mood of the 1850s. The book sold 20,000 copies in its first year, prompting Smiles to develop his ideas in subsequent texts such as *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875), *Duty* (1880) and *Life and Labour* (1887).² For Smiles, self-help developed 'character', the attainment and deployment of a variety of desirable traits such as thrift, independence and self-reliance, which would enable workingmen to improve their own condition. This collective of individuated endeavour would in turn lead to societal development and progress

¹ J. C. Curwen, *Hints on the economy of feeding stock and bettering the condition of the poor* (London, 1808), pp. 362-3.

² For biographical detail on Smiles, see the entry by H. C. G. Matthew in the *Oxford dictionary of national biography*. For the development of his politics and its influence on his thinking see A. Tyrrell, "Class consciousness in early Victorian Britain: Samuel Smiles, Leeds politics, and the self-help creed", *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 9, No. 2 (May, 1970), pp. 102-125.

for character was “the true antiseptic of society” and the most promising and inclusive response to social and industrial change.³ As Smiles saw it, the “spirit of self-help” is:

The root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength. Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates. Whatever is done for men or classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves; and where men are subjected to over-guidance and over-government, the inevitable tendency is to render them comparatively helpless.⁴

The nexus of self-help and character was frequently deployed in tandem with a further strand of desiderata in mid-Victorian social commentaries, conduct books and societal analysis namely that of manliness which had replaced politeness as “a marker of social and political virtue”, and which “might be described as the moral rearmament of the Victorian governing classes”.⁵ Manliness “spoke to the virtues of rugged individualism”, was “socially inclusive” and formed “a guide to life, deeply rooted in popular culture”. The cultivation of manliness, encompassing the qualities of energy, virility, strength, decisiveness, courage and endurance, was directed towards the desired outcome of forming an “independent man”, who was “beholden to no one” and who “ruled his own household” - as Charles Kingsley pithily put it: “All true manhood consists in the defiance of circumstances”.⁶ Yet this independence was the embodiment of character, realised through self-help. This triumvirate of moral habitudes overlap with and reinforce each other, providing the ideal of Victorian masculinity and, by extension, citizenship.⁷

However, this ideal was the end product of a half century of development of the underlying ideas involved, centred on self-reliance and the virtue of activity to achieve such ends. As John Tosh suggests, “viewed as the ‘common sense’ of social relations, manliness comprised a set of core values which had characterised masculine culture long before the Victorians “whilst “Evangelical writers in the earlier part of the century had aimed to moralise manliness as a vital part of their programme of social regeneration”, striving to establish character - following the dictates of one’s own conscience rather than external pressures.⁸ The systematic analysis of the development and genealogy of the interrelated themes of manliness, character and self-help in the earlier period has

³ Smiles, cited in T. Travers, *Samuel Smiles and the Victorian work ethic* (New York, 1987), p. 256.

⁴ S. Smiles, *Self-Help: With illustrations of conduct and perseverance* (2nd edn., London, 1866), p. 13, cited in G. Finlayson, *Citizen, state and social welfare in Britain 1830-1990* (Oxford, 1994).

⁵ J. Tosh, “Gentlemanly politeness and manly simplicity in Victorian England”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 12 (2002), pp. 455-72, pp. 456-57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 460; Kingsley cited in *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁷ For more on the theme of Victorian manliness see the essays by S. Collini and B. Hilton in L. Goldman (ed.), *The Blind Victorian: Henry Fawcett and British liberalism* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁸ Tosh, *Gentlemanly Politeness*, p. 459, 467.

yet to be conducted, and this thesis will not attempt that sizable task. Rather, the thesis will aim to explore the development of an ideology of self-help and the development of character within the confines of discourse on the poor laws, as the discussion of poverty and how to alleviate it cuts to the core of social and political analysis of the period and illuminates from within many of the ongoing concerns that contributed towards the mid-Victorian scenario. The Victorian morality of self-help should be held as the distant product of the issues analysed below, and does not provide the focus of the thesis. Rather, the central argument presented here is that self-help emerged as a coherent ideology as a means of reconciling the issue of poor relief with the political exigencies and economic and social realities at the outset of the Nineteenth Century, and that it is properly understood as a rationale for avoiding dependency and empowering improvement. The term 'self-help' itself was coined in the 1840s – in the ensuing discussion it is mainly used anachronistically to describe how the desire for self-betterment (the core of political economy) was expanded with the addition of a conception of character and its associated value-system, a sort of moral valorisation of everyman economic agency. Self-help was given energy and direction by the twin motors of political economy and evangelicalism, as the ethos of self-help was equally applicable within both these wider intellectual currencies, yet it was within the discursive crucible of poor relief that this ideology was given shape. Furthermore, this ideology of self-help formed a crucial and devastating intervention in poor law debates and was critical to how the discursive terrain of poverty was recalibrated to accommodate social and economic change. This thesis will aim to trace and analyse how the ideology of self-help emerged and how it altered the landscape of poor relief. This in turn informed later developments such as the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and latterly the Victorian ethos of self-help as outlined above.

The development of and changes in poor relief and associated discourse

The issue of poor relief was of particularly pressing concern at the end of the Eighteenth Century and beginning of the Nineteenth Century due to the dislocation of traditional social and economic norms caused by industrialisation and the occasional harsh effects of severe dearth, especially in the 1790s. Over the long Eighteenth Century several interrelated issues problematized and altered understandings of and attitudes towards the poor and poverty, entailing a shift away from established norms and structures and contributing towards the emergence of an ideology of self-help. These were: the increasing involvement of government in social policy and the changing relationship of parliament with the localities, which helped to cement a persistent question mark over whether the parish was the most appropriate organisational unit for local government, particularly with regard to the poor laws; accelerating commercial, economic and industrial change;

the emergence and recognition of the labourer as a rational individual and consumer, prompted by self-betterment – this realisation fed directly into the development of political economy. It is necessary to take a brief overview of these developments and how they impacted upon existing socioeconomic and intellectual structures in order to preface the emergence of self-help.

The established organisation of poor relief along the lines laid down by the Elizabethan statutes was firmly grounded in the local parish and rooted in a paternalist social structure based on authority and deference but this was altering as increasing economic activity on a regional and national scale placed pressure on the parochial governance structure, especially with regard to poor relief. In Elizabeth's 1572 Act the principle of compulsion in the assessment and collection of poor rates was introduced, building on medieval precedent, followed up by a 1598 Act which placed responsibility for the administration of relief on the shoulders of churchwardens and overseers of the poor in every parish, in turn rounded off by a 1601 Act which (ostensibly) closed the loophole permitting licensed begging.⁹ The Elizabethan organisation of poor relief had the inhabitants of the parish rated by wealth and their contributions redistributed to those in need, principally the ill, old or very young. Materials could be procured for the able-bodied poor to work on whilst they were in receipt of relief, which was often in kind rather than cash doles. There was a large amount of discretion in this system for the parish overseer and vestry to follow their own ethos of relief, but the poor could appeal to magistrates to intervene on their behalf if they thought themselves hard done by. Some of the tensions inherent to this system are discussed below, and have been much discussed in the historiography, yet the whole edifice was rooted on parochial control and the principle that those who could work should be put to work.¹⁰ The parochial structure of poor relief practise was further strengthened in 1662 by the Settlement Act which aimed to restrict the access of non-indigenous labourers to poor relief in parishes where they did not have an established claim to relief centred on birth or residency. As Gareth Stedman-Jones has recognised, the adoption of this additional axis of conditionality (over and above that of meriting relief by one's moral worth or mitigating life circumstances: the "deserving" poor) tacitly acknowledged the right to relief of those who could

⁹ See S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The micro-politics of poor relief in rural England c. 1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 11-12. For the medieval experience of poor relief and its linkage to Elizabethan developments see C. Dyer, "Communities and poverty before the poor law: How medieval villages treated the poor", unpublished paper given at the Roehampton University London History Research Conference 'Charity and Community', 13-15th June 2009. For an elaboration of this, see also C. Dyer, *An Age of Transition?: Economy and society in England in the later middle ages* (Oxford, 2005); C. Dyer, *Everyday life in medieval England* (London, 2000); *Making a living in the middle ages: The people of Britain 850-1520* (New Haven, 2002). For the religious dimension of poor relief in the medieval period see also R. Powell, "Material poverty, spiritual currency, and mutual dependency: Charity, the poor, and chantry colleges in late medieval England", unpublished paper given at the Roehampton University London History Research Conference 'Charity and Community', 13-15th June 2009; E. Duffy, *The stripping of the alters: Traditional religion in England, c. 1400 – c.1580* (New Haven, 1992).

¹⁰ See especially S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: a regional perspective* (Manchester, 2000).

meet the criteria of residency and eligibility by necessarily excluding those who could not; it “institutionalised the duty of relief within the parochial system”.¹¹

Later, the Workhouse Test Act of 1722 encouraged the establishment of workhouses and the ‘workhouse test’ (i.e. if offered the harsh conditions of living in a workhouse only those who were truly in need would take up the offer) as a means of limiting claims for relief and had grown out of the vogue in the late Seventeenth Century and early Eighteenth Century for large centralising institutions (such as those established by the Corporations for the Poor and exponents of mercantilism) as the surest means of both limiting the costs of poor relief and putting the poor to work so as to maximise national productive, mercantile and economic strength. According to Joyce Appleby the contribution of the dominant mode of thought at this time, mercantilism, to poor law discourse was the undermining of the by-now established paternalist model as a “change of consciousness” occurred.

Mercantilist ideology sought to coordinate the population as the source of national strength, putting it to work to maximise the prestige and power of the commonwealth. As Appleby has documented, the late Seventeenth Century saw a proliferation of pamphlets outlining schemes to put the poor to work as “the idea that only labouring people could increase wealth became a truism”. Concomitant to this was the political arithmetic assumption “that population density promoted prosperity”.¹² As the political arithmetician William Petty put it: “It may be laid down for an undeniable truth, that where all work nobody will want”, for “to what pitch of wealth and greatness might we not be brought, if one limb were not suffered to draw away the nourishment of the other, and if all members of the body politic were rendered useful to it?”¹³ The productive capacity of the poor should therefore be exploited via government-managed public works programmes (born out of proviso in the Elizabethan Poor laws that stocks should be kept for the unemployed to work up) so as to maximise the public economic benefit as understood in balance-of-trade theory, which saw the trading universe as essentially a coherent and mutually supporting community.¹⁴ The aggregate outcome of this movement and of the works of contributors such as William Petty, Edward

¹¹ G. Stedman-Jones, *An end to poverty? A historical debate* (New York, 2004), p. 75. For a long-term analysis of the poor laws see Martin, E. W. “From parish to union: Poor law administration 1601-1865”, in E. W. Martin (ed.) *Comparative development in social welfare* (London, 1972), and; L. Lees, *The solidarities of strangers: The English poor laws and the people, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998).

¹² See J. O. Appleby, *Economic thought and ideology in seventeenth-century England* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 134-140.

¹³ W. Petty, “A scheme for setting the poor to work” in his *Essays on mankind and political arithmetic*, Project Gutenberg Ebook of Essays on Mankind and Political Arithmetic (Ebook No. 5619, May 2004), pp. 43-44.

¹⁴ See Appleby, *Economic Thought*, Ch. 9.

Misselden, and Thomas Mun was a notion of “a natural order of economic relations impervious to social engineering and political interference” which “meant separating the discrete acts of producing and exchanging from the social organization in which they took place”. In short, the “principle of competitive pricing replaced custom or authoritarian direction with the market’s aggregation of individual choices”. Appleby calls this phenomenon “The Moral Economy in Retreat”.¹⁵ Although recent work by Thomas Leng and R. B. Outhwaite has called into question some of Appleby’s conclusions, it nevertheless seems clear that the mercantilist projects of poor relief did contribute both to the recognition of national markets as interfering in traditional social structures and that centralising tendencies might proffer a valuable solution to spiralling relief costs, and these themes were certainly revisited when a period of crisis again gripped the national consciousness at the end of the Eighteenth Century.¹⁶

The period from 1780 onwards witnessed the onset of a period of crisis in the arena of poor law practise. After 1780 “parishes came under increasing pressure”, with rapidly rising expenditure and unemployment contributing to the poor becoming “an increasingly dependent group” such that

By the later Eighteenth Century a ‘crisis’ in the management of poverty was developing. Nationally, poor law expenditure rocketed, as did the numbers being relieved. In 1776 the total poor relief expenditure in England and Wales was £1.5million (£0.21 per capita), by 1803 it had reached just over £4 million (£0.44 per capita), in 1813 it was £6.6 million (£0.63 per capita), and thereafter fluctuated between £5 million and £7 million (£0.44-£0.68 per capita).

The possible reasons for this situation are manifold: rapid population growth resulting in a rising dependency ratio; severe harvest failures in the 1790s and 1800s; the experience of total and global warfare with Revolutionary and then Napoleonic France 1793-1815; rapid price inflation; demobilisation, post-war depression and structural unemployment after 1815. The cumulative outcome was “a weakening of support for the old poor law” as “intellectuals, politicians and other contemporaries heatedly debated The state of the poor and possible reforms of the poor laws”.¹⁷ The experience of the poor was that “the welfare safety net was thrown ever wider, to

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 242-245. See also Ch. 3.

¹⁶ See T. Leng, “Commercial conflict and regulation in the discourse of trade in seventeenth-century England”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Dec., 2005), pp. 933-954; R. B. Outhwaite, “Dearth and government intervention in English grain markets, 1590-1700”, *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Aug., 1981), pp. 389-406. Peter Solar has made the argument that far from being a problem the English poor laws actually facilitated English economic development, see P. Solar, “Poor relief and English economic development before the industrial revolution”, *Economic History Review*, Vol. 48 (1995), pp. 17-18.

¹⁷ See S. Williams, *Poverty, gender and life-cycle under the English poor law 1760-1834* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 6, 9.

accommodate unemployed males alongside regular pensioners [the old, the young, the infirm]”, but this net was “showing signs of strain, evident in the contraction of relief in kind...in a period of worsening economic conditions and a contracting economy of makeshifts, poor relief became ever more central and essential”, yet “recognition of this poverty and its relief was contested and negotiated” both at the parochial, micro-political level and at the level of discourse.¹⁸

As suggested above, the experience of mercantilist theory and politics had contributed towards altered understandings and experiences of poor law practice but this was not the only on-going trend to have this effect in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Broadly speaking, there arose a recurrent questioning on whether enlarging the organisational sphere of responsibility for poor relief was a more appropriate or efficient way of handling the persistent problem of poor relief, and orthogonal to this line of thinking was that of the extent of involvement that the governing classes should take in the economic and moral fortunes of the labouring classes and how best any involvement was to be directed, particularly in the new and growing urban and industrial centres.¹⁹ The period from the mid-Eighteenth Century onwards witnessed some key developments in the evolution of poor relief and attitudes towards the poor, most noticeably in a greater turn towards individualism, moral propriety and a larger, more abstract and macroeconomic rendering of the problem of poverty.

As the century wore on the force of localism, for so long entrenched in social organization and institutional configurations, was beginning to unravel.²⁰ Poor law commentators such as Thomas

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 20, 165.

¹⁹ For more on the parish as the operational unit of social structuring and how this changed over time, see D. Filtner, “Divorcing charity from community – an institutional analysis of the changing situation of the poor in early modern England”, unpublished paper delivered at the Roehampton University London History Research Conference ‘Charity and Community’, 13-15th June 2009. What I have suggested is that early modern society was principally a parochial community-bound place. It is helpful to consider it as a patchwork quilt, with different size and shape patches, each with their own colouring of welfare provision, yet each nevertheless a patch. Although historians such as Steve King have stressed the disparities between regions in terms of social structure and operation of the poor laws, I believe that an emphasis on the uniformity of the administrative unit of the poor laws and the parish is more helpful. See S. King, “Making the most of opportunity: the economy of makeshifts in the early modern north” in S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.) *The poor in England 1700-1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003), also; S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: a regional perspective* (Manchester, 2000). Despite increasing conceptual tension over the limits of the moral bounds of community, Keith Snell has recognised the persistence of this equivalence of parish and community: “Community for most people was the parish in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”. K. Snell, *Parish and belonging: Community, identity, and welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 500. In this Snell is broadly correct, yet the experience of “most people” was of questionable relevance in structuring debates over the Poor laws, where the ideology of political economy and self-help came to take centre stage.

²⁰ For the obstruction that localism presented to the corporations of the poor in the 1690s and early Eighteenth Century see P. Slack, *Poverty and policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York, 1988).

Gilbert, echoing developments such as the short-lived urban corporations of the poor and proposals by commentators such as William Hay and Henry Fielding, were increasingly calling for the administrative unit of the poor laws to be scaled up from the parish, whilst enclosure acts were justified on the basis of efficiency and providing a greater good than that bounded by the immediate vicinity.²¹ The settlement laws were also a constant source of tension, with a 1795 amendment prohibiting the exclusion of the non-indigenous unless they made claim to relief. Likewise, running battles between parish vestries and magistrates (or Justices of the Peace – JPs) over the granting of relief (reaching apotheosis with the introduction of the so-called Speenhamland system in 1795) bore witness to a tension between the locality and wider areas, the overcoming of which required the imposition of stronger central authority. As David Eastwood describes it: “once the discretionary authority and personal influence of magistrates were called into question, so too were the most powerful decentralizing agencies within the English state”.²² There was, therefore, an escalating tension between the local and wider economic and social structures, a tension that can also be seen in the changing nature of government in the Eighteenth Century as it became more bureaucratic, formalised and centralised.

Although it was to a certain extent the accepted normal procedure for local experimentation to be at the forefront of social policy, this arrangement achieved a greater pre-eminence in the Eighteenth Century due to the practice of local acts informing nationally coordinated policy. The foregrounding of parliament in the process of government by the beginning of the Eighteenth Century gave greater access to legislative action and policy formation by the propertied classes, yet their eagerness to take up the opportunity of invoking parliamentary authority to make their weight felt even more in their locality in turn tied them more closely to that central authority, as John Brewer recognises: “the power that was invoked was that of central government and the effect of that invocation was often to change (at least in law) the nature of local power”.²³ As the century progressed and more and more local acts of parliament were churned out to meet the needs of those wanting to see enclosure or a workhouse in their locality, parliament began to qualitatively increase its jurisdiction. Eighteenth-century government was largely reactive in its policy agenda, responding to events and

²¹ See Gilbert’s *A plan of police; with objections stated and answered* (2nd edn., 1786 – first published 1781) and for earlier schemes the collection he published in 1787 entitled *A collection of pamphlets concerning the poor*. See also Henry Fielding’s *A proposal for making an effectual provision for the poor* (1753). For more on Gilbert and a general overview of poor law developments see J. Innes, “The state and the poor: Eighteenth-century England in European perspective”, in J. Brewer and E. Hellmuth (eds.) *Rethinking leviathan: the eighteenth-century state in Britain* (Oxford, 1999).

²² D. Eastwood, *Governing rural England: Tradition and transformation in local government 1780-1840* (Oxford, 1994).

²³ J. Brewer, “The eighteenth-century British state: Contexts and issues” in L. Stone (ed.) *An imperial state at war: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London, 1994).

to causes if and when they arose. However, by the 1790s a more proactive system was emerging, driven mainly by the energy and proposals of backbench MPs. With the cabinet mainly preoccupied with foreign affairs, politicking or other such pressing matters, social policy was left to the machinations of groups of MPs who took an interest in certain causes.²⁴ Yet with the formation of the Home Office in 1782 and increasing recourse to committee and commission, government and not just parliament began to take a greater interest in domestic affairs.²⁵ By the 1830s government was transformed into an institution concerned with its own people and economy, with ministers taking the lead on legislative proposals.²⁶ As political economy was increasingly adopted by the men in government (noticeably Pitt the younger), the role of government as a monitor of parliamentary interference began to grow more prominent. With the advent of the French Revolution, Revolutionary wars and the scarcities of 1795 and 1801, this trend towards a monitory rather than a regulatory role was rushed forward as Pitt's government took the lead on policy, breaking with traditional responses and advocating the "natural" solution of market forces rather than direct government intervention.²⁷

Such tensions between local communities and wider institutional configurations are not only prominent in legislative proceedings but also can be seen in the debates surrounding policy making. As social policy in the Eighteenth Century was usually not a product of coordinated government action or a coherent reform programme but rather subject to the ambitions and energy of individual MPs or lobbies, it was closely tied to Habermas' public sphere, where such issues were widely discussed.²⁸ The fact that such debates were carried out in the public sphere is important because not only did the public sphere provide a forum for these debates but the very fact that they took place in this realm moulded their content somewhat. Pamphlets and publications were oftentimes directed at particular MPs or ministers or in rejoinder to an act, bill or speech, yet they were

²⁴ See J. Innes, "Parliament and the Shaping of Eighteenth-Century English Social Policy", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 40 (1990), pp. 63-92; J. Innes "The domestic face of the military-fiscal state: Government and society in eighteenth-century Britain", in L. Stone (ed.) *An imperial state at war: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London, 1994). See also D. Eastwood, "Men, morals and the machinery of social legislation 1790-1840", *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 13 (1994), pp. 190-205. There may well have been an unofficial "division of labour" within the legislative process whereby a ministry faced its opponents and dealt with emergencies, leaving domestic affairs to the ordinary members of the house, but holding a consultancy role to try and guide measures through.

²⁵ See E. W. Cohen, *The growth of the British civil service 1780-1839* (London, 1941).

²⁶ For a basic political history of this period see M. J. Turner, *British politics in an age of reform* (Manchester, 1999).

²⁷ See R. Wells, *Wretched faces: Famine in wartime England, 1793-1801* (Gloucester, 1988), esp. Ch. 14.

²⁸ See J. Habermas, *Structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989). See also J. Van Horn Melton, *The rise of the public in enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001). For the specific role and development of the press see J. Black, *The English press in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1987) and for more on coffee houses see B. Cowan, *The social life of coffee: The emergence of the British coffeehouse* (London, 2005).

published to garner public attention and to this end were forced to appeal to a mass audience.²⁹ This in itself helped to overcome narrowly partisan local concerns and furthered the cause of reform situated in an abstract economic community. The development and extension of the public sphere intensified the popularization of political economy and, as a reflection of visible industrial change, began to alter how people viewed their communities as they came to recognise them more and more as tied into a national whole. This had important consequences for the poor laws, played out in the 1790s.³⁰

A.W. Coats has traced the emergence of a new attitude to the poor discernible from the mid-century based on the beneficence of luxury doctrine and advocating benevolence, distinction between deserving and undeserving poor and the protection of workers from excessive hardship.³¹ It was “becoming increasingly recognised that social expediency, as well as humanity, required that the workers should be protected from excessive hardship”.³² This new approach was in marked contrast to the sometimes evoked so-called ‘utility of poverty doctrine’ where the poor were kept in check by their impoverishment. Mid-century commentators and policy makers such as Thomas Alcock, Charles Gray and especially Henry Fielding, who “consistently evoked the image of the unfree labourer, whose wages should be regulated, mobility restricted, and leisure time supervised”, were caught between this immiserating policy proscription and a wish to make a more positive impact on the situation by extending regulation of the poorer sorts.³³ In Coats’ reading the utility of poverty doctrine was increasingly seen as outmoded and cultivating self-betterment recognised as a more sustainable, efficacious and positive strategy as it held out the prospect of greater societal improvement. This approach can be construed as a key ingredient of the turn towards self-help as the poor and labouring classes were seen more and more as responsible agents capable of making rational choices. This shift subtly undermined the established pattern of paternalistic deference,

²⁹ Simon Devereaux has shown how the statutes were more widely promulgated over the Eighteenth Century and Joanna Innes has demonstrated the increasing relevance of public participation in policy formation. These trends had the joint effect of tying more and more people and localities into the centralised processes of government. See S. Devereaux, “The promulgation of the statutes in late Hanoverian Britain” and J. Innes, “Legislation and public participation 1760-1830”, both in D. Lemmings (ed.) *The British and their laws in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2005).

³⁰ For an overview of poor law developments subsequent to this see J. R. Poynter, *Society and pauperism: English ideas on poor relief, 1795-1834* (London, 1969).

³¹ A. W. Coats, “Economic thought and poor law policy in the Eighteenth Century”, *Economic History Review*, New Series Vol. 13, No. 1 (1960), pp. 39-51; see also A. W. Coats, “Changing attitudes to labour in the mid-Eighteenth Century”, *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1958), pp. 35-51; See also A. W. Coats, “Contrary moralities: Plebs, paternalists and political economists”, *Past and Present*, Vol. 54 (Feb., 1972), pp. 130-133.

³² Coats, *Economic Thought*, p. 49.

³³ N. Rogers, “Confronting the crime wave: The debate over social reform and regulation, 1749-1753” in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn and R. B. Shoemaker (eds.) *Stilling the grumbling hive: The response to social and economic problems in England, 1689-1750* (New York, 1992), p. 84.

providing a rationale for the freeing of the labouring class from the traditional authoritarian regime whilst also enabling the emergent commercial and middle classes a greater role in society, especially in urban areas. The product of this was the remodelling of traditional social models to ensure the continuation of hierarchy but within a more flexible structure, responsive to the exigencies of economic change. Once paternalism had been undermined in this way the governing classes were freer to eschew their traditional responsibilities and to distance themselves from some of the less salubrious effects of commercialism – self-help emerged as an ideology and as a rationale that could encompass these changes whilst maintaining the social hierarchy and as such it proved politically powerful. Yet the governing and middle classes often remained earnest in their attempts to hold those in power to the discharge of their established duties – such as caring for the poor. Thus in rural areas especially in the South commentators such as David Davies sought a more pro-active taking of responsibility on the part of politicians and JPs, whilst men such as Thomas Ruggles expounded the duty of local governors and elites to provide work and to help the poor to help themselves.

The new approach detectable in the second half of the Eighteenth Century, in recognition of commercial change, is one that sought to redistribute the burden of responsibility for economic agency (and hence poverty) whilst maintaining as far as possible the established social hierarchy. The poor were increasingly recognised as rational consumers and as such the culpability for poverty was more and more laid at the door of the individual labourer; the means of achieving this conceptual shift was the emphasis of the aspiration of self-betterment. As Coats has recognised, this reconfiguration of the terms of the debate points to an emergent psychology of self-betterment, evolved from compatibilist or voluntarist notions of character development derived from writers such as David Hume or John Locke, and was encoded into understandings of the poor from mid-century, as a product perhaps of discussions over their moral reformation.³⁴ This focus on the individual was a double-edged sword encompassing not only the upwards mobility envisaged by consumerism but also the vulnerability of the labourer to the depreciation of wages.³⁵ As both

³⁴ The influential philosopher David Hume (1711-1776), in his *Enquiry concerning human understanding* (1748), held a compatibilist view of free will that blent a Necessitarian, uniform contribution of environment advancing motives to the guiding hand of the will in selecting courses of action. Hume's ideas were similar to those extolled by the philosopher David Hartley (1705-1757), founder of the Associationist school of psychology, who, in his principle work *Observations on man, his frame, his duty, and his expectations* (1749) outlined a thesis assimilating a doctrine of vibrations in the 'ether' (causing sensations) to a doctrine of associations (whereby certain vibrations had certain association of pleasure or pain), as the cause of mental actions – his theory thus ultimately held a determinist conception of 'ideas' or mental states.

³⁵ For consumerism see N. McKendrick et al, *The birth of a consumer society: The commercialization of eighteenth-century England* (Bloomington, 1982); for the link to industriousness and social mobility see J. De Vries, "The industrial revolution and the industrious revolution", *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (June 1994), pp. 249-270, also J. De Vries, "Between purchasing power and the world of goods: Understanding the household economy in early modern Europe", in J. Brewer and R. Porter, (eds.) *Consumption and the world*

edges of this sword imagined the labourer as distinct from the social setting of his labour, it was anathema to the traditional paternalist social model yet did leave the door open for this model to be reformulated as advocating a system safeguarding the labourer's subsistence, in the form of a minimum wage for instance.

This new approach can perhaps be illustrated by Adam Smith's concern in his seminal 1776 work *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* with the natural workings of the market providing for all and satisfying the needs of the property-less, emphasising the beneficence of luxury as a motivating factor and advocating non-interventionism. Donald Winch has pointed to Smith's influence on late Eighteenth-century thought, in particular with regard to Burke and Malthus, who both advanced macroeconomic systems.³⁶ This new approach, encompassing an aspirational psychology of self-betterment and greater role for consumption by the poor, can be linked to industriousness and improvement as rationalising forces in Poor Law discourse, paving the way for the sea-change in Poor Law affairs that occurred at the end of the century centred on political economy, which altered the terms of debate in recognition of socio-economic change. However, political economy should not be counterpoised *against* traditional 'moral economy' *per se*, rather there was much underlying continuity in terms of the moral worth of work and the community subsistence ethic. 'Moral economy' was not de-moralised as political economy, rather its concerns were changed. Traditional 'moral economy' consisted of localised notions of fairness and social justice, heavily concerned with meeting subsistence needs in a bounded community. As these bounds were geographically extended and as subsistence needs were redefined, the traditional social model and 'moral economy' became dislocated and were superseded by a more abstract, macroeconomic model underlined by political economy. Yet this political economy was centred on the same concerns as those confronted by 'moral economy'. Differences of scale necessitated a re-conceptualisation of the poor and a concomitant future-oriented plan for their relief, one that was based on consequentialism and prudence rather than a reactive one of amelioration or punishment. In this sense, then, the changes in poor law operations were both reflected and contributed to larger changes in the mechanisms, attention of and shape of government. As Elizabeth Fox Genovese has outlined, the real confrontation here is:

of goods (London, 1993); J. De Vries, *The industrious revolution: Consumer behaviour and the household economy, 1650 to the present* (Cambridge, 2008). For the link between consumerism and economic thought see J. Appleby, "Consumption in early modern social thought" in J. Brewer and R. Porter, (eds.) *Consumption and the world of goods* (London, 1993).

³⁶ See D. Winch, *Riches and poverty: An intellectual history of political economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge 1996).

Between two economic systems and the relationship between reality and the contending models. Economics itself, in the eighteenth century, was moving from micro to macro concerns. In other words, although traditional economics spoke with the national tongue, its centre of attention was directed to a series of local (micro) grain markets...while the classical school was concerned primarily with a national (macro) labour and capital market.³⁷

This shift from community-focused to nationally-focused discourse necessarily entailed the abandonment of the local community as the base unit. Rather, the individual labourer was a more appropriate organisational vehicle for discourse as within a macroeconomic setting the economics of the locale lacked coherence and traction. A focus on economic activity as embedded within a localised social system was gradually replaced by a focus on personal propriety as the animating feature of impersonal economic activity within a macroeconomic structure. The moral focus of the discussion was necessarily also relocated from the community level to that of individual probity. The crux of the issue here is the redeployment of the terms of debate from the community to the individual, and deployment of the ideology of self-help as the organising rationale of this transition. Mitchell Dean has explained how there was a break at the end of the Eighteenth Century wherein “the ethical sphere” which had acted “as a foil to the economic rationalisation of poverty” was “displaced on to the entirely different domain of ‘the personal’, which had been previously only hinted at”.³⁸ As work was divested of its social meaning its moral consequence for those who undertook it took on new significance. This significance was not the good of the commonwealth in a mercantilist sense of national strength but rather a more expansive imagining of the common good in which such rectitude would lead to inclusion in an upwardly mobile aspirational (wider) community. The poor as a distinct communal group, a quality of person, was superseded by poverty as a socioeconomic condition, one which could be cured rather than simply salved.³⁹ The simplest and more effective cure seemed to be cultivating that spirit of self-betterment remarked upon by political economists and fleshing this out with a socially useful value system that would encourage social mobility and help the poor to help themselves in avoiding poverty, keeping relief costs down whilst ensuring the inclusion of the labouring poor within the established social system.

Investigating self-help

³⁷ E. Fox Genovese, “The many faces of moral economy: A contribution to a debate”, *Past and Present*, Vol. 58 (Feb., 1973) pp. 161-168, p.166.

³⁸ M. Dean, *The constitution of poverty: Toward a genealogy of liberal governance* (London, 1991), p. 121.

³⁹ For an earlier discussion by the author of some of these themes see D. Filtness, “‘A Duty of Care’: The Political Thought of Moral Economy 1775-1815”, unpublished MPhil. thesis (University of Cambridge, 2007).

In order to trace the emergence of self-help as a distinctive intervention in poor law policy, to elaborate on the continuities within poor law discourse that led to self-help assuming a pre-eminent position, I have conducted what may be considered as a two-phase analysis. Firstly, I have sought to outline how self-help was prevalent within two broad and interrelated yet distinct traditions of poor law discourse, the interventionist and the natural law approaches, broadly defined. I have explored each of these traditions in turn and then I have aimed to show how the second tradition enjoyed greater success in the post-war period after 1815, when wartime legislative paralysis on social issues was lifted. I have used the writers who have made critical interventions in poor law discourse and who have been most widely cited by their contemporaries, so far as I could discern, and by historians. Hence the 'big guns' of Jeremy Bentham, Patrick Colquhoun, Frederick Morton Eden, Edmund Burke, Count Rumford, etc. have been considered in detail as being those writers whose works played a formative role in poor law discourse of the period and who helped to outline the principles of poor relief deployed in legislative interventions in the post-Napoleonic era. I have sought to explore the development of self-help as an ideology and as an organising principle for poor relief in the period from around 1780 to the 1834 reforms, with a particular focus on the post-war years around 1818 as a critical juncture of this development. In seeking to explore how self-help developed I have looked at the earlier manifestations of self-betterment and self-help as prevalent in the writings of key authors of the period and how the principles of self-help were extolled by poor law commentators in pamphlets and periodicals. I have not had the time nor space to conduct an exhaustive appraisal of the various schemes and theories expounded by would-be poor law reformers in this period – instead I have sought to trace the emergence of self-help and how it developed in scope and coherence as an ideology and how it had a lasting impact on poor law policy. There are various subplots within this development, such as over the relative merits of education, the relative merits of friendly societies, etc. which could have done with greater exposition but I have prioritised the analysis of the development of self-help over a completely comprehensive account of poor law debates of the period – continuity and change are the focus here rather than fleshing out the exact constellations of poor law debate at each instance. However, I have looked in particular at the pamphlet literature around 1817 and the parliamentary committee reports of this period for these documents recycled and utilised many of the ideas generated in the earlier period 1780-1815 and gave rise to a set of legislative enactments that had a profound impact on poor law practise and discourse – it can clearly be seen that the ideology of self-help, as an evolution of earlier ideas of self-betterment, was the springboard for these acts. The evidence that I have consulted has mainly been pamphlet literature and published accounts for my concern has been how discourse evolved and shaped policy – the crucible of the public sphere, wherein discourse was birthed, tested and

reproduced, was thus the key site for this investigation, rather than trying to recreate poor law practise in the localities, which was diverse and far from uniform (see the discussion below on tensions within the poor law system).

My analysis of these writers is directed towards recreating the discursive terrain of poor relief in this period and I have then explored in greater detail the pamphlet literature and policy discussions surrounding the 1818-19 Sturges Bourne poor law reforms and looked at some of the technologies and institutions of self-help which directly informed this legislation, as these acts are critical to the establishment of an ideology of self-help at the governmental level. I have focused on the debates surrounding strategies and movements such as allotments, schools of industry and, principally, savings banks, as key to the gradual building of momentum for self-help. They were as much an artefact of poor law discourse as of practise and were at once informed by and informed poor law policy. The analysis of these movements for particular poverty alleviating devices links them to the ideas introduced previously, giving expression to the sentiments outlined in poor law discourse and laying out the continuity and development of self-help. The idea has been to trace how an ideology of self-help emerged out of poor law discourse during the period 1790-1815 and was then embodied in the Sturges Bourne reforms. The Sturges Bourne reforms are of critical importance for they show how self-help had become the mainstream and accepted approach to ameliorating poverty, and they directly informed the celebrated 1834 reforms. The Sturges Bourne reforms and the vogue for self-help schemes such as savings banks have been largely passed over in the extant literature or given a cursory reading as mere background to the more celebrated 1834 reforms. Analysis is generally focused on the effects of these legislative interventions on poor law praxis in the localities, rather than focusing on how they interacted with the debates of the time. Similarly, these legislative enactments should be seen as the product of on-going debates; this rootedness in discourse and the importance of these interventions in cementing the underlying principles of self-help have been underappreciated by historians thus far. For instance, Peter Dunkley recognises the usefulness of the 1817 reports but stresses the contribution of agricultural decline and the inability of JPs to handle the rural situation for the inception of the 1834 reforms and downplays the importance of the immediate post-war period for taking the existing ideas and themes of self-help and using them to permanently change the terms of the debate regarding poor relief.⁴⁰

A similar problem surrounds those 'technologies' of self-help such as savings banks or allotments, which are too often seen (for instance by Poynter) as a by-product of Malthusian abolitionist

⁴⁰ P. Dunkley, *The crisis of the old poor Law in England 1795-1834: An interpretative essay* (London, 1982).

sentiment rather than as a contribution to thought and practise in themselves. As discussed below, abolitionism was seldom a serious proposition and its impracticality was recognised at the time, for instance by F. M. Eden. Although some new research is revising the importance of these schemes and laws to the experience of poverty at this time, their importance at the level of discourse and how they contributed to the development of thinking about poverty and conceptualising the poor still needs more work.⁴¹ Schools of industry and especially savings banks remain particularly neglected by historians – hence I have tried to give them greater coverage here.⁴² This thesis aims to rehabilitate the ideas and practices of self-help as a critical juncture in the history of poor law policy and discourse, as suggested by the later primacy of self-help, character and manliness in the Victorian era. My focus throughout has been on how the intellectual handling of socio-economic difficulties, in terms of the poor laws, shapes the conceptual landscape within which they are embedded. My research approach owes a debt to the New Institutional Economics and to Skinnerian methodology. From the former I have taken a belief in how informal institutions such as cultural beliefs, constructed in the arena of discourse (oftentimes coterminous with the public sphere), impact upon the shape and interaction of more formal institutions (organisations, laws) – that is to say, the discussion of ideas in the public sphere plays a very real role in the shaping of subsequent social reality.⁴³ From the latter I have taken the view, broadly defined, that the deployment of the terminology of self-help within poor law debates helped both to alter the structure of those debates and the social reality to which they corresponded (for a fuller discussion of this see my concluding

⁴¹ See for instance S. Shave, “The impact of Sturges Bourne’s poor law reforms in rural England”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (June, 2013), pp. 399-429; C. J. Griffin, “Parish farms and the poor law: a response to unemployment in rural southern England, c. 1815-45”, *Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2011), pp. 176-98; J. Burchardt, *The allotment movement in England, 1793-1873* (London, 2002).

Interestingly, Griffin emphasises the role of parish farms in reducing unemployment rather than supplementing the incomes of the poor, yet the ethos of self-help still holds true.

⁴² To my knowledge there remains no systematic study of the schools of industry movement. There is a very good if brief discussion of them in M. G. Jones, *The charity school movement: A study of eighteenth-century puritanism in action* (Cambridge, 1938), but their role in poor law debates has been underappreciated thus far. For an introductory discussion of this topic see D. Filtness, “Schools of industry and habits of industriousness: Making childhood pay in the early Nineteenth Century”, unpublished paper given at the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past 2011 Conference - *Child Labour in the Past: Children as economic contributors and consumers* (Cambridge, Oct., 2011). For savings banks the key text remains H. O. Horne, *A history of savings banks* (London, 1947).

⁴³ My understanding of the institutional framework of society has been drawn largely from the New Institutional Economics approach to economic development, as outlined by Douglass North. In this reading, institutions are the “rules of the game” that constrain and pattern social and economic life and can be both more formal rules and laws as well as more informal cultural beliefs. The link between the two can usefully be seen, I think, to be anchored in the public sphere. See D. C. North, *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance* (Cambridge, 1990). See also D. C. North, “Five propositions about institutional change”, in J. Knight and I. Sened (eds.) *Explaining social institutions* (University of Michigan, 1995). See also A. Schotter, *The economic theory of social institutions* (Cambridge, 1981).

For Skinner’s methodological contribution see Q. Skinner, *Visions of politics, Vol. 1: Regarding method* (Cambridge, 2002).

section, below). The confluence of these two approaches gives causal weight in social change to ideas and the discussion of concepts, and this is broadly speaking true for it is the comprehension and conceptualisation of social reality which informs how societies function, how they are governed and how people live. For the period in question this was especially true for the “conceptual modernity” of the time was often hamstrung by “empirical backwardness” – hence the oft-made claim that laws and reforms, such as the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, were more about ideology than about current events and practise.⁴⁴

The historiography of the poor laws to date has been justifiably skewed towards poor law practice and to trying to reconstruct the “economy of makeshifts” of the poor; the intellectual history of poverty in terms of an analysis of how and why poor law policy prescriptions altered and shifted has not often been attempted, and when this has been done the issue of self-help has been largely overlooked.⁴⁵

Perhaps the foremost work in this area is J. R. Poynter’s, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834* (1969), which presents an excellent overview of poor law policy and debates in this period. Poynter’s chronological survey is broad and comprehensive and remains one of the leading texts despite being over forty years old. However, although Poynter’s conscientious account is an excellent tool for any researcher of poverty or social policy in this period it remains an overview; it is a narrative rendering of change and lacks analytical focus. Therefore Poynter does not present any overarching theory as to how or why attitudes to poverty may have changed and his

⁴⁴ See S. J. Thompson, “The first income tax, political arithmetic, and the measurement of economic growth”, *Economic History Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Aug., 2013), pp. 873-94. For this view of 1834 see M. Blaug, “The myth of the old poor law and the making of the new”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (June, 1963), pp. 151-184. For a critique of Blaug see K. Williams, *From pauperism to poverty* (London, 1981), esp. Ch. 1.

⁴⁵ By “economy of makeshifts” is meant the various means and strategies that the poor made use of to get by and supplement their earnings, including but not limited to activities such as gleaning, gathering firewood or grazing a cow on the common, engaging in piece work in cottage industry, etc. For the term “economy of makeshifts”, see O. H. Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974); S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.), *The poor in England 1700-1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003). See also J. Innes, “The mixed economy of welfare, 1683–1803”, in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, self-interest and welfare in the English past* (London, 1996). For the importance of custom and common rights to the poor and to rural society see J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common right, enclosure and social change in England 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. Ch. 1. For a critique of how the value of customary rights may have been exaggerated by historians see L. Shaw-Taylor, “Labourers, cows, common rights and parliamentary enclosure: The evidence of contemporary comment c. 1760-1810”, *Past and Present*, Vol. 171 (May, 2001), pp. 95-126; See also L. Shaw-Taylor, “Proletarianisation, parliamentary enclosure and the household economy of the labouring poor: 1750-1850”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (June, 2000), pp. 508-511. For a broader discussion of some of these themes see also K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: Social change and agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), Ch. 4, and; R. W. Hoyle (ed.), *Custom, improvement and the landscape in early modern Britain* (Ashgate, 2011).

work is often overly concise when perhaps a more expansive investigation of certain themes or writers would have been useful. This is, however, left to other historians.

Karl Polanyi in particular drew attention to poor law policy and social theory in this period as a major site of change and paradigmatic shift.⁴⁶ Taking a more longitudinal view, Polanyi placed Speenhamland-type allowances-in-aid-of-wages subsidy systems at the centre of his discussion of the historical genesis of market economy and modern government, describing how they pauperised, immiserated and de-moralised rural workers and paved the way for the establishment of a proper competitive labour market and abolition of the “right to live” with the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. For Polanyi, the nexus of concerns surrounding the problem of poverty in the early Nineteenth Century sowed the seeds for the modern bureaucratic form of government and for the capitalist economic model that abounds today and that was first railed against by Marx and Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. Polanyi’s insights have inspired more modern historians and theorists to investigate his claims. Mitchell Deans’ work on establishing a ‘genealogy’ of the government of poverty links this directly to the establishment of liberalism as a governmental creed and highlights how political economic models and the deployment of statistics shifted the meaning of poverty as a socioeconomic condition rather than a personal quality.⁴⁷ For Dean, the realm of the personal as an ethical response to poverty helped to birth classical liberalism in its laissez faire sense and the repercussions of this can be traced through to the modern era.

Elsewhere, Sandra Sherman in her *Imagining Poverty* has made an extended analysis of the deployment and creation of statistical forms of knowledge in this period and the role of such developments in the creation of poverty as an abstract, macroeconomic condition. Sherman has shown how the formation of an “imaginary economics” outside the realm of paternalist communities, in particular the deployment of statistics, led to the development of “the science of poor relief” as “a discourse of resource management” and how the poor were supposedly to be co-opted into this strategy by accepting “a made-over paternalism that sublimated obligation in a rational desire for improvement”.⁴⁸ To this can be added that the development of such forms of knowledge gave an extra dimension to poor law debates. By tipping the balance within debates away from philosophical and moral conceptions of poverty, towards a more sustained engagement

⁴⁶ See K. Polanyi, *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (Boston, 2001; originally pub. 1944).

⁴⁷ See M. Dean, “A genealogy of the government of poverty”, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Aug., 1992), pp. 215-251; also his *The constitution of poverty*.

⁴⁸ S. Sherman, *Imagining poverty: Quantification and the decline of paternalism* (Columbus, Ohio, 2001), p. 13, 26, 38; See also T. Crook and G. O’Hara (eds.), *Statistics and the public sphere: Numbers and the people in modern Britain, c. 1800-2000* (London, 2011).

with trying to describe empirically the status of the everyman pauper as an economic functionary (or ‘metonymic cipher’ in Sherman’s terms), commentators and policymakers were making the poor man the subject rather than the object of economic analysis.

Dean and Sherman’s work (explored in greater detail below) do much to establish how the transition from the traditional ‘moral economy’ model to the new regime of political economy was achieved and how it impacted upon the policing of poverty, yet they do not consider the evolution and role of self-help in and for itself as a central plank of this transition and the view they take is very broad and prioritises theory. There remains scope for a more properly historical account of some of the details of the writers and ideas surrounding poor law debates in this period and how they were transformed by socio-economic and intellectual developments.

The problem of intellectual transition in poor law debates has drawn much attention over the years, yet again the contribution of self-help as a coherent ideology has remained ill-defined and under-analysed. The problem is in some ways one of a double shift: firstly, the shift from what has been described as traditional ‘moral economy’ to political economy and secondly from the Smithian model of political economy to the Malthusian and classical models of political economy. This double shift could perhaps be seen as mirroring that between self-betterment and self-help – but both shifts were an evolution of continuing concepts. At each stage the problem of retaining the moral dimension of economic activity and its embeddedness within the established social hierarchy vexed contemporaries and commentators. In contrast to Bernard Mandeville’s concerns over “private vices, public benefits” in his *Fable of the Bees* of 1714 Smith’s more optimistic vision of the ‘invisible hand’ of market forces leading to economic and societal progress, wherein self-betterment was harnessed as a motive force for labour, did not necessarily omit morality as a determinant of progress, rather that morality was re-positioned as more of a personal attribute than as a community ethic. Historians have wrestled with the seeming inconsistencies within Smith’s oeuvre between moral principles and laissez faire economics, but a greater role for self-betterment need not result in the eschewing of moral responsibility, provided appropriate structures and strictures are put in place.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ This contradiction lies in the gap between Smith’s *Wealth of nations* and his *The theory of moral sentiments* (1759) and has been pithily labelled by historians as ‘The Adam Smith problem’. Smith’s concern in his 1759 work to establish that it was social interaction and the approbation of one’s peers which served as the basis of morality has been seen as incompatible with his later stress on self-interest as benefiting society. Historians are divided as to whether these two works really are incompatible or whether Smith changed his views after visiting France in 1764-66. See D. Winch, “Adam Smith: Scottish moral philosopher as political economist”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 35 (1992), pp. 91-113; E. Rothschild, *Economic sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011).

An exhaustive discussion of Smith's works would take several volumes: a cursory examination of how Smithian political economy may have differed from established practise will have to suffice.

The issue of civic republicanism and the accompanying debates over virtue and societal development associated with the development of political ideology as a coherent body of ideas, most notably in the Scottish Enlightenment of Smith, Ferguson, et al, played an important role in the tenor and direction of these debates. Indeed, civic republican notions of civic virtue and activity directed towards the common good may have crucially informed the development of the political cachet of self-help and its attractiveness in an age of revolutions. Unfortunately time and space constraints preclude a detailed analysis of this topic here, but the reader should be aware of the resonance of self-help with contemporary notions of virtue and the on-going natural jurisprudence and civic republican traditions of thought – certainly for writers such as Bentham the linkage here was clear and useful.⁵⁰

An assessment of change in conceptualising poverty must first pay attention to the established system, i.e. that localised, hierarchical social structure propped up by the parochial bounds of poor relief which is often described as pertaining to the 'moral economy of the poor'. The notion of 'moral economy' in a historiographical sense owes its prominence to the works of E. P. Thompson, principally his seminal essay *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century* (first published in 1971), which outlined how the Smithian model of economic theory differed from traditional 'paternalist' praxis and served as a consequence to dislocate rural communities.⁵¹ For Thompson the 'moral economy of the poor' operated as one half of a dual 'field of force' mechanism

⁵⁰ For more on the civic republican and natural jurisprudence traditions see I. Hont and M. Ignatieff, "Needs and justice in the *Wealth of Nations*: An introductory essay" in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.) *Wealth and virtue: The shaping of political economy in the Scottish enlightenment* (Cambridge 1983); See also J. G. A. Pocock, "Virtues, rights, and manners: A model for historians of political thought" in J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, commerce, and history* (Cambridge, 1985); J. G. A. Pocock, "Cambridge paradigms and Scotch philosophers: A study of the relations between the civic humanist and civil jurisprudential interpretation of Eighteenth-century social thought" in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.) *Wealth and Virtue: The shaping of political economy in the Scottish enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983); J. G. A. Pocock, "The mobility of property and the rise of eighteenth-century sociology" in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.) *Virtue, commerce and history* (Cambridge, 1985). For a discussion of the broader background of political economy in terms of the enlightenment see G. Himmelfarb, *The roads to modernity: The British, French and American enlightenments* (London, 2008).

⁵¹ E. P. Thompson, "The moral economy of the English crowd in the Eighteenth Century" in *Customs in common: Studies in traditional popular culture* (New York, 1993). For a modern reading of the concerns of the moral economy see J. P. Powelson, *The moral economy* (Ann Arbor, 1998). For Thompson the moral economy is most visible at the margins of normal socio-economic day-to-day existence, most noticeably in times of riot and uprising over perceived discrepancies in pricing or unfair economic practise, hence a focus on the food riot in his writings. For an analysis of riots in this period see J. Bohstedt, *Riots and community politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810* (Cambridge, 1983), see also; A. Randall and A. Charlesworth (eds.), *Moral economy and popular protest: Crowds, conflicts and authority* (Basingstoke, 2000); A. Randall and A. Charlesworth (eds.), *Markets, market culture and popular protest in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool, 1996).

counterpoised by the paternalist responsibilities of local elites. It was grounded in an established understanding that economic activity should be fair and just and subservient to the needs of the local community.⁵² A central plank of the moral economy was the right to relief, given expression in times of dearth by the seizure and re-sale of grain at fair prices and the persecution of middlemen, factors and forestallers who were thought to place profit above the natural (moral) order of production and consumption. This right to relief was elaborated on in natural jurisprudence traditions, corroborated by government action punishing middlemen in times of crisis and assumed by the poor to be the operational linchpin of the poor laws. As one historian puts it, “custom” such as those girding the moral economy “was clearly an important source of law”.⁵³ Thompson examines the existence and exertion of this traditional paternalist model at times of crisis, most especially bread riots in defence of how commercial enterprise should be beholden to just and fair price and distribution standards – where prices were deemed to be unfairly too high, for instance due to the artificial limitation of grain supplies by middlemen, labouring consumers were supposedly justified in forceful resistance and the re-imposition of acceptable standards. In short, economic activity was subservient to social order and the maintenance of the common good of a community. However, this paternalist model was predicated upon an economic system lodged in the locale and was thus vulnerable to the exigencies of an emergent macroeconomic system, wherein the moral authority of the common good could be relocated at the national rather than the local level. Thus, as the economic, mercantile and social infrastructure of the country developed over time the underlying paternalist model became ever more divorced from commercial practise and political economy was developed to explain and justify this breach. As Thompson himself has noted, the paternalist model was “drifting apart from reality” but traditions were “referred back to...whenever emergency arose” and this appeal to a “moral norm”, of “what ought to be men’s reciprocal duties” was never totally overcome. Rather, where Thompson has accused political economy of “de-moralising...the theory of trade and consumption”, in actuality the central concerns of ‘moral economy’ that men should have a moral place in the system and that the common good should be met were preserved in the new structures of political economy; the widened conceptual canvas of the new system involved a translation of these themes rather than their subservience to amoral theory.⁵⁴ The best means of meeting the common good of the populace in a macroeconomic setting, when the infrastructure of police to impose governmental will was far from extant, was to relocate the moral responsibility for

⁵² For a modern parallel and how a ‘subsistence ethic’, where landlord extraction of agricultural produce should never compromise the subsistence of the community, operates see J. C. Scott, *The moral economy of the peasant: Rebellion and subsistence in south-east Asia* (London, 1976).

⁵³ See M. Lobban, “Custom, nature, and authority: The roots of English legal positivism” in D. Lemmings (ed.), *The British and their laws in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 41; See also D. Lieberman, *The province of legislation determined: Legal theory in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 199, 203, 201.

that good onto the individual and to make self-help the agency of improvement. The problem confronted by the governing classes has been outlined by Donald Winch: “a gradual transition from a ‘landed nation’ with a rapidly growing external commerce towards one in which manufacturing, increasingly making use of machinery and newly created urban work-forces, provided both a promise of rising living standards and an actual or potential source of moral decline and political instability”.⁵⁵ For Gertrude Himmelfarb, meanwhile, the problem was thus: “Between the old “moral economy” and Smith’s political economy there was a gulf – a chasm, as some said. The former depended, at least in principle, on a system of regulations derived from equity, tradition, and law, a system prescribing fair prices, just wages, customary rights, corporative rules, paternalistic obligations, hierarchical relationships – all of which were intended to produce a structured, harmonious, stable, secure, organic order. The “system of natural liberty”, on the other hand, prided itself on being open, mobile, changeable, individualistic, with all the risks but also all the opportunities associated with freedom”. Although, as Himmelfarb notes, “the contrast is to a certain extent artificial, the old moral economy having been much attenuated in the century before Smith, and the new political economy having its own moral imperatives and constraints”.⁵⁶

If political economy, then, emerged as a means of making sense of economic change, it was not totally divorced from moral conceptions of economic activity and the later charge of de-moralisation levelled by Robert Southey, E. P. Thompson, Himmelfarb (focused on Malthus) and their ilk should be qualified appreciably. Winch has described the process of de-moralisation attributed to political economy as “wishing to describe the process by which political economy was supposedly divorced from moral considerations and made subordinate to impersonal economic forces” rather than the dictionary meanings of ‘to corrupt morals’ or ‘to lower morale’. Winch severely questions the de-moralisation thesis and goes on to explore the extent of continuity between Smith and his disciples. He critiques the optimist/ pessimist dichotomy that has been employed by historians to characterise this progression, yet the role of self-help and the maintenance of a moral core in political economy in this progression has, even by Winch, been understated.⁵⁷ Even in its later Malthusian guise political economy maintained a concern for the morality of labour and the moral wellbeing of the labourer and it was the ideology of self-help that provided this moral dimension and that galvanised the whole edifice.

⁵⁵ Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 5

⁵⁶ Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, p. 63

⁵⁷ Winch, *Riches and poverty*, pp. 6-7. For Winch’s discussion of these themes see especially Ch. 1.

The more longitudinal perspective of Ben Jackson in his analysis of the development of theories of social justice stresses the role of republicanism and industrial change but does not examine the mechanism for this in historical detail.⁵⁸ A major contribution to the literature in this area is Gertrude Himmelfarb's *The Idea of Poverty: England in the early industrial age* (1985), which aimed to trace the development of intellectual thinking about poverty in the period 1750-1850. Himmelfarb takes as her starting point the divergence between Adam Smith's conceptualisation of poverty as being treatable by economic growth and improvement, and Thomas Robert Malthus' reformulating of the problem of poverty around his principle of population, which outlined a more pessimistic future scenario of scarcity, want and starvation as the central organising principle for the treatment of poverty. Himmelfarb outlines how Malthus' ideas formed a new ideological approach to poverty termed as 'Malthusianism' and that "at a time of acute economic distress and social tension, Malthusianism precipitated a profound moral crisis and provoked one of the most intense ideological conflicts in modern history".⁵⁹ The consequences of this Malthusian 'turn', as we might term it, incorporating the contributions of Ricardo also, Himmelfarb has outlined as political economy freeing itself "from its ties to moral philosophy" and emerging as a "natural science" which "threatened to undermine whatever remained of the "moral economy" (the poor laws, most notably), to deprive the poor of the moral status they enjoyed in Smith's market economy, and to renege on his promise of moral and material progress". For Himmelfarb, the early Nineteenth Century was such a "frenetic" period because "so many individuals and groups tried so desperately to fill the moral vacuum created by Malthusianism".⁶⁰ This "moral vacuum" speaks of the "cultural lag" of Malthusianism pessimism, of the "existential reality" which may have differed from the economic and social reconstructions of historians. For Himmelfarb, the "contemporary reality, then, was more pessimistic – more Malthusian – than the reality as historians may define and understand it. Historians, taking a longer, larger, more "objective" view of events, may find conditions improving. Contemporaries, more sensitive to dramatic instances of distress than to the un-dramatic, unheralded instances of relative comfort...were inclined to take a grimmer view of things, a view which was more in accord with the grim vision of the "dismal science".⁶¹ Yet this split between Smithian optimism and Malthusian pessimism has sometimes been exaggerated by historians. As Himmelfarb suggests, there remained "something like a moral consensus, a common view of what was moral and what was immoral, and, more important, of the primacy of morality in the

⁵⁸ See B. Jackson, "The conceptual history of social justice", *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 3 (2005) pp. 356-73. For a discussion of the contribution of the poverty debates of this period to thought on property rights see T. A. Horne, *Property rights and poverty: Political argument in Britain 1605–1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

⁵⁹ G. Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty: England in the early industrial age* (London, 1984), p. 101.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101, 144.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

formulation of the social problem and in the making of social policy”.⁶² Ironically, it was to the staunch critics of Malthusianism, the romantic movement of Coleridge and Southey and critics like Thomas Carlyle and William Cobbett, those who first posited the opposition of political economy to an imagined moral economy of human relations and natural interactions, that the supposed ‘de-moralization’ of political economy should be attributed.⁶³ Donald Winch follows a similar line in opposing Smith to Malthus, yet he also emphasises the moral kernel of Malthus’ thought: “what distinguishes Malthus most as a political economist from his secular contemporaries is his life-long commitment to a Christian version of the science of morals and politics”, as he was “committed to ‘re-moralising’ Smith’s science, to supplying an essential missing or omitted element that could not fail to be noted with regret by Christian readers of both of Smith’s main works”.⁶⁴ For Himmelfarb and Winch, therefore, political economy retained a moral heartbeat and a concern for the moral well-being of the labourer. The departure of political economy was thus not so much an issue of the de-moralisation of the worker so much as its removal from more traditional contexts and community-based norms. Political economy spoke to a macroeconomic conception of poverty, labour and productivity rather than a localised conception of labour and poor relief, etc., and therefore its departure from traditional notions of what has been termed by historians as the ‘moral economy’ should not be taken as the de-moralisation of economic so much as its reformulation onto a broader conceptual canvas. For Himmelfarb, it was Smith’s “assumption that the overwhelming number of the poor were in fact sober and industrious...that permitted him to “connect” the interests of the “labouring poor” with the “general interest” of society”. Furthermore, “it was because the poor were presumed to have the same virtues and passions as everyone else, because there were no innate differences separating them from the other classes, that they were capable of working within the “system of natural liberty” and profiting from it as much as everyone else”. For Smith “the poor, as much as the rich, were free, responsible, moral agents” and as such enjoyed a “moral status” in the economy – “not the special moral status they enjoyed in a fixed, hierarchic order, but that which adhered to them as individuals in a free society sharing a common human, which is to say, moral, nature”. The “moral responsibility” of the poor established for them a claim to a higher standard of living “as a result of a free, expanding economy”.⁶⁵

Raymond Cowherd has opposed natural law reformers to evangelical humanitarians in the period from about 1760 to the time of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, with Benthamite Radicals

⁶² Ibid., p.12.

⁶³ See Ibid., p. 131.

⁶⁴ Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 23, 236

⁶⁵ See Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, pp. 62-63

joining the fray after about 1820 to decisive effect. According to Cowherd the Evangelicals, centred on the Clapham Sect of William Wilberforce and Hannah More, identified themselves with “the weak members of society” and “shed tears over pathetic and needy paupers”; the “romanticism of the Evangelicals brought them into conflict with the natural law reformers who were strict rationalists” and were operating at cross purposes with both the “natural law reformers” who wanted to improve society “in keeping with the natural laws of economics” and the Utilitarians “who held to the ethics of self-love as the best guide for public policy”. Yet this division of forces in the quest for poor law reform obscures the continuity of the moral force of self-help as an organising principle in this period.⁶⁶ Cowherd stresses how the subservience of legislative interventions to the supposed natural and iron laws of economics resulted in that amoral construction of political economy so railed against by Carlyle, Southey, etc. Yet the moral concern of political economy was kept alive in its promotion of self-help. The vociferous concerns of self-help to promote the moral and economic wellbeing of the labourer should always be remembered in tandem with their silent partner, the understanding that such self-advancement answered to the needs of the wider populace and served the common good of the nation. This was almost an inversion of Mandeville’s conception of “private vices” equating to “public benefits”; in this new fable the private efforts of self-help would necessarily result in public benefits, be they respite from poor relief costs or an augmentation of national productivity – it is the dimension of vice that has shifted as the morality of economic activity was extrapolated onto the national canvas from the outset. With the surrender of humanitarian evangelicalism to the later brand of evangelicalism which underpinned Christian Political Economy this moral dimension was revived and brought even closer to the foreground of political economy discussions, yet the peculiar dimension of poor relief remained the heartland of self-help as a moral cause.⁶⁷

Hence self-help emerged as the central organising principle of political economic solutions to the new pressing problems of poor relief after 1780. As the old poor laws “were more the creation of local officials rather than of legislators or thinkers” the new macroeconomic understandings of political economy and their application to social ills entailed a seismic alteration both in how people

⁶⁶ See R. Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws: A historical study of the Influence of classical economics on the formation of social welfare policy* (Athens, Ohio, 1977), esp. pp. xiv-xv; “The humanitarian reform of the English poor laws from 1782 to 1815”, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (June, 1960), pp. 328-342.

⁶⁷ See B. Hilton, *The age of atonement: The influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford, 1988); for Cowherd’s supposed transition within evangelical circles due to how “Malthus’s morals and theology appealed to those pious clergymen who were already busy promoting voluntary schools and churches”, see *Political economists and the English poor laws*, p. 78.

thought about their society and how they hoped to shape it through policy proscriptions. Government interference in this arena took on greater urgency, fuelled by committees of inquiry and the amassing of abstract statistical data. The ramifications of this process have been recognised by David Eastwood in his exploration of governance in rural England in this period. As the poor “ceased to be regarded as individuals who may or may not merit assistance, and came to be regarded instead as ‘a problem’” the scene was set for the Sturges Bourne Acts which “symbolised a fundamental shift in public attitudes towards the poor” and, as the poor laws were the “normative political institution in rural England”, the upshot was that the “traditional open, amateur, and essentially voluntarist structure of local government was under notice”.⁶⁸ As the magistracy were pushed further from the operation of poor law practise the regime of the poor laws were reshaped around the principles of self-help, with operational discretion, within a uniform system; this process being fully realised in 1834 with the establishment of poor law unions and guardians. By 1820 when underemployed and unemployed labourers and the allowance system were seen as being at the heart of the poverty problem, self-help offered a favourable solution.

What follows is an attempt to engage more fully with the processes of such re-conceptualisations and their social evolution. Exploring the continuity within and between discourse and policy debates is an important means of understanding their internal coherence, in turn crucial to understanding their significance in terms of social change. Mapping the translation of underlying continuities in poor law debates and wider discourse will not only help to better understand their internal coherence but also how they adapted to social change and perhaps, through policy making, impacted upon social change. The mechanism by which such adaptations could influence social change hinged upon the institutional framework of society and, in this period, most specifically on the operation of the public sphere. Hence analysis must focus on the intellectual development of poor law debates as the process and artefact of social understanding, and to this end the key thinkers and their discourse of the period must be traced and deconstructed. As the poor rarely had access to or made contributions to such debates, the focus will remain on those who structured and shaped discourse (pamphlet literature, periodicals, parliamentary reports and proceedings), in a Foucauldian sense, and contributed to the emergence of a new rationale of governmentality.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See Eastwood, *Governing rural England*, p. 133, 121, 100, 132.

⁶⁹ A Foucauldian reading of discourse views it as “constituted by the difference between what one could say correctly at one period (under the rules of grammar and logic) and what is actually said. The discursive field is, at a specific moment, the law of this difference...the formation and transformation of ‘things said’.” See M. Foucault, “Politics and the study of discourse”, in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality, with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), p. 63. For how the formation of discourse occurs (discursive formation) see M. Foucault, *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (London, 2002, first published in English 1970), and;

Chapter One explores the intellectual tensions inherent in the practice of the Poor laws since their inception and in particular examines two divergent traditions of poverty amelioration; on the one hand a more directly centralised, interventionist approach and on the other a more devolved, permissive form of intervention. The contributions of Jeremy Bentham and Patrick Colquhoun to this divergence are considered and I suggest a pivotal role for these writers in moving discourse forward to consider a strong linkage between individual agency in the form of self-help and national improvement. Chapter Two continues this strand of analysis by investigating how natural law reformers, in particular Joseph Townsend, Frederick Morton Eden, David Davies and Edmund Burke stressed the role of individual self-help within an abstracted, macroeconomic conception of poverty as the curative solution to such social ills. Chapter Three extends this strand of analysis and considers the weighty impact of Thomas Robert Malthus and the role of his contribution in crystallising self-help around notions of frugality and prudence, shifting responsibility for poverty firmly onto the shoulders of the improvident poor and introducing the theme of character as an organising trope for this discourse. Chapter Four considers the legislative fruit of such currents in discourse, arguing that such measures as the laws supporting savings banks, friendly societies, national education, allotments, etc. should be viewed as a coherent legislative programme for implementing a regime of practices directed at alleviating poverty through self-help. Chapter Four also considers the Poor Law Reform and Select Vestry measures of 1819 as the summit of this reform agenda, and argues that what underpinned this legislative turn was a re-conceptualisation of paternalism as organised around facilitating self-help via a raft of available institutions. Finally, Chapter Five looks ahead to the 1834 Poor Law reforms and traces how ‘new paternalism’ was mediated through the disillusionment of the 1820s and concomitant loss of patience with more permissive prescriptions of self-help towards a more Benthamite, institutionally interventionist approach that constructed a coercive and punitive apparatus of workhouses and Poor Law Unions to enforce the gains and ideology of self-help. Chapter Five concludes by stepping back from the coalface of historical inquiry and considering the changes mapped out here in terms of ideology and institutional transition.

M. Foucault, *Archaeology of knowledge* (London, 2002. First published in English 1972). Foucault thought that discourse structures and is structured by power relations, hence potentially a shift in the terms of discourse will impact upon the modalities of power within a given community or society; as arguably happened in terms of the Poor laws and the moral economy in the period under consideration here.

Chapter 1: Intellectual tensions in the Poor laws

The traditions of poor law discourse bequeathed to the era of the French Revolution a set of inherent tensions within the management of the poor.⁷⁰ Mapped onto such tensions as those between local/national and of dealing with a potential “free-rider” problem was that of a legislative entanglement: the principle of the Poor laws designated them as a uniform system of provision, yet they were functionally dependent upon the local discretion through which this principle was put into practice. Issues of how much relief should be provided (itself dependent upon the resources available to a particular parish), in what kind and to whom exactly (i.e. the boundary between deserving and undeserving) dictated the generosity of relief, blurred the system’s uniformity and hindered efforts towards greater integration of social units. Cultural attitudes, historically determined, towards the poor thus exerted massive influence upon the shape and direction of relief systems in different communities and regions, as Steve King has explored.⁷¹ However, much of the disparate nature of poor relief practice seems to have not exerted a significant influence upon the views of poor law commentators other than as manifest in repeated clarion calls for the uniformity of provision, usually within expanded notions of community.

⁷⁰ As outlined above, such as that between the local provision of relief as enshrined in the Elizabethan legislation and increasing trends of national migration patterns. Consonant with this was the growing influence of political economy in terms of conceptualising economic issues at the abstract macroeconomic level of the market as opposed to the agrarian parochial community, an approach which, as Wells has noted, was decisive in the handling of the scarcity crisis of 1800-1801. See R. Wells, *Wretched faces: Famine in wartime England, 1793-1801* (Gloucester, 1988), esp. Ch. 17. See also K. Willis, “The role in parliament of the economic ideas of Adam Smith, 1776-1800”, *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1979), pp. 505-544. Such tensions as that between the national and local spheres of influence in terms of migration patterns held another resonance in poor law provision in terms of the protection of communal resources and the burden of dependent poverty, this tension being expressed in discussion over the settlement laws. Migration was traditionally held as pernicious to the social order and as endangering the rule of law, hence myriad laws harshly punishing vagrancy. For the development of views on vagrancy see N. Rogers, “Policing the poor in eighteenth-century London: The vagrancy laws and their administration”, *Social History*, Vol. 24, No. 47 (May, 1991), pp. 127-147. For discussions of the settlement laws and the extent to which they provoked dissension and conflict see N. Landau, “The regulation of immigration, economic structures and definitions of the poor in eighteenth-century England”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sept., 1990), pp. 541-571; G. Stedman-Jones, *An end to poverty? A historical debate* (New York, 2004); J. S. Taylor, “A different kind of Speenhamland: Non-resident relief in the industrial revolution”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Apr., 1991), pp. 183-208, also; J. S. Taylor, “The impact of pauper settlement 1691-1834”, *Past and Present*, Vol. 73 (Nov., 1976), pp. 42-74. Such tensions between the provision of poor relief by a local community and the protection of such communal resources against outsiders underlay discussions of poor relief throughout the early modern period, implicit in moves towards expanding the geographic and legal bounds of community as manifest in Thomas Gilbert’s legislation for poor law unions in 1782 and similar measures. See T. Gilbert, *Plan for the better relief and employment of the poor; For enforcing and amending the laws respecting houses of correction, and vagrants; And for improving the police of this country. Together with bills intended to be offered to Parliament for those purposes* (London, 1781). See also R. Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws: A historical study of the influence of classical economics on the formation of social welfare policy* (Athens, Ohio, 1977), Ch. 1.

⁷¹ See S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England, 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester, 2000).

Such tensions were inherent to the structure and operation of poor relief, yet there were broader ideological tensions active too, such as that between a view of the poor laws as a tension management system or that of them as hindering economic progress. This tension is better known as the confrontation between moral economy and political economy. In this confrontation, the locally-bound paternalist cultural-legal mechanism for ensuring just prices, the protection of the good of the community and the insurance of subsistence ran up against an inchoate understanding of macroeconomic processes of supply and demand, market prices and abstracted conceptions of the common good that saw the free development of commerce and manufacturing as favourable to the prosperity and progress of the nation and, crucially, to the general happiness of the populace. Utilitarian conceptions of happiness and the common good underwrote a decline of the moral authority of poor relief and economic intervention such as the assize of bread or wage-setting as harmful to the broader common good of the nation or of the “community as a whole”. Consistent with this shift in moral authority from the local to the national was an accompanying ideology of improvement that highlighted the potential of enclosure or manufactures for developing an expanding national product and a consonant rise in living standards. The surety of subsistence security within a locale was made subordinate to the potential expansion of wealth to the benefit of the “community-at-large”, and improvement and industriousness expounded as the means to this end. However, an expansion of the geography of community necessarily entailed a revision or replacement of the cultural-legal complex of paternalism. This was achieved by a greater emphasis on self-help as the surest way to both security and improvement, thus negating traditional paternalism and conceptualising it anew as the provision of institutional structures for developing and guiding self-help and self-responsibility. To legitimise such processes a vocabulary of “virtue” and “duty” was adopted, borrowed from the civic humanist tradition but deployed within a paradigm of economic natural laws developed from Newtonian and civil jurisprudential discourse.⁷² The tension between these two intellectual traditions was exploited to engineer a break with former paternalist attitudes, which enshrined a right to relief, and to break with the past. In the emergent new paradigm, the contribution of classical political economy, poverty came to be seen as the product of natural laws, as a condition rather than as a personal ontological artefact. But if personal poverty was economically fluid rather than static, then a conceptual space was adumbrated for people to be able to move in and out of it if they were prudent and industrious. Thus the abstraction

⁷² See J. G. A. Pocock, “Cambridge paradigms and Scotch philosophers: a study of the relations between the civic humanist and the civil jurisprudential interpretation of eighteenth-century social thought”, in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and virtue: The shaping of political economy in the Scottish enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983).

of the pauper from his community completed the processes of thought that began with improvement and the expansion of the common good, forming poverty as a changeable condition and the labouring poor as vectors capable of shifting their position within the social constellation – whether or not the labourer was able to achieve this was dependent upon his character. Thus character was linked to a psychological re-evaluation of the poor that categorised them not as shaped entirely by their environment but as agents capable of ameliorating their own condition through the display of appropriate virtues. In tandem with such a seismic shift in the discourse of poverty there occurred the emergence of a theology of the activity of individual virtue within the moral arena of the world as the arbiter of salvation. Such intellectual shifts also led to a change in the conception of crime and punishment, as reformation of the criminal came to supersede punishment as the principal animating factor of jurisprudence. All these changes were interrelated, reflexive and concurrent, forming an almost impenetrable palimpsest of change that identifies this period to many as that where the ground was prepared for the on-going transformations of the modern world. However, by singling out the debates over the poor laws we can fruitfully analyse many of these intellectual shifts from the inside-out.

The discourse of poverty encompassed the debates over the poor laws but added to it an ideological penumbra. It can thus fruitfully be deconstructed into a phalanx of ideas about poverty and poor relief within which policy prescriptions were embedded. An example of such a division would be between the Newtonian views of Malthus and his advocacy of savings banks. Following Mitchell Dean's methodology a further dimension can be added to this division, in that we can draw a distinction between the "discursive formation" of ideas about poor relief and the "regime of practices" with which they are held in dialogical tension.⁷³ This dialogical tension as an arena of legislative intervention constituted the "governmental rationality" of poverty, which was fed by discursive formation and in turn fed back into political "technologies" or "means of...action or intervention".⁷⁴ Joel Mokyr has drawn a distinction in the development of technology and industry between propositional knowledge and prescriptive knowledge, or that between "what" and "how". The propositional form of knowledge is constituted from observations, classifications, measurements, etc. as well as from the establishment of regularities, principles, and natural laws. Mokyr goes on to postulate on the "tightness" of propositional knowledge, or on its "consensualness", dependent upon "the ease of verifiability...it determines the confidence that

⁷³ See M. Dean, "A genealogy of the government of poverty", *Economy and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Aug., 1992), pp. 215-251.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 247-248, Note 31.

people have in the knowledge”, aided by the “the effectiveness of justification”.⁷⁵ Mokyr sees prescriptive knowledge as derived from propositional knowledge; in a similar way the regime of practices of poor relief are ideationally embedded in the discursive formation, or propositional knowledge, of poverty. The combination of propositional and prescriptive knowledge of poor relief can be said to form the discourse of poverty, contributive of a rationality of government that applies political technologies to manage the problem. Thus we have a separation of but also an interaction between discourse and governmentality, discourse playing a role in the formation of policy and in the design of interventions. Crucially, as Himmelfarb has noted, the existential reality of the past, unrecoverable through economic analysis alone, contains a “cultural lag”; that is to say, the shaping of ideas through events or discussion lives on and can play a large role in the decisions people take and how they think about themselves and their world.⁷⁶ Thus the 1790s debates and scarcities lived on into the Nineteenth Century, informing the propositional knowledge within discourse. The poor law practices deployed in the period 1800-1810 had as much to do with the events and discussions of the 1790s as they did with concurrent events and discussions, and thus the regime of practices suggested and the political technologies enacted did also.

An analysis of the changes in attitude and approach towards the poor and/or poverty in this period can be fruitfully broken down into two divergent traditions of discursive formation reflecting the tensions inherent to the poor laws as outlined above. On the one hand there is the on-going tradition of poor law debates that sought to differentiate between the deserving and undeserving poor, to manage the poor in the best way possible as economic contributors in a mercantilist sense and to punish those who wilfully disregarded their own future and, by extension, the interests of the community. On the other hand there was an emergent avenue of discussion that looked firmly towards the common good of the greatest number, not just that of the community but of the nation; to the abstract macroeconomic natural laws of the market as the best way to ameliorate the condition of the poor, and that sought to equate individual happiness and moral reform with national productivity. The two traditions demarcated above were not mutually exclusive: indeed, they overlapped a great deal but the difference lay more in the means than in the end. The former approach advocated a more interventionist platform, usually at the parochial or county level, with revitalised gentry leadership, empowered by new and rational positive institutions, guiding the lower classes as a whole into a more contributory and productive future. The concern here was with policing the poor within a community and with the security of their subsistence first and foremost, and this approach can therefore be construed as developing out of paternalist attitudes towards the

⁷⁵ See J. Mokyr, *The gifts of Athena: Historical origins of the knowledge economy* (Woodstock, 2002), p. 5.

⁷⁶ G. Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty: England in the early industrial age* (London, 1984), p. 137.

poor. The latter tradition initially interpreted the poor in a macroeconomic sense as outside of the reach of positive governance, and urged reconciliation with their status in society and an acceptance of the operation of the market as the arbiter of social destinies. However, this emphasis on submitting to national market prerogatives tended to sublimate the poor within the market mechanism, thus opening up a vista wherein it was possible to prioritise improvement. Although doubting the capacity of governance to secure the wellbeing of the populace, such writers as Thomas Malthus or Frederick Morton Eden envisioned a society where the poor would take on a greater role of self-responsibility, acting within the natural laws of the market to further their own interests, with societal progress the happy result. As one would expect, the tensions and differences outlined here led to different regimes of practices being advanced, the one being a more interventionist, centralised mode of relief predicated on policing the poor, the other being a more devolved, permissive form of intervention predicated upon managing poverty and aiding those who fell prey to it to help themselves out of it. Contrary to writers such as Himmelfarb, Polanyi or Thompson, the divergence of discourse presented here was not that of a discontinuous “demoralisation” of the issue, but rather a transition within the discursive formation of the problem of poverty.⁷⁷

The bridge between these two traditions is provided by writers such as the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), who promulgated an extension of his panopticon penitentiary scheme for criminals to workhouse or “pauper penitentiaries”, wherein the architectural principle of panopticism would force the internalisation of virtuous codes of behaviour and beget habits of useful industry and moral reform.⁷⁸ By the operation of such supervisory authority the poor would

⁷⁷ See Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*; K. Polanyi, *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (Boston, 2001; originally pub. 1944); E. P. Thompson, *Customs in common: Studies in traditional popular culture* (London, 1991), and; E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (London, 1963).

⁷⁸ In his *A fragment on government* (1776) Bentham was keen to stress the role of positive law in shaping the community, and outlined how he believed the root of government to be “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” and that this is “the measure of right and wrong”, for “the greatest happiness or the greatest felicity principle” is the “only right and justifiable end of government”. See J. Bentham, *A fragment on government* (London, 1776), reprinted in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought series, with an introduction by Ross Harrison (Cambridge, 1988) p. 4, xvii, vi, 58, 59. From here he was led to consider the bloated corpus of criminal law and the campaign for prison reform and to comment, in turn, upon the Hard-Labour bill of 1778 in his *A view of the hard labour bill*. It was only by the efficient censorial force of government that societal progress and happiness could be maintained and maximised. Bentham again and again protested how the happiness of the community depended in turn on the happiness of its component individuals, and therefore on their safety, leading him to prioritise security of property, and hence the optimal management of poverty, which oftentimes infringed upon property. He also opposed poverty on the grounds that visible distress and hunger infringed upon public utility and morals. The campaign for prison reform was waged principally by John Howard (1726–1790), the celebrated prison reformist and High Sheriff of Bedfordshire whose evidence given to the 1774 select committee on prison reform and his 1777 work *The state of the prisons* helped to set the agenda for prison reform into the next century and contributed to the

be forced to offset the costs of their relief and be made socially useful, furthering the cause of public utility whilst simultaneously enjoying the happiness and peace of mind provided by the security and industry of the workhouse.⁷⁹ By the elision of individual and public utility (through the operation of his “duty-interest junction principle” whereby what was in the individual’s interest was also his duty, i.e. in the common good) the burden of relief would be eradicated as the poor, efficiently employed and policed within a national reticulation of penitentiaries under the charge of a National Charity Company, would be “dross...converted into sterling”, whilst contributing to national improvement.⁸⁰ Bentham also developed a “neighbour’s fare” principle of less eligibility that was to come to the fore in discussions of poverty in 1834.

Bentham’s schemes for poor law reform were not merely an intervention in the existing literature on poor law reform, but were also the logical extension of his system of utilitarian ethics into this arena, consistent with his earlier and later writings. For Bentham decisions were to be framed in terms of

1778 Hard Labour Bill. Howard died a martyr to his cause after contracting typhus following a visit to a prison in the Ukraine. See M. Ignatieff, *A just measure of pain: The penitentiary in the industrial revolution, 1750-1850* (London, 1978). For Bentham’s legal ideas see J. Bentham, *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation* (London, 1780), and; P. Schofield, *Utility and democracy: The political thought of Jeremy Bentham* (Oxford, 2006); D. G. Long, *Bentham on liberty: Jeremy Bentham’s idea of liberty in relation to his utilitarianism* (Toronto, 1977). For how Bentham’s thought was predicated upon an idea of “public utility” in terms of social usefulness, derived from Cicero through Hume, see G. J. Postema, *Interests universal and particular: Bentham’s utilitarian theory of value*, p.1 – paper accessible at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~phil/docs/postema-paper.pdf> (accessed 08/ 07/ 2012); G. J. Postema, “Bentham’s equality-sensitive utilitarianism”, *Utilitas*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Jul., 1998) pp. 144-158, and; C. Muldrew, *The economy of obligation: The culture of credit and social relations in early modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 140-141.

⁷⁹ Bentham postulated the creation of 250 houses, each housing 2000 paupers, giving a total of 500,000 institutionalised paupers. At 1791 levels of population this would represent 6.45% approximately of the total population of England of 7,750,000; at 1801 levels it would be 5.7% out of 8,650,000. See J. Bentham, “Outline of a work entitled pauper management improved” in *Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. XXX (1798), pp. 90-91. These population figures are taken from Boyd Hilton’s *A mad, bad, & dangerous people? England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 6. E. J. Evans, in *The forging of the modern state: Early industrial Britain 1783-1870* (London, 1983), p.512, puts the figures at 7,740,000 in 1791 and 8,319,000 in 1801 respectively (Evans’ source is E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The population history of England 1541-1871: A reconstruction* (London, 1981) pp. 534, 588). For Bentham’s writings on the Poor laws see M. Quinn (ed.), J. Bentham, *Writings on the poor laws* (2 vols., Oxford, 2001-2010); C. F. Bahmueller, *The national charity company: Jeremy Bentham’s silent revolution* (Berkeley, 1981); G. Himmelfarb, “The haunted house of Jeremy Bentham” in G. Himmelfarb, *Victorian minds* (London, 1968); M. Quinn, “Jeremy Bentham on the relief of indigence: An exercise in applied philosophy”, *Utilitas*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (May, 1994), pp. 81-96; J. Semple, *Bentham’s prison: A study of the panopticon penitentiary* (Oxford, 1993); G. Himmelfarb, “Bentham’s utopia: The national charity company”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Nov., 1970), pp. 80-125.

⁸⁰ Bentham Mss. CLIVb, 385. Cited in Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, p. 80

As L. J. Hume summarises it, Bentham believed that “it was entirely proper for self-willed individuals to pursue their own interests” but that “the requirements of utility or of the happiness of the community, which was his own version of the public happiness or public interest” constituted “legitimate grounds for interfering with or frustrating them in that activity” for “public happiness should be the object of public policy”. L. J. Hume, *Bentham and bureaucracy* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 238, 239. See also L. J. Hume, “Jeremy Bentham on industrial management”, *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (May, 1970), pp. 3-15.

the common good, both for individual persons and for government. Yet there was to be a common denominator provided by the greatest happiness principle, for “to be at once appropriate and all-comprehensive, a deontological principle designed for giving direction to human conduct should apply alike to conduct in public and private life”.⁸¹ In other words, government would be conducted on the same lines of conduct as private life, with the same rationale applied to decision-making, the same ‘felicific calculus’ applied to the framing of laws and the handling of expenses as to the treatment of one’s neighbour, and the common good in the shape of greatest happiness of the greatest number held up as a beacon illuminating the paths to action of all: “Private ethics concerns every member, that is, the happiness and the actions of every member, of any community that can be proposed, and legislation can concern no more”.⁸² Thus “government’s indispensable function was to be the organization of the hedonistic social environment” and hence “Bentham’s science of human nature determined the character of his political thought”.⁸³

From an outline of first principles in his first *Essay on the Poor laws*, Bentham next attempted to bridge the gap between these initial philosophical positions and an actual schema of poor relief.⁸⁴ In his Second essay; *Fundamental positions in regard to making provision for the indigent poor*, Bentham explicitly stated what he had only implied earlier, that “In a civilized political community, it is neither consistent with common humanity, nor public security, that any individual should, for want of any of the necessaries of life, be left to perish *outright*”, also that “the title of the indigent to their subsistence, seems to stand upon as strong ground at least as that of any man of property to his estate”.⁸⁵ His use of the term “public security” is revealing here, for it delineates a crucial consideration for the provision of relief, that meeting the subsistence needs of the poor fulfils the public good in a two-fold manner; pre-empting attacks on the property of the rich out of necessity as well as the narrower utilitarian concern of preventing starvation as in itself a fundamental disutility, causing wide moral distress, not to mention the reduction of costs as also serving the common

⁸¹ P. Schofield, *Utility and democracy*, p. 41; J. Bentham, *Official aptitude maximised; expense minimized*, note 352, cited in Schofield, p. 41.

⁸² Bentham, *Principles*, p. cccxi.

⁸³ Long, *Bentham on liberty*, p. 212, 213. For more on Bentham’s concept of a felicific calculus see W. C. Mitchell, “Bentham’s felicific calculus”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 33 (1918), pp. 161-183.

⁸⁴ In the period 1796-7 Bentham produced the bulk of his work on the poor laws, including his three *Essays on the subject of the poor laws* as well as *Pauper systems compared; Observations on the poor bill*, and; *Outline of a work entitled pauper management improved*. Towards the end of 1796 Bentham aimed to incorporate the *Essays* into a “projected major work” entitled ‘*Penetocomia*’, or *Principles of legislation and management relative to the subject matter of the poor laws*, yet this work, like so many others, was never to be completed, despite Bentham drawing up a wealth of additional material – See the introduction to M. Quinn (ed.), *The collected works of Jeremy Bentham: Writings on the poor laws*, Vol. 1, p. xi.

⁸⁵ J. Bentham, “Essay II: Fundamental positions in regard to the making provision for the indigent poor”, in Quinn (ed.) *Writings on the poor laws* Vol. 1, p. 10, 21.

good.⁸⁶ In other words, the good of the individual is here *actually* the same as that of the wider community. Bentham goes on to suggest that due to the “necessary precariousness” of private charity in providing a holistic basis for relief, “no fund, therefore, but a public fund, can ever be permanently adequate to the purpose”.⁸⁷ It is almost as if Bentham views the indigent poor as a social cost, the negative externalities of which, manifest as a threat to the security of property and moral distress, can only be internalised and made safe by the provision of a public good by the government.⁸⁸ This understanding of the dilemma he faces is consistent with his view, illuminated by Michael Quinn, that the principal cause of opposition to the poor laws is their cost, for opposition “turns ultimately upon nothing but the magnitude of the present expense: for as to idleness on one part, it is no otherwise an evil than in as far as it necessitates expense on the other”.⁸⁹ This quotation is also useful as it seems to reinforce Bentham’s concern for the industry of the poor being a good in itself as well as for the communal good. The provision of public relief could lead to an equation of duty and interest on the part of the poor, duty understood as what they owe to the common fund providing that relief and interest as their own welfare. In this equation, again, the question of desert is largely irrelevant, subordinated to the more pressing broader societal concerns. Certainly “imprudence” resulting in indigence should be discouraged, but it should not form a reason for with-holding relief:

If, in any one case, the existence of a duty were a sufficient reason for refusing to make provision for the breach of it, so would it be in every other case: if the existence of that class of duties which are comprehended under the head of prudence were a sufficient warrant for refusing to save a transgressor himself from the consequences of his transgression, the existence of the duties comprised under the head of probity would be a warrant equally sufficient for refusing to save the rest of the community from the consequences of transgression on the part of its respective members. If it be good reasoning to say that men ought to live prudently, therefore there ought to be no hospitals, it would hardly be bad reasoning to say men ought to live honestly, therefore there ought to be no gallows.⁹⁰

In Bentham’s eyes relief was a necessity, to be provided for in a manner which made as far as possible the individual good commensurate with the common good. By reducing relief to the limitations of necessity not only was the common good met on various levels, but the individual was forced to realise his/her own good too. Michael Quinn has commented how “the enhancement of

⁸⁶ Bentham thus met the four ends of legislation, namely subsistence, security, abundance and equality as set out at length in his *Theory of legislation* (1830). See *The theory of legislation; edited with an introduction and notes by C.K. Ogden*. (London, 1931).

⁸⁷ Bentham, *Essay II*, p. 11.

⁸⁸ For Bentham’s comments on the ‘pain’ of seeing distress, see *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁸⁹ See Quinn, *Jeremy Bentham on the relief of indigence*; Bentham, *Essay II*, p. 12.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

public security is the object of the provision of relief, the object of its limitation is frugality, which serves the interests of justice”, yet justice in this sense can really be writ large as the public good, for what is more in keeping in the public good than providing a service at minimal public cost, or ‘enabling’ the satisfaction of a duty to repay that cost when in receipt of relief through the performance of production?⁹¹ It is unnecessarily confusing the issue to introduce a language of justice, which is not widely conspicuous in Bentham’s poor law writings, to explicate a set of issues that can be, and was by Bentham, discussed using the syntax of the greater good, a sort of civic politics that a classically-trained lawyer and ardent utilitarian could well appreciate. As Bentham himself states, justice is “an imaginary personage, feigned for the convenience of discourse, whose dictates are the dictates of utility”.⁹²

The commensuration of the individual good in the public good was to be realised through the operation of labour and industry on the part of the poor. Reasoning up from first principles, Bentham saw that the costs of providing relief, a drain on public resources, should be offset by the labour of those receiving it:

In administering relief at the public charge, government is warranted in exacting in the way of return, by a condition annexed to the grant of such relief, all such compliances on the part of the individual relieved, as, in its own judgement, are conducive to the benefit, either of the individual himself or of the community at large, at whose expense he is to be received.⁹³

Yet industry was also productive of moral good in itself, and thus had the additional benefit of reforming the character of those in receipt of relief so that they might be more prudent in future. Bentham admits how “the habit of industry is a source of plenty and happiness. The habit of idleness in one who has property is a cause of uneasiness, and in one who has no property of indigence and wretchedness”. Industry was in the interest of both the individual and of the wider community and therefore productive of maximal utility and should be encouraged *wherever* possible:

As far as concerns the execution of work...no individual can look upon the obligation of making an adequate return for the relief he stands in need of as either unjust or hard in itself, or as not comprised in the number of those obligations, for which he as well as

⁹¹ Quinn, *Jeremy Bentham on the relief of indigence*, pp. 89-90.

⁹² Bentham, *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation* (1780), in J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (eds.) *Collected works of Jeremy Bentham*, (30 vols. (to date), London, 1968 – on-going), p. 120n, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁹³ Bentham, *Essay II*, p. 44.

everybody else, is constantly prepared in point of expectation, by generally established opinions and generally known practice.⁹⁴

For Bentham starvation and distress were abundant sources of disutility and of societal instability, and went against the natural right of man as a member of his community. Bentham was here drawing upon the natural jurisprudence tradition, as elaborated by writers such as John Locke or William Paley, who asserted that every man had a natural right to subsistence and that where society did not allow for this right to be met every man was legally entitled to seize what he needed from the property of the wealthy.⁹⁵ In other words, the right of the poor to subsistence invoked a reciprocal duty of the rich to provide adequate sustenance as a necessary component of the legal sanctity of property rights. Locke claimed that:

The poor had 'a Right to the Surplusage' of their brother's goods when 'pressing Wants' called for it. He stated that just as much as 'Justice' gives every man a title to the product of his 'honest Industry, so Charity gives every Man a Title to so much out of another's Plenty, as will keep him from extreme want, where he had no means to subsist otherwise'.⁹⁶

However, this natural right of necessity of recourse to the property of others could be most effectively met by the institutional provision of subsistence such that the additional cost to society was minimised, by the coercion of productivity on the part of recipients. In this way the destabilising effects of scarcity would be forestalled whilst the poor would be brought into the remit of a productive, stable and happy society. For Bentham, it was the institutional internalisation of the social costs of scarcity and inequality that would lead to the greatest aggregate of societal happiness. In contrast other, later reformers counterpoised such claims with a reform schema that circumvented a natural right to subsistence by delegating responsibility for distress onto the shoulders of the poor themselves. Instead of subsistence natural rights, the natural laws of property and of the market were foregrounded as the rationale for relief schemes that saw self-help rather

⁹⁴ Bentham, *Essay II*, p. 58; In the *Outline of a work entitled pauper management improved*, Bentham was to wax lyrical on the merits of apportioning appropriate labour, relative to their ability, to all the inmates of the house of industry including the blind or elderly. Such an attitude of *quid pro quo* and of communal solidarity, underlain by subsistence rights, may be construed as underpinning the traditional paternalist moral economy, and hence Bentham may be said, to a greater or lesser degree, to be institutionalising this in a new form.

⁹⁵ See I. Hont and M. Ignatieff, "Needs and justice in the wealth of nations: An introductory essay" in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.) *Wealth and virtue: The shaping of political economy in the Scottish enlightenment* (Cambridge 1983).

⁹⁶ John Locke, cited in C. Muldrew, *Economy of obligation*, p.307. Locke's attitude towards natural rights stemmed from his conception of the primary duty of government as being that of the preservation of society itself. See J. Locke, *The second treatise of government* (1690), Ch. XI, esp. sections 134-135, in J. W. Gough (ed.), *The second treatise of government : An essay concerning the true original, extent and end of civil government and a letter concerning toleration* (Oxford, 1956).

than community-level redistributive mechanisms as the rightful and just solution to social ills. Hence, if poverty was avoidable then there could exist no natural right to another's property, an argument stressed by the natural law writers examined in Chapter Two below.

Similarly, the magistrate, reformer and founder of the Thames Police Patrick Colquhoun (1745-1820) called for the complete reform of the system of police, extolling a brand of "half-baked Benthamism" that would thereby force the poor into industry and hence moral reform.⁹⁷ Colquhoun established a conceptual continuum, rooted in immorality, between poverty/indigence and crime, with what he saw as a faulty system of police to blame for the propagation of that immorality by not effectively managing the strains of commercial growth. The means of overcoming the inherent peccancy of this police system was to re-organise the jurisprudential system along lines of proportional punishment, as espoused by the celebrated penologist and reformer Cesare Beccaria in his *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764), and to inculcate a principle of proactivity into law enforcement whereby an "active principle" of "watchful police" would fulfil the "true essence of police", the "fundamental principle of good legislation", namely the "prevention of crimes and misdemeanours", thereby

⁹⁷J. R. Poynter, *Society and pauperism: English ideas on poor relief, 1795-1834* (London, 1969), p. 207. Colquhoun's principal work, *A treatise on indigence* (1806) – "the most important work on the question of poverty published between the scarcity and the end of the war" – had the effect of putting "the science of police on a new footing", despite the fact that his espousal of "coercive didacticism" seemed to offer, in Poynter's view, "few practical suggestions"; Dean, *A genealogy of the government of poverty*, p. 236; S. Sherman, *Imagining poverty: Quantification and the decline of paternalism* (Columbus, Ohio, 2001), p. 199; Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, p. 200, 206. The full title of Colquhoun's *magnum opus* is *A treatise on indigence; exhibiting a general view of the national resources for productive labour; with propositions for ameliorating the condition of the poor, and improving the moral habits and increasing the comforts of the labouring people, particularly the rising generation; by regulations of political economy, calculated to prevent poverty from descending into indigence, to produce sobriety and industry, to reduce the parochial rates of the kingdom, and generally to promote the happiness and security of the community at large, by the diminution of moral and penal offences, and the future prevention of crimes* (London, 1806). See also P. Colquhoun, *A general view of the national police system, recommended by the select committee of finance to the House of Commons, and the functions of the proposed Central Board of Police Revenue: with observations on the probable effects of the general designs in the prevention of crimes, and in securing the rights of the peaceful subject* (London, 1799); P. Colquhoun, *A treatise on the police of the metropolis, explaining the various crimes and misdemeanours which at present are felt as a pressure upon the community; and suggesting remedies for their prevention* (London, 1796). See [Anon.] *Observations on a late publication intituled a treatise on the police of the metropolis, by P. Colquhoun, Esq. By a citizen of London: But no magistrate* (London, 1800) for how Colquhoun's reforms would "threaten a species of despotism and inquisition hitherto without a parallel in the country", p. v.

For more on Colquhoun, see R. Paley, "Colquhoun, Patrick (1745–1820)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5992>]; The biography written by his son-in-law, 'latros' [G. D. Yeats], *A biographical sketch of the life and writings of Patrick Colquhoun Esq. LL. D.* (London, 1818); for an outline of his views see R. Pieris, "The contributions of Patrick Colquhoun to social theory and social philosophy", *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. XII (1954). See also: A. P. Donajgrodzki, "'Social police' and the bureaucratic elite: A vision of order in the age of reform", in A. P. Donajgrodzki (ed.), *Social control in nineteenth century Britain* (London, 1977), pp. 51-76.

“conducting men to the maximum of happiness, and the minimum of misery”.⁹⁸ A gradated system of institutionalised, deterrent punishments, overcoming the inertia, inhumanitarianism and problematic magistracy discretion of the “bloody code” (from houses of correction to penitentiaries to public works to hard labour and transportation) and an extension of the supervisory and detection system of governance (stipendiary magistrates, constables, peace officers, public prosecutors and a National Police Board among others) would promote certainty of punishment and discourage criminal behaviours, as well as enabling the collection of data on the poor for police and surveillance purposes.⁹⁹ Furthermore, a nationally uniform system would enable the overcoming of

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 35, 16, 18, 301.

⁹⁹ Bentham had also envisioned such a purpose for his pauper penitentiaries. Indeed, the collection and deployment of information through a networked system of penitentiary workhouses, advertising employment as well as wanted outlaws, formed an interesting adjunct to both Bentham and Colquhoun’s schemes. Information was to be collected by Colquhoun’s Board on the number of indigent persons totally supported; number of paupers removed; aggregate expenses of the parish; food and house rent of the poor; earnings of mechanics and labourers; number of apprentices; the resources for employment in each parish; number of schools for poor children; general state of morals in the parish; number of vagrants in the habit of asking alms; number of vagrants passed on, etc. The board was to report their findings to the secretary of state, with the commissioners authorised to “suggest regulations” for “the general economy and management of the pauper police in each parish...to relieve the indigent requiring assistance, to prop up the industrious poor ready to descend into indigence”, Colquhoun, *Treatise on indigence*, pp. 91-94. For the expanded role of constables see Colquhoun’s *A treatise on the functions and duties of a constable; containing details and observations interesting to the public, as they relate to the corruption of morals, and for the protection of the peaceful subject against penal and criminal offences* (London, 1803).

The ‘bloody code’ is a colloquialism for the criminal justice system in eighteenth-century England in which the legal punishment for a vast array of crimes, especially those against property such as theft, larceny or forgery (encompassing the 1729 Forgery Act), was hanging. Capital punishment was the likely fate of those found guilty under the Riot Act, Black act, Smuggling Acts, to name but a few. David Lieberman has commented on this uneven extension “of the punishment of last resort in a penal system which was being transformed by the introduction of, and increasing reliance upon the new secondary punishments of transportation [initially to America from 1718 until the War of Independence and then to Australia from 1787] and punishment” and declares that “many eighteenth-century penal law reformers recognized that extensively increasing the number of capital statutes in order to prevent criminal acts actually undermined effective criminal deterrence”, see D. Lieberman, *The province of legislation determined: Legal theory in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 27, 18. Historiographical discussion of the ‘bloody code’ owes much to J. M. Beattie’s *Crime and the courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford, 1986), and the disagreement between Hay and Langbein over whether the criminal code functioned primarily as a ruling-class conspiracy tool of class repression or grew out of new forms of economic activity, being principally designed to serve and protect. See respectively D. Hay, et al, *Albion’s fatal tree: Crime and society in eighteenth-century England* (London, 1975) and J. H. Langbein, “Albion’s fatal flaws”, *Past and Present*, Vol. 98 (1983), pp. 96-120. For more on the eighteenth-century criminal code see the collection of essays in N. Landau (ed.), *Law, crime and English society, 1660-1830* (Cambridge, 2002); V. A. C. Gatrell, *The hanging tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford, 1994); P. King, *Crime, justice and discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford, 2000), and; F. McLynn, *Crime and punishment in eighteenth-century England* (London, 1989). For an account linking greater rationalization of punishments in the Weberian sense to the progression of greater civility see E. Jephcott trans. N. Elias, *The civilizing process* (Oxford, 1994), which may link into a sensibility of “sympathy” prevalent in the prison reform movement as described in R. McGowen “A powerful sympathy: Terror, the prison, and humanitarian reform in early nineteenth-century Britain”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Jul., 1986), pp. 312–334. According to J. M. Beattie, “it was a fundamental assumption [of the ‘bloody code’] that some offenders were such a threat to the community that their execution was essential; and that the sight of men and women being hanged provided the only effective means of deterring others”; compared to later less

the administrative problems presented by local variation of poor law practice and the vagaries of the settlement laws.¹⁰⁰

Colquhoun, following Bentham, distinguished between poverty (working for one's living), the natural condition of man and productive of wealth, and indigence (the inability to subsist independently), and declared indigence to be the real social problem. Furthermore, "the barrier between these two categories in society is often slender, and the public interest requires that it should be narrowly guarded, since every individual who retrogrades into indigence becomes a loss to the body politic, not only in the diminution of productive labour, but also in an additional pressure on the community by the necessary support of the person and his family who have thus descended into indigence".¹⁰¹ This guarding took the form of both a "watchful and superintending agency which is indispensably necessary to produce a preventive effect" and the "use [of] those means which talents, attention, and humanity can accomplish...for the purpose of enabling them to assist themselves".¹⁰² Hence he

draconian methods which aimed to break offenders away from wicked or idle ways of life, and by this example to deter others. See J. M. Beattie, "London crime and the making of the 'Bloody Code', 1689-1718", in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock and R. B. Shoemaker (eds.), *Stilling the grumbling hive: The response to social and economic problems in England, 1689-1750* (New York, 1992), p. 54.

¹⁰⁰ As Steven King has suggested, there was systemic confusion in the poor laws stemming from the lack of legislative guidance in how to define poverty and deservingness, once considered a benefit of system at the (rural) parochial level but increasingly problematic as the socio-economic landscape altered, encompassing broader subjectivities. Colquhoun denigrated this confusion as a source of inefficiency, one that could be overcome by the implementation of a national or at least county-level jurisdiction of relief based upon proper mechanisms of observation, information and discrimination that would rationalise, regularise and systematise the provision of relief and prevent the culpable indigent from gaining too many free meals. Yet his nationalised system of police would also supersede and correct another systemic abuse located within the poor law edifice, that of the settlement laws. These laws, by hindering labour mobility and making unemployment an unalterable fact of life and excuse for indigence rather than a challenge to the industry and ingenuity of the labourer, threw a stick in the moral and regulatory mechanics of the poor relief vehicle. The original principle of poor relief was "national", the practice was "parochial", and thus "limiting the burden to a parochial fund, laid the foundation of all the evils which have followed" and "debased the minds of the unhappy sufferers, without adding an atom to the resources of the state". The solution therefore was "to consider the nation as one family, or as one parish, and to apply the general fund wherever it is most wanted...by losing sight of particular parishes as their freeholds, they [the poor] would trust less to this ultimate resource and more to their own exertions". The founding logos operating here is uncovered by Colquhoun's comparison of labour mobility with the rating of wages: "In every country the free circulation of labour is of the utmost importance, as it regards the interest of the virtuous poor, and perhaps the chief barrier against a state of indigence; while rating of wages by legislative authority destroys that principle which produces competition, and will often prove unjust, since it places the athletic and industrious workman on the same footing with the feeble and the lazy, while (excepting in piecework) there is no encouragement for exertion". Colquhoun, *Treatise on indigence*, p. 244, 16. See S. King, *Poverty and welfare*, Ch. 1

¹⁰¹ Colquhoun, *A Treatise on indigence*, pp. 8-9

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 83; Colquhoun, *The state of indigence, and the situation of the casual poor in the metropolis, explained; with reasons assigned why the prevailing system, with respect to this unfortunate class of the community, contributes, in a considerable degree, to the increase and multiplication of crimes: with suggestions, shewing the necessity and utility of an establishment of pauper police, immediately applicable to the casual poor, under the management of responsible commissioners, with their functions explained* (London, 1799), p. 12.

directed his efforts towards breaking the continuity between idle poverty/ desperate indigence and crime by opening up a conceptual and operational space for the deployment of strategies of self-help to correct the almost Lamarckian attributes of loss of character associated with “culpable” (i.e. wilful or idle) indigence, for the “object in view” did not “depend merely on the manner of giving relief...but upon various collateral aids, which, operating together, shall promote industry, frugality, health, comfort, virtue, and happiness among the labouring people; while in their operation they gradually reduce the mass of indigence and turpitude, which at present afflicts society”, the underlying logic of this schema declaring how “it is in the character of the labouring people that the cause of the great and unexampled extent of indigence is to be found”.¹⁰³ The “collateral aids” he suggested were, principally, discriminatory soup kitchens supported by subscriptions, parochial benefit societies attached to a national deposit bank, and a national system of education for the children of the poor. Colquhoun held a broader ambition for shoring-up the social structure and state apparatus as a means of enhancing overall “the stock of genuine and individual happiness”.¹⁰⁴ It is the agency of the individual within such structures, rather than outside of them in a revolutionary space, that presents the most promising avenue for realising national greatness and individual contentment and autonomy. Colquhoun linked reform of individual behaviours to national aggrandisement such that (in a departure from mercantilist and political arithmetic models) it was not merely the extraction of people’s labour but the active contribution of persons to the common good that was the desired object, uniting all together in a common endeavour. For Colquhoun’s purposes a more interventionist platform was necessary to enable the forming of character around a cluster of desirable attributes and to enable rising productivity. The setting out of such an institutional apparatus would promote *rapprochement* between the various sections of society and enable them to play their complementary roles to the full; the goal was to convince the poor that “they have a stake in the country as well as the rich”, that “national happiness and prosperity” [my emphasis] was the desideratum, that “the nation may be considered as a large family”. Indeed, the idea that the nation should be considered as “one family, as one parish” or as the “body politic” forms a dominant motif in Colquhoun’s work, underpinning his conception of an organic society and the emphasis he placed on the role of government to incorporate the lower classes more closely into an improving whole, to “render their labour productive” as “the fundamental principle of good legislation...is the art of conducting a nation to the maximum of happiness and the minimum of misery”. By enabling the lower classes to work with their natural superiors rather than at cross-purposes to them social happiness would be maximized.¹⁰⁵ As David Philips has shown, Colquhoun

¹⁰³ Colquhoun, *Treatise on indigence*, p. 245, 239.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156, 166.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.122, 9, 18, 244, 277, 49.

(and Bentham can be said to express a similar sentiment) thought the urban poor no longer amenable to control by traditional methods; “the lower classes had grown apart from their natural rulers, and, since they no longer lived in a close ‘face-to-face’ society, their morals and behaviour could no longer be personally supervised by the squire or master; it now required *institutions*”.¹⁰⁶ The muscular interventions proposed by these two writers sought to co-opt the poor into industry and frugality, enabling maximal cost-effectiveness of poor relief to be attained but also realising the equation of individual happiness with national prosperity. Through a lack of political will and parliamentary baulking at the cost and magnitude of such reforms, neither scheme came to fruition, yet conceptually they point the way to a strong linkage between the quality of individual agency in the form of self-help and national improvement. Self-help can thus be seen to develop from more orthodox discussions over poor relief than a rigid focus on Malthusianism might suggest. Yet it was that emergent platform of macroeconomic structures within the context of scarcity that evolved individual self-responsibility from discussions over self-betterment and national improvement, and added prudence and frugality as preventative of a retrograde state and falling in the social scale. By focusing on individual thrift and productivity within an institutional programme for internalising the costs of subsistence rights, Bentham and Colquhoun helped to advance discussion of poverty to the point where the emphasis on the individual took precedence over that of subsistence rights, and the security of society elevated above that of personal disaster. This shift in cognition encompassed not just understandings of social policy, as a more broadly conceived and discriminatory approach came to the fore, but also of modes of governance as paternalism came to be conceptually re-structured.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ D. Philips, “‘A new engine of power and authority’: The institutionalization of law-enforcement in England 1780-1830”, in V. A. C. Gattrell, B. Lenman and G. Parker (eds.), *Crime and the law: The social history of crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London, 1980), p. 177.

¹⁰⁷ The author’s analysis of the strand of thinking inclusive of Bentham, Colquhoun and more orthodox approaches to social policy has had to be massively truncated for reasons of space (by about 90%) – see the extended version of my thesis at www.academia.edu. As the natural law approach to poverty is more relevant for later chapters and for my overall conclusions it has been given preference here, yet the underlying continuities of both strands in terms of a broad conception of economic problems and an understanding of the potentially temporary nature of poverty and the reformative power of developing character should be stressed.

Chapter 2: The Natural Law Reformers: Self-responsibility, Virtue and Abolition

The natural law tradition of poor law discourse predated the 1790s in a form slightly different to that it assumed later on, epitomised by the contributions of Malthus and Eden. The principal difference lay in the later deployment of an aspirational psychology to buttress self-help and make it coincident with national progress. The earlier writers made more of the naturalness of poverty, derived from a utility of poverty conception of the labour market, which was made the focal point of the work of men such as Townsend or Burke in order to buttress their hierarchical conceptions of society and to ensure the docility of labour. Yet the experiences of the 1790s in terms of scarcity, allowances and Jacobin radicalism forced a rapprochement of such concerns with prevailing sentiments of humanitarianism such as minimum wage debates, paving the way for an amalgamation of natural law understandings of society such as that espoused by Townsend or Malthus with a stress on the psychology of emulation and improvement; a paean to self-help as the means of bringing the poor within a hierarchical polity rather than as a necessary and subservient appendage. If poverty was the product of natural laws and a hierarchically-ordained society then either it could be submitted to as immutable and accepted at face-value (in which case the stresses associated with it needed to be incorporated into the governance structure, much as Locke or Bentham attempted), or else the community could work in accordance with those natural laws to try and ameliorate their worst effects. The difference lay here in breaking the equivalence of poverty and hierarchical inequality. If inequality was inevitable in a society organised by the division of labour and the security of property, then it did not necessarily have to follow that those who laboured for their living had to live in indigence, rather the societal minimum standard of living could be raised by improvement and an expanding national product above the level of subsistence, thus negating the need for poor laws. Yet, in a catch-22 situation, it was only by preventing the hindering effects of the poor laws that such improvement could be achieved. In effect, de-regulation of the labour market would enable national economic growth, but there might occur an intervening period of hardship as society adjusted to the new conditions. In the economic parlance of the age, the wages-fund could be expanded, but only if the subsistence security of those at the bottom was minimised to a level where it would not prove a hindrance to economic development.

Writing in 1786 the Rev. Joseph Townsend (1739-1816), rector of Pewsey, Wiltshire, made an important contribution to later social, political and biological thought with his *Dissertation on the*

poor laws (1786); in particular the debt owed to him by Malthus and Darwin has been noted.¹⁰⁸ As a member of the Geological Society and noted geologist, Townsend's tract received wide attention, being cited in the *Annals of Agriculture* and in works such as Thomas Ruggles' *The history of the poor; their rights, duties, and the laws respecting them. In a series of letters*, or those by Davies, Howlett, and others.¹⁰⁹ Townsend was a supporter of enclosure and fierce critic of the poor laws, for not only did they hurt the poor as well as the rate-payers, they also wielded a damaging influence on the community at large, working to disrupt the social fabric.

John Hatcher has stressed the ubiquity of such claims of hunger enforcing "the duty to labour" within poor law discourse stretching back to the fourteenth century, and how Townsend was merely drawing on an existing portfolio of enduring beliefs, yet the socio-economic challenges faced by Townsend's generation were new in their scale and demanded at least a new application of this portfolio to try and explain them.¹¹⁰ In seeking to align his own religious morality with the economic and social changes he was witnessing, Townsend was seeking to adapt this older discourse to new circumstances, and we should not be surprised if he drew on older ideas to do so. The societal discourse pertaining to the poor laws was itself being continuously challenged and updated, yet many of the central concepts of more traditional paternalism were not discarded but *translated* as part of this.

Townsend saw overpopulation and a lack of discretion in administering relief as the root of the evils of his time, and in this he followed a similar mantra to that laid out by other poor law reformers such as Count Rumford (see below). He deplored the benevolent magistrate who was in effect "taking bread from industry and virtue, to bestow on indolence and vice", and preferred out-relief at the discretion of the parochial authorities, who had the personal knowledge to judge on character and deservingness.¹¹¹ For Townsend, the poor laws served only to "promote the evils they mean to remedy, and aggravate the distress they were intended to relieve". The problem was that "it is only hunger which can spur and goad" the poor to labour industriously, as the "most natural motive to

¹⁰⁸ See A. Montagu's foreword to the 1971 print of J. Townsend, *A dissertation on the poor laws: By a well-wisher to mankind* (London, 1971). He also enjoyed success with the related works *Observations on various plans for the relief of the poor* (1788) and *Journey through Spain in the year 1786 and 1787* (1791), which expanded upon the themes of his *Dissertation*.

¹⁰⁹ For biographical detail on Townsend see A. Sherbo, "Townsend, Joseph (1739–1816)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27613>, accessed 16 July 2012]. See also, R. G. Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws: A historical study of the influence of classical economics on the formation of social welfare policy* (Athens, Ohio, 1977), pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁰ See J. Hatcher, "Labour, leisure and economic thought before the Nineteenth Century", *Past and Present*, Vol. 160 (Aug., 1998), pp. 64-115.

¹¹¹ J. Townsend, *Observations on various plans for the relief of the poor* (London, 1788), p. 7.

industry”; “yet our laws have said, they shall never hunger”.¹¹² This thorny controversy lay at the heart of further problems, for by demotivating the poor to labour the force of subordination within the social hierarchy was weakened as “our laws tend to weaken these bonds, and to destroy this subordination, compelling the occupier of the land to find employment for the poor”. As without “due subordination all government must end”, the stakes were high. Similarly, the poor laws artificially inflated wages by setting a base level of subsistence expenditure by or for everyone in the parish. Higher wages tended towards idleness and insubordination, for “as you advance the wages of the poor, you diminish the quantity of their work”, and thus improvements were harder to effect. Townsend claimed that “hope and fear are the springs of industry” and that “our laws weaken the one and destroy the other”, by guaranteeing subsistence and hence by rewarding indolence, which by this process becomes the wrongful object of emulation for the “lazy and improvident”, instead of “the man who by his activity is acquiring affluence”.¹¹³ For Townsend, such interference in the natural regulations of society disrupted God’s plan for a Christian way of life as well as harming the overall good of society by inhibiting improvements and undermining “due subordination”. As he understood it, “in the progress of society, it will be found, that some must want; and then the only question will be this, who is most worthy to suffer cold and hunger, the prodigal or the provident, the slothful or the diligent, the virtuous or the vicious?” That there may always be some “to fulfil the most servile, the most sordid, and the most ignoble offices in the community” was a “law of nature” by which the “stock of human happiness” was “much increased” as it facilitated production and the division of labour, and the upper classes were enabled to be “most useful to the state”.¹¹⁴ This is a rigid, pessimistic conception of existence that anticipates much of what Malthus was to elaborate in his *First essay*. Townsend declared that “poverty and wretchedness” were “increasing daily” in proportion with efforts to restrain them, for, by encouraging population, the poor laws merely created the problem they were designed to overcome: “He, who stately employs the poor in useful labour, is their only friend; he who only feeds them, is their greatest enemy”. Townsend attacked not only the principle of the poor laws in guaranteeing subsistence, but also their current shape in rewarding only those who were the most importunate or who had the least shame, whilst those who truly merited assistance such as the aged or ill were treated harshly with the workhouse test or badging. Such measures functioned as a “virtual repeal” of the “poor’s tax”, but “unfortunately the most worthy objects suffer most by this repeal, and the advantage to the public is little more than negative”. Workhouses as the last resort of the needy also served to “disarm the magistrate” and

¹¹² Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, p. 23, 17.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23, 24, 26, 29.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36, 34-35.

“intimidate the poor”; in them it was impossible to preserve a “system of economy”.¹¹⁵ Townsend supported the JPs of Lindsey in Lincolnshire in their protest against workhouses for “the expense at which they are maintained, and the contemptible produce of their labour”, proclaiming them to operate “like the figures we set up to scare the birds, till they have learnt first to despise and then to perch upon the object of their terror”. The poor, “when collected, cost three times as much as in their own cottages, and do not half the work” and Townsend denigrated workhouses as expensive, inefficient, and detrimental to the deserving poor, attacking Thomas Gilbert’s 1786 Bill advocating union workhouses.¹¹⁶ He was naturally averse to more interventionist attitudes towards the poor, believing that such measures hindered rather than helped. He supported the movement for friendly societies and for annuities, believing that self-help and out-relief was preferable to in-relief, and no relief to out-relief. His critique of the poor laws was thus three-fold: they expensively encouraged population and hence created the poor; they rewarded the improvident and importunate at the expense of the more deserving, and; they interfered with the Christian duty of charity.

Townsend saw charity as a proper Christian occupation, but only if conducted in a properly Christian manner. As “Christian charity was never meant to discourage diligence and occupation, nor to promote among men a wanton dissipation of their substance”, so “the charity of Christians” should *not* be “indiscriminate and blind” but rather should select “first those which are most worthy”.¹¹⁷ Deborah Valenze has noted how Townsend “blended the principles of religion with those of commercial capitalism”, and certainly his emphasis on choice points towards a commercial sensibility.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, Townsend’s critique of the charity of the poor laws in fact represented a stringent defence of the hierarchical nature of society, along Calvinist-Methodist lines (for whom he had sympathies, being involved in the evangelical Lady Huntingdon’s circle).¹¹⁹ He excoriated the

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26, 55, 48, 54.

¹¹⁶ Townsend, *Observations on various plans*, p. 36, 20, 14

¹¹⁷ Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, p. 58-9.

¹¹⁸ D. Valenze, “Charity, custom, and humanity: Changing attitudes towards the poor in eighteenth-century England”, in J. Garnett and C. Matthew (eds.), *Revival and religion since 1700: Essays for John Walsh* (London, 1993), Ch. 4.

¹¹⁹ Selena Hastings, countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791) was the Calvinist-Methodist leader of the countess of Huntingdon’s connexion, a religious organisation of several establishments which formally seceded from the established church in 1783, headquartered at the countess’s private chapel in Spa Fields. Widowed at age 39, Lady Huntingdon pursued her faith zealously, making contact with Methodist leaders such as John and Charles Wesley (she fell out with John Wesley in a disagreement over the role of good works in securing salvation, preferring a more Calvinist conception of predestination, and launching a publicity campaign against him in 1770) and, significantly, the more Calvinist George Whitefield. She established Trevecca College in Brecknockshire in 1768 for the training of evangelical ministers and chapels in Brighton (1761), Bath (1765) and Tunbridge Wells (1769). Insolvent at her death, her connexion nevertheless proved an influential evangelical organ. Townsend occasionally preached at her chapel in Bath and in 1767 he went on a mission to Scotland for her and in 1768 to Dublin. Although sympathetic to the Calvinist-Methodist doctrine of the connexion, Townsend was not a devotee and did not secede. It is not clear to what extent his religious views

“undistinguishing benevolence of power” and denigrated how, “by establishing a community of goods, or rather by giving to the idle and to the vicious the *first* claim upon the produce of the earth, many of the more prudent, careful, and industrious citizens are straitened in their circumstances, and restrained from marriage”. Elsewhere he emphasises time and again the “due subordination” of the poor and their “duty” of “obedience”. His conception of society is one where all have a place and where all are useful. This brings in his concerns over excess, idle population hurting the common good:

When industry and frugality keep pace with population, or rather when population is only the consequence of these, the strength and riches of a nation will bear proportion to the number of its citizens: but when the increase of people is unnatural and forced, when it arises only from a community of goods, it tends to poverty and weakness.¹²⁰

Elsewhere he counters claims such as those by John Howlett that an increasing population is in itself beneficial: “But you may perhaps be satisfied with saying, the strength of a nation is in the multitude of people. True, if they are usefully employed: if unemployed, it matters little to the state whether they are fed in convents or in cottages”.¹²¹ For, “speculation apart, it is a fact, that, in England we have more than we can feed, and many more than we can profitably employ under the present system of our laws”.¹²² The distinction between labouring and idle poor thus takes on national importance in deciding “who is most worthy to suffer cold and hunger”, as “in the progress of society, it will be found, that some must want”. Townsend’s approach to charity and poor relief thus takes on a moral approach that seeks to distinguish who is most worthy of relief and who is, in effect, excess populace. The duty of landlords and the upper classes is to maintain the diligent poor and exclude the idle and dissolute; the duty of labourers is to be productive and follow the lead of the upper classes, for “the first duty required from a servant is prompt, cheerful, and hearty obedience”.¹²³ Instead of the current poor laws, then, aid must be “limited” so that “the minister and principal inhabitants in every parish...would then have it in their power to encourage sobriety,

patterned his views on the Poor laws, but it seems likely that his predilection for Calvinism may have led him to prioritise natural laws and the moral quality of life over living standards and hence a rejection of the Poor laws – to a certain extent humanitarianism was irrelevant to his thinking. For more on the Countess of Huntingdon see B. S. Schlenther, *Queen of the Methodists: The countess of Huntingdon and the eighteenth-century crisis of faith and society* (Bishop Auckland, 1997) and E. Welch, *Spiritual pilgrim: A reassessment of the life of the countess of Huntingdon* (Cardiff, 1995). For more on the evangelical movement of the period see A. Armstrong, *The Church of England, Methodists and society 1700-1850* (London, 1973) and D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain* (London, 1989).

¹²⁰ Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, p. 42.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, cited in D. Valenze, *Charity, custom and humanity*, p. 30.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 36, 26.

industry and due subordination among the labouring poor”.¹²⁴ This is why Townsend asserted that “the legislature should facilitate the laying common fields in severalty, leaving the enclosure of these lands to every man’s discretion”; for enclosing not only removed the common’s sources of subsistence but, through offering the potential for increased production, also encouraged greater industry and improvement on the land. He offered a similar defence of luxury as increasing production and thus affording greater employment for the poor.¹²⁵

Townsend imparts a moral quality to industry and self-help as in keeping with the moral rectitude of imparting charity to the deserving poor. A sort of reciprocal obligation is formed, a tacit understanding that industry and diligence, by demonstrating the moral propriety of the poor, induce a charitable obligation on the part of the rich to meet the needs of these poor in times of dearth. Townsend’s deployment of more overtly religious morality, couched in individual responsibility rather than communal ethics, to justify his proposed system, is demonstrated in his notions of charity and self-reliance. Yet there exists a social and societal balance between the two. Thus, those who prove themselves unable to feed themselves, rather than being incapable of doing so, are in a position of their own making and do not constitute proper recipients of charity. His economics is that of biological providence; the poor, “who responded to a biological stimulus to work – the physical need to eat, rather than to the civilised need to compete, win and exhibit themselves publicly”, were “inhabiting a world closer to nature”, and were therefore subordinate. These views “re-inscribed a hierarchical representation of society, in this instance subordinating labourers on the grounds of their natural propensities to live their lives out of control”.¹²⁶ His model of the Isle of Juan Fernandez, inspiring Malthus and then Darwin, in which survival of the fittest is advocated as the natural law to regulate populations of dogs and goats in their relative positions *vis-à-vis* the topography of the island, advocates two relative populations of rich and poor in which those most able to take care for themselves survive. If the goats grow careless than more of them will be eaten by the dogs and then the dog population will swell until famine, either in the form of a lack of goats or their growing propriety in keeping to the higher slopes, culls it. Control is seen as central to survival; either regulation of position in the higher slopes of society to avoid slipping down, or regulation of limited resources down below. Thus biological laws provide the framework for providence to operate within, and those who demonstrated moral self-control would survive. Townsend saw the poor laws as undermining this system and therefore undermining the fragile population balance and threatening the survival of society itself.

¹²⁴ Townsend, *Observations on various plans*, p. 40.

¹²⁵ Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, p. 33.

¹²⁶ Valenze, *Charity, custom, and humanity* p. 72.

The reform of the Poor laws according to Townsend should be such that “industry, economy and subordination” are encouraged whilst the demand for labour was made to regulate population, as it would do if the labour market was left to find its natural level. The plan he suggested was, accordingly, that the “poor’s tax be gradually reduced in certain proportions annually, the sum to be raised in each parish being fixed and certain, not boundless, and obliged to answer unlimited demands”. The goal of such a reduction of available relief was to coerce the poor through “pressure” to “acquire habits of diligent application, and of severe frugality”. Once this was done, the truly poor and indigent “might safely be left to the free bounty of the rich, without the interposition of any other law”, furthermore “if the whole system of compulsive charity were abolished, it would be still better for the state”.¹²⁷ To assist the industrious poor and to “train up the children of the dissolute in useful labour”, workshops should be set up offering daily pay, whilst all men should be denied relief unless they were members of a friendly society, hence “would sobriety, industry, and economy, take place of drunkenness, idleness and prodigality, and due subordination would be again restored”, whilst alehouses should be taxed into oblivion.¹²⁸ Thus by cutting the poor loose into the currents of a free labour market they would become dependent upon the benevolence of the rich once again and assume “due subordination”. Simultaneously, the habits of industry and economy that they would be forced to acquire would contribute towards a rising national product, a stable population and the moral regeneration of society, rich and poor alike. This plan of poor relief was preoccupied with creating a malleable and docile labour force, a moral and obedient lower class and with securing the hierarchical status quo. It thus conformed to the traditional goals of poor law discourse but used languages of natural laws and self-help and thus can be said to lie on the cusp of the later trend within the discourse towards virtuous self-responsibility and individual agency in the pursuit of personal improvement.

For Townsend, the moral Christian task of charity is regulated by the moral qualification of diligence, duty and “due subordination”; the immoral consequences of undifferentiated charity outweighs the benevolent impulse of assuaging distress. The task of the landlords, etc. thus becomes assessing this qualification for relief. In principle, relief as regulated by morality is substituted for relief as regulatory of morality. As Poynter puts it; “the poor had to earn relief by moral desert as they had to earn wages by their labour: indiscriminate private charity was as unnatural as the poor law”.¹²⁹ The idle poor are seen as detrimental to the community as a whole, selfishly responsible for the

¹²⁷ Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, pp. 61-63.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-65.

¹²⁹ J. R. Poynter, *Society and pauperism: English ideas on poor relief, 1795-1834* (London, 1969), p. 42.

“injustice” of “taking bread from industry and virtue, to bestow upon idleness and vice”.¹³⁰ Here we see an inversion of the moral economy of the crowd as theorised by Thompson. In Thompson’s moral economy the selfish offender against the common good is the selfish forestaller or engrosser whose independent economic action precipitates distress. In Townsend’s moral economy the selfish offender against the common good are the idle and indolent poor whose economic dependency precipitates distress, a theme taken up strongly by Malthus. The difference is one of scale, from local to national, yet still the communal ethic of contributing to the common good is prevalent. In this, Townsend was contributing to a new understanding of the poor law as a national issue in a macroeconomic sense rather than in a collection of microeconomic entities or localities. Furthermore, he was certainly not someone who sought to de-moralise the economy, rather to adhere a stricter conception of morality upon the economic system in which he lived. Townsend’s system thus operates from within the poor law tradition but attacks the principles of poor relief through a natural law critique – a critique more akin to a Newtonian conception of society rather than one built from natural yet communally-sanctioned rights. However, he views industriousness and moral conduct as central to the maintenance of the poor and claims that they can only look to themselves for their maintenance, unless in times of scarcity, in which case those who have displayed the correct and socially useful attributes will be afforded aid, with charitable “bounty” directed towards “the most worthy objects”.¹³¹

Another poor law commentator who wrote with the utility of poverty doctrine in mind as a product of the natural laws governing society was the politician and author Edmund Burke (1729/30-1797), who had made his name with his *A vindication of natural society* (1756), a satirical rebuttal of Bolingbroke’s critique of “artificial religion”, and *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* (1757), which argued that the instinct for self-preservation was associated with apprehensions of pain and danger and thereby with a sense of the sublime; instinctive sociability, by contrast, was associated with pleasure and a sense of beauty. Burke subsequently entered parliament and became a life-long adherent of the Rockingham Whig faction, publishing an array of political pamphlets and speeches that spelt out his Whig principles on various issues. He was an opponent of protectionism and an early exponent of retrenchment and government reform, earning the personal animosity of then king as he manoeuvred to bring the crown’s civil list under parliamentary control.¹³² By 1790 Burke was an influential member of elite

¹³⁰ Townsend, *Observations on various plans*, p. 7.

¹³¹ Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, p. 68.

¹³² For biographical detail on Burke and an account of his long political career and major works see P. Langford, “Burke, Edmund (1729/30–1797)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Sept

society and of the Foxite Whigs. In this year he published his infamous *Reflections on the revolution in France*, which attacked Richard Price's sermon asserting the rights of the people of England over their governors. Burke attacked the doctrine of natural rights that had entrusted the representatives of the people with unlimited power and set out his own statement of contrary values: "of inherited manners that conferred honour and utility on institutions that might seem otherwise outmoded, of religious beliefs that were deeply ingrained in any civil society worthy of the name, of prescriptive customs and institutions, including property itself, that required protection against untried and arbitrary ideas of rationality", and which advanced an organic, holistic conception of the body politic.¹³³ He was to refine his views on the coincidence of interests between Britain and Europe and his opposition to the French Revolution (which had driven an irrevocable wedge between him and Fox) in his *Two letters on a regicide peace* (1796), yet it was a consistency with his opposition to the natural law doctrine of the revolutionary radicals that underlay his vitriolic attack on the right to relief in his 1795 tract *Thoughts and details on scarcity*.

In this short work Burke defended the principles of free trade and asserted that "labour is a commodity like every other, and rises or falls according to the demand". Furthermore, "the impossibility of the subsistence of a man, who carries his labour to a market, is totally beside the question in this way of viewing it", and that if a minimum wage or such-like was enacted the only result would be "equal want, equal wretchedness, equal beggary...such is the event of all compulsory equalizations". The poor had no right to subsistence relief beyond what their industry could fairly purchase for them in the market, and if the magistrate should intervene he is guilty of "a violation of the property which it is his office to protect". All those who were unable to obtain subsistence through their labour, such as the ill or elderly, fall properly under the "jurisdiction of mercy", that is to say charity, which was a "direct and obligatory duty upon all Christians". The price of labour had to be settled by the market, and things left to find their own level, as "to provide for us in our necessities is not in the power of government" for "the labouring poor are only poor because they are numerous"; "the moment that government appears at market, all the principles of market will be subverted".¹³⁴ Burke was here rejecting not only allowances and a minimum wage but the provision of relief and the very principle of the Poor laws. He fundamentally opposed any systematic provision "to supply to the poor, those necessaries which it has pleased the Divine Providence for a while to with-hold from them" for "we, the people, ought to be made sensible, that it is not in

2010) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4019>, accessed 16 July 2012]. See also G. Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty: England in the early industrial age* (London, 1984), pp. 66-73.

¹³³ Langford, "Burke, Edmund (1729/30–1797)".

¹³⁴ E. Burke, *Thoughts and details on scarcity* (London, 1795), p. 5, 12-13, 14, 18, 2, 29.

breaking the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God, that we are to place our hope of softening the Divine displeasure to remove any calamity under which we suffer, or which hangs over us". In part Burke was reacting against the natural rights doctrine of the revolutionary radicals such as Paine or Price, hoping to dissuade opinion at a time of scarcity from involving the government in any kind of responsibility for the poor, as they must "bite the hand that fed them" unless trained to feed themselves.¹³⁵ Yet he was also defending his free trade principles, even prioritising them above an inconsistency in his thought that had him defending public institutions due to their lineage in his *Reflections* yet abhorring the principle of the Poor laws in his *Thoughts and details*, an institution of 200 years standing. However, this is perhaps not necessarily an inconsistency once one considers that those institutions he sought to defend were truly and properly public, national and venerated ones. The Poor laws, by contrast, aimed to legislate at the micro-level, whereas the government "cannot do [or perform] the lower duty" at the parish or private house level, as such affairs were really for "manners alone to regulate". Burke's opinion was "against an over-doing of any sort of administration, and more especially against this most momentous of all meddling on the part of authority; the meddling with the subsistence of the people".¹³⁶ He advocated a laissez-faire approach that would make the poor dependent upon the operation of the labour market for their subsistence, the implication being that if they were in distress only those who were deserving would be granted charitable assistance. Burke was seeking to explain why government interference could not help the poor during the times of scarcity and why it was inappropriate to attempt it, for "traders are to be left to their free course".¹³⁷

Much historiographical discussion has focused on Burke's relation to Adam Smith in *Thoughts and details*, yet it seems likely that Burke was not rigidly following a Smithian line, as Smith did not comment explicitly on the Poor laws, but rather was writing in answer to a specific problem put to him by Pitt and the select committee on high food prices of 1795.¹³⁸ In defending free trade

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 32, 30.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 45-46, 48.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

¹³⁸ See D. Winch, *Riches and poverty: An intellectual history of political economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge, 1996), Ch. 8. See also G. Himmelfarb, "Edmund Burke: The hero as politician, and the politician as philosopher", in *Victorian minds* (New York, 1968). For more on Burke see C. B. MacPherson, *Burke* (Oxford, 1980); R. Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A genius reconsidered* (New York, 1967); F. O. Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His political philosophy* (Bloomington, Ind., 1973), and; P. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the natural law* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1958). For more on the "Burke-Smith problem" of reconciling Burke's inconsistencies see D. Winch, "Review: The Burke-Smith problem and late eighteenth-century political and economic thought", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1985), pp. 231-247. For Burke's clash with Paine see G. Claeys, "The French Revolution debate and British political thought", *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 2 (1990), pp. 59-80 and M. Philp, "The fragmented ideology of reform" in M. Philp (ed.), *The French Revolution and British popular politics* (Cambridge,

principles Burke thought himself to be defending the justice of property security, the status quo and the divinely ordained hierarchical nature of society. Furthermore, in the *Letters on a Regicidal Peace* Burke attacked the “puling jargon” of the “labouring poor”, declaring that the term “poor” had hitherto only been ascribed to those who were unable to labour, for the “sick and infirm, for orphan infancy, for languishing and decrepit age” and that “when we affect to pity, as poor, those who must labour or the world cannot exist, we are trifling with the condition of mankind. It is the common doom of man that he must eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, or the sweat of his mind”. Grouping the able-bodied labouring poor in the same category as those who were unable to labour merely had the effect of dissatisfying the labouring poor with their condition and teaching them “to seek resources where no resources are to be found, in something else than their own industry, and frugality, and sobriety”.¹³⁹ Burke was underlining the principles of free trade and the market mechanism with a rejection of any sentiment that sought to subvert the place of those at the bottom of the social pyramid. He was opposing natural rights with natural laws and denying that anyone had any right to be anything other than what they were, or could make themselves to be. Furthermore, as he “did not know of one man, woman, or child, that has perished from famine”, the subsistence complaints of the poor were exaggerated, especially those who could work.¹⁴⁰

He adopted a similar position to Townsend in denying the principle of poor relief, though on slightly different grounds. Yet they share a concern with the market setting of wages, a process dependent upon the supply and demand of labour. In denying a right to relief in favour of the natural laws of the market these writers were undercutting the paternalist provision of relief, but only on the grounds of its systemic nature and on its lack of discretion. By portraying a greater role for discriminatory charity as a mechanism for making the poor habituated to industry, sobriety and economy, they were arguing for a moral regeneration of the poor and a retrenchment of relief, but using the market as the coercive mechanism rather than the workhouse. By denying the natural right to subsistence these thinkers were seeking not to internalise the costs of distress but to circumvent them altogether. However, both writers viewed society as a strictly hierarchical entity and stressed the status quo over any notion of social mobility. Burke stressed in his *Reflections* the “great wheel of circulation” and the beneficent effects of the “yoke of luxury” for distributing the “surplus produce of the soil”, yet he did not stress the role of an expanding national product in ameliorating the condition of the poor (other than to show that wages, although not dependent

1991). For Adam Smith’s position as distinct from his disciples see D. Winch, “Adam Smith: Scottish moral philosopher as political economist”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 35 (1992), pp. 91-113.

¹³⁹ Cited in Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, pp. 68-69 and in Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 198.

¹⁴⁰ Burke, *Thoughts and details*, p. 44.

upon food prices, had kept pace with the price of grain), for he was certain that the existence of the poor was a necessary feature of society, as was Townsend.¹⁴¹ However, by stressing the existence of a poorer strata within a hierarchical conception of society and opposing the management of the poor as dependent individuals they did create a conceptual space for the component pieces of the poorer strata to attain agency, indeed they stressed that it was only by this agency that the poor could be assured of a subsistence wage or be deserving of charitable relief. Later writers made such agency the cause of an expanding national product and thus outlined an increased role for the poor, a role that included the possibility of social mobility and a heightened standard of living.

Sir Frederick Morton Eden

One of the most influential and well-respected writers on the poor laws issue was Sir Frederick Morton Eden, second baronet and founder and chairman of the Globe Insurance Company, whose magisterial *The state of the poor* (1797) did much to put the issue of self-help at the heart of the agenda of poor law reform.¹⁴² Aside from insurance Eden conducted various investigations into socio-economic conditions and economic questions, most notably his three-volume *The state of the poor* in 1797, yet he also published pamphlets on commerce and manufactures in 1802 (see below) and on *The maritime rights of Great Britain* (1808), advising on the effects of war on British trade. Following up his professional interest in insurance as applied to The state of the poor question, he published *Observations on friendly societies, for the maintenance of the industrious classes, during sickness, infirmity and old age and other exigencies* in 1801 [See following chapter] and *On the policy and expediency of granting insurance charters* (1806).

Eden was an avid disciple of Adam Smith, his works betraying a firm belief in the free operation of the market and in the potential of the insurance principle and self-help to lead to improvement in

¹⁴¹ Cited in Winch, *Riches and poverty*, pp. 215-216.

¹⁴² The full title of Eden's work is: *The state of the poor or, An history of the labouring classes in England from the conquest to the present period; in which are particularly considered their domestic economy with respect to diet, dress, fuel, and habitation; and the various plans which, from time to time, have been proposed and adopted for the relief of the poor: Together with parochial reports relative to the administration of work-houses and houses of industry; the state of friendly societies; and other public institutions; in several agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing, districts* (3 vols., London, 1797). Unless otherwise stated, all references pertain to the first volume.

Born in Ashstead, Surrey, in 1766, the eldest son of Sir Robert Eden, governor of Maryland (created baronet 1776) and Caroline Calvert, sister and coheir of the sixth Lord Baltimore, Eden was educated at Christchurch, Oxford, matriculating in 1783 and proceeding to MA in 1789 but vacating his studentship in 1792 upon his marriage to Anne, the only daughter and heir of James Paul Smith of New Bond Street, London. From thence he worked in the insurance business in London, co-founding the Globe Insurance Company and becoming chairman. He died at the company's offices in Pall Mall, London, on 14th November 1809, aged 43. Biographical detail taken from: D. Winch, "Eden, Sir Frederick Morton, second baronet (1766–1809)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8450>, accessed 10 June 2012].

society without the need for the abolition of the rates. Described by Marx as “the only disciple of Adam Smith during the eighteenth century that produced any work of importance”, Eden’s prominence in the poor law debates in the 1790s and at the turn of the century has mandated that he be given attention in the historiography although, like Colquhoun, he has not been subject to much sustained analysis.¹⁴³ He has been all but dismissed by Poynter as “of minor importance as a theorist”, a “lesser writer” who displayed a marked “lack of originality”; yet Sherman has instead highlighted the conceptual importance of his methods and approach, wherein the way in which *The state of the poor* “relies on numbers...encourages readers to conceive the poor as extensions of the market”, preparing the ground for Eden to “discount the humane mind”, prepared to “enforce improvement” and become a “major antagonist of traditional paternalism”.¹⁴⁴ Sherman’s approach gets to the heart of the matter in that we can distinguish between Eden’s influence in terms of direct findings and his contribution towards re-framing the question of poor relief in the light of political economy, as the poor emerged as an abstract societal stratum in place of individuated members of a community.¹⁴⁵ Tangentially, Cowherd sees Eden as a theorist who “summarily rejected” the humanitarian reforms of men such as Pitt or Gilbert, whilst Poynter counterpoises him to men such as Davies or Howlett, who called for greater governmental intervention (such as the imposition of a minimum wage) to ensure that labourer’s resources were not overwhelmed by their expenses.¹⁴⁶ Writing in the mid-1790s, Eden collated his findings at a time of crisis, forming an intervention in discussions of poverty at that juncture in the form of his rejection of minimum wages and of greater legislative protection for the poor, yet obliquely he also set out his case for Britain to embrace commercial improvement as the best way to realise greater national strength and to stave off discontent of the ilk seen in France in 1789, a broader thesis congruent with the views espoused in his pamphlet *Eight letters on the peace; and on the commerce and manufactures of Great Britain* (London, 1802), for “internal improvements” will not only lead to an “increase [in] the remuneration of the workman” but have also set the scene whereby “Britain has increased her power”, principally through “the energy of British spirit”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ F. Engels and E. Untermann (eds.), K. Marx, *Capital* (NY, 1936), p. 675), cited in Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, p. 75.

¹⁴⁴ J. R. Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, pp. 111-112; S. Sherman, *Imagining poverty: Quantification and the decline of paternalism* (Columbus, Ohio, 2001), p. 91, 98, 99.

¹⁴⁵ For more on Eden in relation to his contribution towards the development of the use of statistics see R. Stone, *Some British empiricists in the social sciences 1650-1900* (New York, 1997) and, M. Stone, “Sir Frederick Morton Eden”, in C. C. Heyde and E. Seneta, eds., *Statisticians of the centuries* (New York, 2001), pp. 115–118.

¹⁴⁶ Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, p. 16; Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, p. 115.

¹⁴⁷ F. M. Eden, *Eight letters on the peace; and on the commerce and manufactures of Great Britain* (London, 1802), p. 89, 33, 10.

In particular Eden was responding to a debate forming around the subsistence crises of 1794–96 that oversaw the nascent differences in approach between the creeds of paternalism and *laissez faire* evolve into a deep divide, splitting opinion on how best to manage the poverty problem. Raymond Cowherd has described this split as that between humanitarian and natural law reformers, yet this simple dichotomy masks many degrees of difference between the two sides, not least that of an implicit tension between improvement and security or maintenance, that I have outlined elsewhere¹⁴⁸ Stemming from Burke's *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), which sought to protect the operations of the market from ill-advised interventions in support of the artificially constructed and undeserving 'labouring poor', a powerful case was built for allowing the market to naturally alleviate distress, lest interference cause famine by diminishing grain reserves or impede national progress. Supported by Pitt, this approach was constructed to enervate any potential linkage between food riots and Jacobin insurrection whilst protecting the market mechanism that had swelled the coffers of the state and the gentry.¹⁴⁹ Yet the counter to this was a platform that rhetorically linked minimum standards of living to the issue of slavery, hoping to effect the securing of a minimum wage tied to subsistence costs. Reformers of this ilk such as David Davies or John Howlett sought a renewal of gentry leadership through the revival of the ancient practice of JPs being able to regulate wages and found a champion in parliament in the form of the brewer and Foxite Whig Samuel Whitbread, who introduced a *Bill for the Regulation of Labourer's Wages* in 1795.¹⁵⁰ Whitbread was to "challenge the idea of a regnant market" (again in 1807) and asserted

¹⁴⁸ See R. G. Cowherd, "The humanitarian reform of the English poor laws from 1782 to 1815", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 104, No. 3. (Jun., 1960), pp. 328–342; See D. Filtness, "The political thought of moral economy, 1775–1795" (unpublished MPhil. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2007).

¹⁴⁹ In the 1790s many texts appeared, epitomised by Burke, that deplored the poor to be happy with their lot, as this was the natural and divine order of things, not least William Paley's *Reasons for contentment* (1793) and Hannah More's *Village politics, addressed to all the mechanics, journeymen and labourers in Great Britain* (1792). See Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, pp. 79–90.

¹⁵⁰ For the comparison of slaves with paupers see C. Gallagher, *The industrial reformation of English fiction: Social discourse and narrative form, 1832–1867* (Chicago, 1985). See also D. Davies, *The case of labourers in husbandry stated and considered, in three parts* (London, 1795) – see discussion of Davies below. John Howlett (1731–1804), rector of Great Dunmow, Essex, wrote several tracts on population, enclosures and the corn laws but those concerned most closely with the Poor laws are: *The insufficiency of the causes to which the increase of our poor, and of the poor's rates have been commonly ascribed* (London, 1788), and *Examination of Mr Pitt's speech, in the House of Commons, on Friday, February 12th 1796, relative to the condition of the poor* (London, 1796). Howlett vigorously supported enclosure as a means of increasing productivity and raising the condition of the poor as real wages rose. Yet he was careful to frame his discussion in terms of the economic aggregate: "The sole object in view is by no means the finding subsistence for a given number of people from a given extent of land, but to supply the wants and answer the demands of society, in its present refined and highly-advanced situation, with all its different ranks, stations, professions, employments, manufactures, tastes, manners, customs, luxuries, etc."; "It does not then appear, either from fact or speculation, that the general system of our poor-laws has encouraged idleness, fettered the exertions of industry, caused the prodigious advance of our expenses, or the miseries and wretchedness of the poor...the general beneficial influence

that “the wages of labour are at a rate below the standard of its value, and the necessities of those who exercise it”, yet he admitted that labour was a commodity and should in principle be left to find its own level, except in situations of dire need, a tacit capitulation to the supremacy of the market that was exploited by Pitt to defeat the bill in the Commons.¹⁵¹ Pitt also promised to introduce his own measure, looking to those instances “where interference had shackled industry” and reforming the poor laws so as to reduce those fetters on the market that were preventing an expansion of the national product, which would in turn lead to abundance for all; the proposed measure was his *Bill for the better support and maintenance of the poor* (1797), which was derided as bloated, inconsistent and ineffectual and was withdrawn.¹⁵² In it, Pitt called for the retention of the poor laws as they currently stood, with the addition of clauses facilitating rates-in-aid-of-wages where necessary, the provision of loans to purchase a cow, the enclosure of wastes/ commons for the poor, and the establishment of parochial funds to enable saving and schools of industry to raise productivity amongst the poor. The initial position of Pitt in placing his faith in the operations of a freer market for expanding national wealth and alleviating distress was mirrored by Eden, yet was not without its doubters: Edward Gardner’s *Reflections on the evil effects of an increasing population upon the present high price of provisions* (1800) went so far as to deny the facticity of national wealth and its potential to raise living standards.¹⁵³

Eden provided a full copy of Pitt’s bill in the appendices to *The state of the poor* and it was to be, along with minimum wage theorists, a major target of his text for its espousal of support for the

cannot be denied; and the question should always be, not how they affect a few private individuals, but what is their general operation upon the community at large”, J. Howlett, *The monthly reviewers reviewed* (London, 1798), p. 34; *Examination of Mr Pitt’s speech*, pp. 11-12. Howlett was thus arguing from a market perspective in defence of the Poor laws, for they provided a safety net when the market failed (e.g. in times of scarcity). Furthermore, to blame the immorality of the poor for the market failing was unfair and unjust. Rather, the poor should be supported so that the market failure could be corrected and the happiness of society advanced. His attitude to poor relief was similar to Eden in that he saw an expanding national product as solving the issue of poverty at source, as suggested by the title of his 1787 work *Enclosures, a cause of improved agriculture, of plenty and cheapness of provisions, of population, and of both private and national wealth*, in A. H. John (ed.), *Enclosure and population* (Farnborough, 1973).

¹⁵¹ S. Whitbread quoted in *Continuation of transactions in parliament...On the apprehension of a famine!!!* (1796), cited in Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 73. For the debates over Whitbread’s 1795 bill see Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, pp. 55-62, Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, pp. 43-46, 73-75 and Cowherd, *The humanitarian reform of the English poor laws*, pp. 335-337.

¹⁵² Cited in the appendix to Eden, *State of the poor*, Vol. 3, p. cccix. See also *An authentic copy of the bill for the better support and maintenance of the poor, presented to the House of Commons by the right Hon. William Pitt, with the amendments ordered in the committee. Ordered to be printed Dec., 31, 1796. Third edn.* (London, 1797).

¹⁵³ Gardner declared the nation to be “certainly misled by the craft of an interested policy, if we believe for a moment, that national aggrandisement or national wealth, can atone for the distress of the bulk of the people” whilst in actuality “the generality of those circumstances which are conceived to increase the felicity of an empire, contribute more than any other political cause to increase the misery of the majority of its inhabitants”, cited in Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 83.

poor laws. The crucial contribution that Eden effected towards re-framing such debates over the poor was to postulate that the free operation of the market and encouragement of improvements was enough to save the poor, provided that they took on the responsibility of taking advantage of what was available to them in the form of a more varied diet or a diminution of leisure preference. Eden also used statistical tables to seemingly prove that this was the case, subjecting the experience of the poor to the authority of a macroeconomic sensibility. Such a disposition, not the regulation of wages or extension of the poor laws, was the only way of aligning increases in national wealth with decent living standards for the labouring poor. This underlying message can be teased out by a critical reading of *The state of the poor*.

The state of the poor has a basic tripartite structure, with the first volume being split into two theoretical sections and the second and third volumes marshalling parochial reports and statistics so as to illustrate the current condition of the poor of the country and thus underline the relevance of the theoretical stipulations of the first volume. Eden set himself the task, following John Sinclair's example in his *Statistical account of Scotland* (21 vols., 1791-1799) of gathering as much intelligence on The state of the poor as possible in order to uncover possible causes of their current distress.¹⁵⁴ He himself "visited several parishes" or else prevailed upon "a few respectable clergymen" or sent out "a remarkably faithful and intelligent person" to collect "useful information" on the poor, in particular in reply to a series of over 21 queries, inclusive of requests for information on population, prices, wages, diet, enclosure, houses of industry and friendly societies so as to be able to construct a representation of the economic well-being of the labouring part of the community in order to signpost possible future directions for reform.¹⁵⁵

The two theoretical sections of the opening volume address, firstly, a chronology of the legislation and commentary on the poor laws in England, and secondly a presentation of proposed amendments. The pivotal section is the latter one, Book Two, as Eden outlines his views on national establishments for the poor, education of the children of the poor, and reform involving greater domestic economy and frugality and more extensive use of friendly societies. However, it is the preceding segment of the tome, linking back to the conceptual skeleton outlined in the preface, which undergirds the suggested reforms: a segment that, reviewing the history of the poor laws, is concerned with national improvement.

¹⁵⁴ For the continuity of eighteenth-century political economy with that of the earlier seventeenth-century debates, see J. Hoppit, "Political arithmetic in eighteenth-century England", *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Aug., 1996), pp. 516-540. See also P. Buck, "People who counted: Political arithmetic in the eighteenth century", *ISIS*, Vol. 73 (1982), pp. 28-45.

¹⁵⁵ Eden, *State of the poor*, p. ii.

Eden is optimistic about the potential of commercial growth to offset escalating poor rates. In fact he somewhat ironically identifies manufactures and commerce as “the true parents of our national poor” as their introduction led to “many beneficial alterations in the condition of the labouring classes of the community” and unleashed, through a spirit of emulation, “the desire of bettering our condition, which is the predominant principle that animates the world, and which, when expanded into action, gives birth to every social virtue” which in turn encouraged “the villain to quit his livery for the independence of trade”. The denouement of feudalism and decrease of villenage “seems necessarily to have been the era of the origin of the poor” for “it is one of the natural consequences of freedom, that those, who are left to shift for themselves, must sometimes, from either misconduct or misfortune, be reduced to want”, and hence we see the “introduction of a new class of men, the poor”. This provided the underlying logic for the introduction of the Tudor poor laws, yet the “desire of bettering our condition”, once set loose, was to enable an “unexampled pitch of national prosperity”.¹⁵⁶ The key turning point was the inauguration of an “aera of freedom” with the revolutions of the seventeenth century, most especially that of 1688, which diffused a spirit of progress and improvement throughout the land. Eden equates liberty with improvement and improvement with prosperity, such that he

should venture to assert, *á priori*, that the exercise of civil and religious liberty must, from the very nature of things, have been attended with a proportionate acquisition of social comforts; and that, not only the aggregate body of the nation must have advanced to wealth and independence, but that the portion of the community, which consists of those who are emphatically called the *labouring* classes, must have considerably bettered its condition in the course of the last century.

He goes on to declare how he felt “no difficulty in persuading myself that the beneficial effects of national opulence have been diffused through every order of the State”, betraying a firm conviction of the benefits of commercial progress in terms of quality of life for the whole nation, including the poor.¹⁵⁷ In effect describing a ‘trickle-down’ effect wherein economic growth improves overall living standards, Eden nevertheless admits “the most unaccountable increase of the poor, or the immense, novel, and unparalleled expenditure for their support”, which he attributes to “the increase of persons becoming burthensome” due to “the difficulties...from the high price of grain” which “the labouring part of the community” has experienced. Yet he optimistically observes that “the rise in the Poor’s Rates has not kept pace with other branches of national expenditure, or even with our increased ability to pay them”.¹⁵⁸ The question implied here is that of how a modern commercial nation displaying ostentatious wealth and national strength never before witnessed can

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 61, 29, 56, 60, 58, 57, 61.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 404-405.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. xxii-xxiii, i, 407.

simultaneously encompass a turgid corpus of poor dependent upon relief. The answer he arrives at is that national improvement has been fettered by antiquated customs and institutions, artificially restricting expansion along the productivity frontier and that only a decisive intervention to emancipate the country's productive capacity will see systemic poverty alleviated. He is also doubtful over the nature of the surrounding poverty itself, declaring that it was aggravated by the inability of labourers to follow more frugal modes of living or be more discerning consumers. A central concern here is that one of the lamented outmoded institutions is the constellation of the poor laws itself, with dependency on the rates detracting from individual exertions, but that these need to be retained for expediency's sake – "faulty and defective as our poor system may be in its original construction, and in its modern ramifications, he must be a bold and rash political projector, who should propose to level it to the ground" for "it seems to be very generally agreed, that a modification only of those laws, and not a total repeal of them, can be attempted".¹⁵⁹

Eden sets out his exploration of The state of the poor as a treatise demonstrating the historical importance of the poor laws, but asserts that "the code devised for this purpose, although originally, perhaps, sufficiently simple, has, in the progress of society, undergone such various modifications, as sometimes, and in some respects, well-nigh to have lost sight of its first aims and intentions" and even poses "whether, along with much acknowledged good that it has done, we may not also ascribe to it many great evils, both moral and political...and in what degree the present system and administration of our Poor laws affect either the progress of industry, or the blessings of domestic life" for labourers, especially compared to "the lot of their forefathers".¹⁶⁰ He outlines how farming out the poor, and then "incorporated districts, work-houses, and houses of industry...at first, and for a while, succeeded to admiration" but then observes that creeping rates had lead these establishments also to "experience the common fate of all the plans hitherto attempted for the introduction of any general, unexceptionable, and complete system for the management of the poor; and are no longer thought to answer the good ends expected from them"; in consequence "the public mind is once more afloat".¹⁶¹ Having expressed doubts over the utility of out-relief and of workhouses, which he agreed with William Young in describing as "gaols without guilt", Eden nevertheless assures the reader that there do exist positive duties of the state towards the lower classes as "it is the duty of every man, according to his abilities and opportunities, to relieve his fellow creatures in distress...the interest of the state is essentially concerned in the ample and efficient performance of this duty", to the extent that the poor laws which inscribe and enforce this duty have, over time, embedded this principle in the heart of the social fabric, "like the spreading ivy"

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 470.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. v.

that insinuates itself “into every crack and aperture of the edifice” such that “cutting its roots might perhaps endanger the fabric, which the feeble plant first undermined, and now holds together”.¹⁶²

The principle of public relief for the poor in times of distress is enshrined in the constitution by the historical function of the poor laws, and in this sense Eden can be said to be “a better Burkean than Burke himself”.¹⁶³ Yet at the same time a legal provision for the poor “checks that emulative spirit of exertion, which the want of the necessaries, or the no less powerful demand for the superfluities, of life, gives birth to”, for “it assures a man, that, whether he may have been indolent, improvident, prodigal, or vicious, he shall never suffer want: it weakens the strongest tie of civil society; the desire of acquiring property; for it declares, that, whether a man is industrious or idle, his most pressing difficulties, the necessity of food, lodging, and clothing, shall be provided for” and that “in every part of England...instances may be found of persons preferring a pension from the parish, and a life of idleness, to hard work and good wages” and thus “any permanent establishment for the relief of the poor has a tendency to increase the number of those wanting relief...a premium never operates with greater effect than when it is given for the encouragement of idleness”.¹⁶⁴ Given that it was the same desire of bettering our condition/ emulative spirit of exertion that occasioned the poor laws in the first instance, Eden’s reasoning may at first glance appear circuitous here, yet it is his contention that the poor laws were only ever supposed to relieve extreme want, operating at the subsistence margin. As he says, “it is, in my humble opinion, a mistaken idea, that the nation is indispensably called upon, in its collective capacity, to educate the orphan, feed the aged and impotent, and provide employment for the industrious”, as “these are duties on the individual of a high and powerful obligation...which must be supplied by voluntary charity. The compulsion of the law is merely confined to the removal of extreme wants”. It is the certainty of relief that checks industry, begotten by the failure of discrimination in provision, not its operation at the point of need. It is this nexus of concerns that underlines his opposition to setting the poor to work which, in his view of things, cannot be facilitated “without in some degree injuring those who are engaged in similar undertakings”, echoing Defoe’s early eighteenth century condemnation of make-work schemes.¹⁶⁵ Eden goes further, categorically denying that any member of society can claim “a right, founded on the very essence and constitution of human society, to the active and direct interference of the legislature, to supply him with employment while able to work, and with a maintenance when incapacitated from labour” as no right “the gratification of which seems to be impracticable, can be

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 411, 6, 457.

¹⁶³ Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁴ Eden, *State of the poor*, pp. 447-450.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 486, 467.

said to exist”.¹⁶⁶ He is here re-iterating Burke’s opposition to any right to relief derived from contractarian theories of government (such as Rousseau’s Social Contract or theories of an original Christian community of goods), Burke supposing that contractarianism supplied a healthy fount for revolutionary apologetics. In Eden’s conceptual schema, “the exertion, both of industry, and of charity, may be safely left to the discretion of individuals. The natural inclination of social man, to better his condition, will point out to him the most suitable employments: the benevolence, which is the result of natural wants, and of the habits and relations of social life, will best instruct him to relieve his fellow creatures with justice and determination”; with society having a duty to meet subsistence needs only, but a duty also to protect and sponsor individual industry, which is the source of national prosperity.¹⁶⁷ He quotes Burke’s views that men in civil society “have a right to the fruits of their industry, and to the means of making their industry fruitful...whatever each man can separately do, without trespassing upon others, he has a right to do for himself; and he has a right to a fair portion of all which society, with all its combinations of skill and force, can do in his favour [i.e. public goods]. In this partnership all men have equal rights; but not to equal things. He that has but five shillings in the partnership, has as good a right to it, as he that has five hundred pounds has to his larger proportion”. However, crucially for Eden: “these rights are perfectly congenial with the active principle, (the desire of bettering our condition), which more or less animates mankind in every state of society”.¹⁶⁸

At the root of Eden’s paradigm of poor relief it is individual industry as animated by the desire of bettering one’s condition that provides the litmus test of the beneficence or harmfulness of a legislative institution or intervention. The provision of subsistence will contribute overall to the productivity of society, but the creation of dependent poor in whom the active principle has been enervated by ease of access to a maintenance (rather than individuated or discrete incidents of relief – he has in mind principally such schemes as rates-in-aid of wages or bread scales) can only lead to entropy in society. Furthermore, it is the market which sets the value of labour and, by giving free reign to the “active principle”, facilitates social distinction and the bettering of one’s condition, hence “the regulation of wages” is a device “certainly tending, to cramp the exertions of industry” and “the excellence of legislation may, perhaps, be but estimated according as it leaves the individual exertion more or less unshackled”. To this end the poor laws should be altered, “not by extending the operation of a system, which is adverse, in many points of view, to the exertion of honest industry, but by checking the too ready encouragement which it offers to idleness,

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

improvidence, and immorality”.¹⁶⁹ The point being that the legislative framework of poor relief, although necessitated in some form by historical precedent, should be geared as much as possible towards maximising individual industry through the harnessing of the “active principle”. It is the free operation of the market, in a macroeconomic sense, which provides the underlying rationale for his enquiries, as well as the moral justification for them. For the free operation of the market promises improvement, as it will facilitate the transfer of capital to where it may find the best return, and thus promotes greater productivity, or work done, and hence rising national productivity.

Eden’s whole enquiry into the living conditions of the poor is backlit by the wider macroeconomic landscape, with this bigger picture providing the lens through which any legislative interference or institution should be seen, for “the only point of view, in which a nation can regard such schemes of a reform, is to consider how far they actually do or do not promote the general weal”. Furthermore, for Eden the aggregate outcome takes precedence over more local or partisan concerns as, perhaps betraying utilitarian principles, it is the “national utility” of improvements which are of paramount importance. If, for instance, the consolidation of several farms may “bear hard on the owners of small farms, and, perhaps, on cottagers and labourers, this is an evil to be lamented indeed, but not of such a magnitude as that it should be suffered to counteract the greater good which may be expected to result from the improvement”.¹⁷⁰ Eden uses the same theoretical toolkit for constructing his case against the poor laws, as demonstrated by the striking similarity of the objections that he proffers to both unimproved wastes/ commons and to the poor laws, namely that they “do much harm, by the temptations they hold out to remissness, in exertion, and a slovenly husbandry” on the one hand, and “encouragement of idleness” on the other.¹⁷¹ The wider economic good of society is held up as the moral authority by which the structural reform of the poor laws and other “improvements” are justified, Eden quoting the poor law commentator Dr McFarlan as corroboration of his findings; the job of the legislature being “to take off such restraints, laid on by former improvident laws, as may be complained of, and to grant such general encouragement to industry, as may be conducive, on the whole, to the public good”.¹⁷² This is shown quite clearly in Eden’s objections to the Speenhamland scale, introduced by Berkshire magistrates in 1795, and other practices of rates-in-aid of wages.

At the height of the scarcity occasioned by grain shortages in the mid-1790s, the JPs of Berkshire held a meeting in the Pelican Inn at Speenhamland on 6th May 1795 and decided, from a variety of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 41, 437, 471.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. xiii- xiv.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. xxi, 450.

¹⁷² Dr McFarlan, *Inquiries on the poor*, p. 425, cited in Eden, *State of the poor*, p. 469.

proposed amendments including fixed wages, to introduce a means-tested sliding-scale of wage supplements, wherein families were paid a subsidy from the parish in order to ‘top-up’ their income to a minimum level outlined in a table, dependent upon the price of bread and the number of children in the family.¹⁷³ For example, if bread was 1s 2d a loaf, the wages of a family with two children were topped up to 8s 6d, and if bread rose to 1s 8d the wages were topped up to 11s 0d. Although not national in coverage and, due to the failure of Pitt’s 1797 bill, never given legislative sanction, this system of rates-in-aid of wages proved popular in rural counties, especially in the South, and was much-maligned in the parliamentary reports preceding the Poor Law reforms of 1834. The efficacy of the measure in salving chronic rural poverty has been much debated by historians, but what is of greater concern here is the conceptual impact of the practice within poor law discourse.¹⁷⁴ Originally designed as a method of staving off a subsistence crisis for the poorest labourers, and attendant disorder, the Speenhamland scale of out-relief to the able-bodied, although “hardly an innovation” (it was first facilitated by Gilbert’s Act of 1782), was construed as misguided by most political economists (e.g. Malthus) who bemoaned how it would cause the labouring poor to become dependent upon parish relief for attaining a minimum standard of living, and hence undermine any spirit of industry or sense of shame concomitant of receiving relief that may previously have existed, and it was roundly condemned as contributory of increased poor relief burdens.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ For a detailed account of the Speenhamland meeting and scale see M. Neuman, “Speenhamland in Berkshire” in E. W. Martin (ed.) *Comparative development in social welfare* (London, 1972). For the bread crises of the mid-1790s see W. M. Stern, “The bread crisis in Britain, 1795-96”, *Economica*, Vol. 31 (1964), pp. 168-187.

¹⁷⁴ The revisionist account, arguing for greater continuity between the old and new poor laws, is championed by Mark Blaug in his “The myth of the old poor law and the making of the new”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (June, 1963), pp. 151-184. Blaug describes the supplementation of labourer’s wages as a response to underemployment in the lagging agricultural sector of an industrialising economy, with the problem that “wages were too low to provide a minimum standard of living”, and charges the 1834 reformers with exaggerating the supposed pauperising effects of allowances in order to create political will for reform (p. 169). See also: M. Blaug, “The poor law report re-examined”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Jun., 1964), pp. 229-245. For a criticism of Blaug see J. S. Taylor, “The mythology of the old poor law”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Jun., 1969), pp. 292-297; Cowherd is similarly critical, especially of Blaug’s narrow source base. Elsewhere, P. Dunkley, *The crisis of the old poor Law in England 1795-1834: An interpretative essay* (London, 1982) has stressed the new poor law as a “reaction to the breakdown of social cohesion in the English countryside” (p. iv), whilst K. Williams, *From pauperism to poverty* (London, 1981), has called for a complete rejection of Blaug’s thesis on the grounds that it misrepresents data from the *Rural and town queries* of 1832 and the select committee *Abstract of returns* from 1824, indulging in “economic reductionism” and neglect of the “cultural configuration of the institution”, which must be addressed if poor relief practice is to be made intelligible (pp. 34-35). This is closer to my own position of focusing on the cultural construction of relief practices through poor law discourse. See also Karl Polanyi’s *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (Boston, 2001; originally pub. 1944), esp. pp. 81-89.

¹⁷⁵ Neuman, *Speenhamland in Berkshire*, p. 89.

In addition to this many farmers and agricultural employers recognised that they could lower their wages, or not increase them in line with price inflation, and the parish would make up the difference, in effect subsidising the labour costs of employers from the parish rates and artificially increasing the burden of the rates by defraying private costs onto the taxpayer. Eden took the view that allowances in aid of wages would result in a demoralised and dependent labouring class and attacked the system as an impediment to improvement. He outlines his objections to the system when describing the condition of the labouring poor in Berkshire who, since the adoption of allowances-in-aid of wages as a policy explicitly backed by the magistracy (with incentives in the form of prejudicial treatment in appeals cases, and therefore widely utilised within the county) have received their wages “in the way most prejudicial to their moral interests: they received it as charity; as the extorted charity of others; and not as the result of their own well-exerted industry; and it was paid them, not by their immediate employers, but by those who were in many instances not the employers of any labourer”, the net effect being that “the publication of this table diminished the quantity of work done; and, in that light, was productive of a national loss”, as the labourer’s “spirit of independence” was “lost forever”.¹⁷⁶ Eden here bemoans how the supplementation of wages from the rates pauperised the labouring poor and led to the erosion of their spirit of independence and desire of bettering their condition as the topping-up of wages to a minimum subsistence level of income undermined the subjectivity of self-betterment and diminished the prospect of effecting a change in one’s fortunes through the application of industriousness. Yet he also opposed allowances from a more rigidly doctrinaire position of adherence to Smithian political economy, in that such subsidisation of the poor from the wider taxpayer served to diminish the amount of capital available for use elsewhere in effecting improvement and thus held an opportunity cost of diminished productivity, which would depress wages in the longer term. It was such dogmatic fealty to Smithian theory that also underpinned Eden’s opposition to parochial employment and other elements of the poor laws; as Cowherd has identified, “he preferred to argue from the wages-fund theory that all compulsory payments to the poor came from employers’ funds available for the payment of wages and for the employment of additional workers”.¹⁷⁷ Eden describes how “the fact seems to have been, that, instead of an advance in wages, proportioned to the increased demand for labour”, instead “the labourer...received a considerable part of that portion of his employer’s capital, which was destined for his maintenance, in the form of Poor’s Rate (the very worst that it could assume) instead of being paid it as the fair, well-earned recompense of equivalent labour”, and that this

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 88-89; Eden, *State of the poor*, p. 583.

¹⁷⁷ Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, p. 17. For Smith’s theories on wages see A. Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (2 vols., London, 1776), Vol. 1, Ch. 8. For an extended discussion of wages theories in this period see J. Hall (trans.), A. Stirati, *The theory of wages in classical economics: A study of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and their contemporaries* (Aldershot, 1994).

represents “a deplorable evil, which has fallen heavier on the Poor than on the Rich...it has been considerably aggravated by the very injudicious steps which have been adopted for administering relief to those whom the pressure of the late scarcity had incapacitated from supporting themselves and families, in the way to which they had been accustomed”, such aggravation in turn exacerbated by the “many instances [which] might be adduced, of the ill effects of the indiscriminating charity of individuals, and of the no less ill effects of the discriminating interference of magistrates and parish officers”.¹⁷⁸

The concern Eden demonstrates over the allowance system is thus twofold, on the one hand encompassing what was to evolve into the wages fund theory and held in the other palm an avid decrial of a loss of the “active principle” and consequently of the amount of work done. Yet the two are linked by the extrapolation of the loss of the active principle into the realm of the wages fund, such that a diminution of productivity would lessen capital accumulation and improvements, having a reflexive impact upon the living standards of the labouring poor. Only an increase in work done would lead to improvement and an augmentation of national wealth and utility, and only an unshackling of wages from subsistence levels would provide the necessary animation of the active principle.

Eden also levelled a further charge at the allowances system that was concerned with the linking of minimum incomes to the price of bread. Traditionally the assize of bread had regulated the price, weight and quality of loaves of bread sold so as to ensure fair trading standards as against the adulteration of bread (particularly by mixing alum into the dough, which whitened coarser loaves, making them seem of higher and finer wheaten quality) and to prevent the exploitation of consumers by millers, bakers and middlemen, and to enforce a “just price”.¹⁷⁹ Dating from the thirteenth century and originally controlled via manorial courts and then JPs, the assize of bread was ideologically undercut by the encroachment of political economy and laissez faire thinking, and the legislation was initially attacked and repealed in 1815, caught up in the furore over the Corn Laws.¹⁸⁰ Total abolition of the practice came in London with the passing of the Bread Act of 1822 which

¹⁷⁸ Eden, *State of the poor*, p. 575.

¹⁷⁹ For more on the historical role of the just price see R. de Roover, “The concept of the just price: Theory and economic policy”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Dec., 1958), pp. 418–434.

¹⁸⁰ Paternalistic regulation had more recent precedents in a series of acts since 1773 to regulate the wages of the silk weavers in Spitalfields in line with “the price of provisions”. Undercut by the logic of the market, this legislation was abolished by a bill from Huskisson in 1824, in line with the abolition of the Statute of Artificers in 1814. See J. H. Clapham, *The Spitalfields Acts, 1773–1824*, *Economic Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 104 (Dec., 1916), pp. 459–471.

ordered bread to be sold by the pound, and this was extended to the rest of the country in 1836.¹⁸¹ However, when Eden was writing in 1797 it remained very much in operation and he subjected the practice to withering attack, viewing fixing of the price of bread levying on that foodstuff a customary and cultural significance out of all proportion to its nutritional and social value and having a distorting effect upon the livelihoods and budgets of the labouring poor, for the price of bread “is no criterion of the ability of a man to subsist by his labour, unless it can be shewn that this grain is wholly and entirely his ordinary food. But at no period of our history has this been the case”.¹⁸² Eden, as an exponent of political economy and firm believer in the untrammelled and natural operation of the market, fundamentally opposed the conceptual infrastructure of price-fixing and of linking the wages of labour to the price of bread as it constructed an artificial standard of living for the labouring poor that had no basis in the market, the only guaranteed effector of rising productivity and increased national wealth.¹⁸³

From this point of view, the labourer should be encouraged to cut his cloth to fit his purse, embracing substitutes and forgoing traditional modes of life and culturally determined minimum standards of living, this being the only sure-fire way of alleviating distress without endangering future productivity. In the process of his peripatetic querying Eden discovered that “in most of the communications respecting labourers’ household accounts, their expenses exceed their earnings”, this being the cause of referral to the rates. Clearly, the labourers were incapable of budgeting appropriately, either because wages were just too low, or because they did not embrace all the avenues of fiscal responsibility open to them. However, the accuracy of the collated reports is in doubt. For the poor, whether by being “habitually careless” and thus “totally unable to give any satisfactory information”, or else, apprehensive that the underlying motivation for such data-gathering is “to effect a reduction in their wages, or something equally disagreeable”, are “unchangeably mysterious and insincere”. Furthermore, where information can be elicited from them, the poor most often calculate their income from the price of day labour whereas “work is now

¹⁸¹ For more on the assize of bread see A. S. C. Ross, “The Assize of Bread”, *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1956), pp. 332-342, also C. Peterson, *Bread and the British economy c. 1770–1870* (Aldershot, 1995).

¹⁸² Eden, *State of the poor*, 561.

¹⁸³ Eden subjected the Speenhamland scales to such an analysis: “The price of labour does not depend upon the price of bread-corn. The natural effect which the price of any article of provisions has upon its consumption is to diminish it. The consumer substitutes other food in lieu of it; and this will always be the case with those dependent solely upon their own industry and prudence. This diminution would, in a short time, reduce the price; and the evil would gradually remedy itself. But this natural operation was counteracted by the system, which directed the formation of the Berkshire Table; because bread was kept at the same price to the consumer, by the extraordinary relief granted to him by the parish; and he had no inducement to substitute other articles in lieu of wheaten bread; though the substitutes for it were cheap, obvious and plentiful; and no less nutritious, palatable and wholesome than his ordinary food. It is evident...that the price of bread-corn is not commensurate with the price of labour”, *Ibid.*, p. 580.

very generally done by the piece”, producing “extremely fallacious” returns. Ultimately, the poor, Eden suspects, know how to play the game and are careful that “if the expenditure is not exaggerated, the income is, in most instances, considerably under-rated”, and therefore the need for legislative intervention to secure a subsistence level of income has been exaggerated, a caveat that suits well Eden’s aims and ambitions.¹⁸⁴ It is likely that mere budgetary praxis would suffice, coupled with an increase in productivity over the longer term, to alleviate distress and banish the spectre of scarcity. The allowance system and such practices had the function of eliminating such budgetary concerns and the spirits of independence and industry amongst the poor, for “the relief held out was beyond the wants of the poor”, that is, above that minimum level of subsistence on which poor relief should be calculated and brought into operation, it being clear that “the relief of the able-bodied poor, with or without families, was no part of the original system of the poor laws”, and had no place in any future system, if national productivity/ wealth was to be realised.¹⁸⁵

In terms of national improvement, whilst an increase in work done would augment the overall capital stock and investment in improvements, leading to higher wages for the labourer, increased frugality would make wages go further and thus a double-effect contribution to living standards could be effected. Yet it was not just during the period of scarcity that economies should be made, rather the poor should be reconciled to the market control of wages such that the market wage was the ‘fair’ wage. As he puts it: “To convince his employer that his wages ought to be raised, may require more eloquence than he is possessed of: but to make the wages which he received more productive, depends on a few little frugal arrangements at home”.¹⁸⁶

Eden negates the potential of wage and price-fixing to underwrite a cultural level of subsistence, instead declaring in favour of a completely rationalised economy with labourers accommodating themselves to a level of subsistence commensurate with their earnings, such that alternative foodstuffs are embraced and savings from the rates and, potentially, from the wages fund, are enabled. He deplores how the social significance of bread has impoverished the poor as it discourages them to explore alternatives such as the potato or soup, and thus artificially and needlessly increases immiseration. For, “the miseries of the labouring poor arise, less from the scantiness of their income, (however much the philanthropist might wish it to be increased), than from their own improvidence and unthriftiness; since it is the fact...that, in many parts of the kingdom, where the earnings of industry are moderate, the condition of the labourer is more comfortable, than in other districts, where wages are exorbitant”. Eden focuses on household

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. xxvi-xxvii.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 580, 584.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 494.

budgets in his parochial reports, attempting to demonstrate that the labourer was capable of subsisting and staying off the rates if he could only be “induced so to alter his course of life, as to effect a considerable saving in any one article of expense, but more especially in that of diet, [as] he will thereby secure himself a fund for future independence, and increasing gratifications”.¹⁸⁷

Expenditure on food was the single largest expense for the poor, and Eden quotes authors such as the influential Count Rumford and texts such as *Mr Ray's 'Collection of north country words'* or those produced by the Board of Agriculture, that described methods of cutting costs, either by cooking in more cost-effective ways (such as Rumford's patented stove and heat retention devices) or by using recipes which used cheaper ingredients or substitutes, such as oaten bread, potatoes or 'hasty pudding'.¹⁸⁸ Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford in the nobility of the Holy Roman Empire (1753-1814), natural philosopher, soldier and philanthropist sought to eliminate dependent poverty by promulgating frugality of food and energy (especially the substitution of soup for more expensive foodstuffs) in a series of tracts that became hugely popular in Britain in the 1790s and 1810s. He enjoyed massive celebrity in reforming circles, and emphasised the cost-effectiveness of working rooms and public kitchens for the poor through a description of the workhouse that he instituted in

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 494-495.

¹⁸⁸ For an extended discussion of Rumford's contribution to the changes traced in this thesis see the author's extended thesis at www.academia.edu. For Rumford's writings see S. C. Brown (ed.), *Collected works of Count Rumford* (6 vols., Cam., Mass., 1968-1970), esp. Vol. 5: *Public institutions*, and within it *An account of an establishment for the poor at Munich* (1795-96), *Of the fundamental principles on which general establishments for the relief of the poor may be formed in all countries* (1796) and *Of food, and particularly of feeding the poor* (1795). Rumford thought that the poor should be encouraged with kind words and fair wages to take up a “spirit of order and industry”; additionally their “comfort and happiness” both now and in the future could be ensured by domestic economy, this bifold reformatory package minimising the applications for relief as surely as it also minimised the cost of any relief given, thus contributing to “the comfort, happiness and prosperity of society”, p. 131, 134. For Rumford, “the number of inhabitants who may be supported in any country, upon its internal produce, depends almost as much upon the state of the *art of cookery* as upon that of *agriculture*”, hence the crucial consideration was to effect “a remarkable change in the customs and habits of mankind...necessary in order to make any considerable saving in the consumption of those articles commonly used as food”; to erode the poor's preference for bread and to encourage them to consume less expensive, more nutritive and calorific substitutes such as potatoes, soups, “Indian corn”, “hasty puddings”, etc. – a change which could be achieved by “proper management”, pp. 155-156, 171, 180, 216. Rumford was in fact calling for an extended degree of “behaviour modification” that would see the poor align their expectations with a subsistence standard of living, as Sandra Sherman has emphasised. See Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, Ch. 5.

See also D. Knight, “Thompson, Sir Benjamin, Count Rumford in the nobility of the Holy Roman Empire (1753-1814)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan., 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27255>]. For more on Rumford see especially G. I. Brown, *Count Rumford: Scientist, soldier, statesman, spy: The extraordinary life of a scientific genius* (Stroud, 1999), D. Bradley, *Count Rumford* (Princeton, 1967), also; J. Thompson, *Count Rumford of Massachusetts* (New York, 1935), and E. Larsen (pseud.), *An American in Europe; The life of Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford* (London, 1953); F. Redlich, “Science and charity: Count Rumford and his followers”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (August, 1971), pp. 184-216; S. C. Brown, *Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford; Count Rumford on the nature of heat* (Oxford, 1967), and S. C. Brown, *Count Rumford: Physicist extraordinary* (New York, 1962).

Munich. Rumford did influence the management techniques of extant workhouses in England, yet his contrivances for efficiency were also attractive for those who advocated wage controls or economic growth, coupled with greater frugality, as the means to alleviate poverty.¹⁸⁹ In short, the budgeting potential of his economising and accounting technologies fitted neatly into an emergent rationale of poor relief that made individual self-help the means of societal improvement. The campaign for soup endorsed his proposals for cheaper, more nutritive foods and backed his accordant call for “behaviour adjustment”, but the paradigm within which such endorsement was embedded was that of a greater purview for self-help and budgetary responsibility in times of scarcity, consistent with an accompanying degree of industriousness, the animating principle being that of bettering one’s condition.¹⁹⁰ Rumford’s psychology of poor relief was outmoded, even more so once the Malthusian turn had taken root, and his conception of the poor as dumb brutes in need of mollycoddling to make them productive was inconsistent with a conception of the *labouring* poor. Rumford did indeed help to confront traditional paternalism “by implying that poor relief can, indeed should, enforce cost-effectiveness”, and this confrontation was to prove decisive, but only because the cost-effective measures he proposed were extracted from the institutional structure within which he employed them; the allowances he made for out-relief in his works were of more consequence than those for in-relief that lay at the core of his system.¹⁹¹ His strictures on cost-effectiveness struck a resonant chord with concurrent calls for greater frugality on the part of the poor and a close attention to household budgets (in the works of Davies and Eden especially) at a time of scarcity. There was a rush of tracts directed at helping the poor to live more frugally, to take advantage of cheaper food substitutes such as soup or barley bread and to avoid expensive luxuries

¹⁸⁹ Sherman has detailed how notice was taken of Rumford’s stipulations and action taken accordingly in a number of workhouses around the country, being reported on in several accounts of workhouses such as in *An account of the proceedings of the acting governors of the house of industry* (Dublin, 1799), Henry Wansey’s *Thoughts on poor-houses, with a view to their general reform* (1801), or *Considerations on the increase of the poor-rates, and on the state of the workhouse, in Kensington-upon-Hull* (1800). See Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 163.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9. For the campaign for soup see Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, Ch. 6. See also P. Colquhoun [?], *Useful suggestions favourable to the comfort of the labouring people, and to decent housekeepers. Explaining how a small income may be made to go far in a family, so as to occasion a considerable saving in the article of BREAD. A circumstance of great importance to be known at the present juncture* (London, 1795); P. Colquhoun [?], *An account of a meat and soup charity, established in the Metropolis, in the year 1797, with observations relative to the situation of the poor, and on the means of bettering the condition of the labouring people with regard to food; and of increasing their comforts in other respects, by a more frugal mode of living, particularly in the city of London, and its environs* (London, 1797); P. Colquhoun, *Suggestions offered to the consideration of the public, and in particular to the more opulent classes of the community, for the purpose of reducing the consumption of bread corn; and relieving at the same time the labouring people, by the substitution of other cheap, wholesome, and nourishing food; and especially by means of soup establishments, etc.* (Second edn., London, 1800).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

such as ale or tea.¹⁹² In an environment of scarcity in 1795 the Board of Agriculture took its cue from the Tory government's legalizing of the making of bread flour from mixed grains and potatoes and the prohibition of the sale of fresh wheaten bread, a situation conducive to the proselytization of bread substitutes and economizing measures of the type that Rumford promoted.¹⁹³ The scarcity bundle of measures was for the most part re-enacted upon the return of dearth in 1800, witnessing the *Act for the better provision for the poor and for diminishing the consumption of bread corn*, which explicitly promoted substitutes such as soups.¹⁹⁴ It was in such circumstances that the debate over minimum standards of living and the utility of poverty doctrine took on a renewed urgency not seen since the middle of the century, an urgency which buoyed Rumford's accounts to a pitch of celebrity they would otherwise have not enjoyed.¹⁹⁵ There proved to be little contemporary appetite for the kind of invasive, heuristic, sustained and initially expensive network of positive institutions that Rumford, Bentham and Colquhoun advanced. These were more long-term strategy than short-term expediency, visionary but unwieldy; whereas changes to diet, cooking and expenditure could be immediately implemented and encouraged, as Eden saw and Rumford recognised "cookery...ought particularly to be attended to in times of general alarm".¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Other tracts suggesting soups or a more frugal diet as part of a more cost-effective mode of living amongst the poor included Maria Russell's *New system of domestic cookery; Formed upon principles of economy* (1805), Susannah Carter's *Frugal housewife* (1790) or the 1796 edition of Hannah Glasse's *Art of cookery*. Cited in Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 170. See also *Letters from the earl of Dundonald, on making bread from potatoes* (1791); Nathaniel Kent, *Hints to a gentleman of landed property* (1775, third edn. 1793) also advocated milk and potatoes for the poor. For the discussion of potatoes as a substitute for bread see R. N. Salaman, *The history and social influence of the potato* (3rd edn., Cambridge, 1985; first published 1949), esp. pp. 506-517.

¹⁹³ For this bundle of measures see Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, pp. 11-12. This legislation also placed bounties on the importation of food including sugar, grain and potatoes, repealed bounties on the exportation of sugar and prevented distilleries from using all types of grain, malt and potatoes in the production of wines and spirits (36 Geo. III, c. 20). The Board of Agriculture was able to promulgate the adoption of potatoes or soup as common foodstuffs through its unofficial organ the *Annals of Agriculture* and its systematic surveying of the country along the same lines that its progenitor and first president John Sinclair had done in his celebrated *Statistical account of Scotland*. For an account of the 'Board of Agriculture and internal improvement' and its mission to excite a spirit of industry and experiment in agriculture and, during crisis, to increase the food supply, see R. Mitchison, "The old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822)", *English Historical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 290 (Jan., 1959), pp. 41-69. The Board, a "closed corporation", declined into desuetude as it was increasingly aligned with agricultural protectionists (especially over the Corn Laws in 1815) and was unable to secure its greatest wish of a general enclosure act (not realised until 1845). Its prime movers and shakers such as Arthur Young passed away or moved on and the Board was eventually deprived of its £3000 per annum government stipend in 1822 as agriculture faded from front-bench politics until the revival of the corn law debate in the 1840s. However, the model of the Board did prepare the way for the inauguration of the Royal Agricultural Society in 1838.

¹⁹⁴ For more on this measure see Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 124 and R. Wells, *Wretched faces: Famine in wartime England, 1793-1801* (Gloucester, 1988), p. 223.

¹⁹⁵ See the discussion of Frederick Eden, below.

¹⁹⁶ Rumford, *Works*, pp. 179-180.

It was in this context that over the 3 volumes of *The state of the poor* Eden compiled over 63 tables of diet, reproducing the diets of the poor only so as to be able to suggest savings and economies that could be made, in particular comparing the more varied (and cheaper) diets of the north, replete with a “great variety of cheap and savoury soups” with the bread-centric palate of the south. He describes how “with all his apparent rusticity, the peasant of the north is as intelligent, as ingenious, as virtuous and as useful a man, as his less provident neighbours; and lives too, as long, and as healthy, and, probably, far more contented and happy, than the South-country labourer, who is for ever receiving, and for ever wanting, assistance and charity”, and further that “could the use of barley, oat-meal, soups, etc., be introduced into the South of England, the situation of the labouring classes would, at once, be greatly improved”.¹⁹⁷ Yet Eden goes further, suggesting in fact that such alterations should be realised with a degree of coercion:

To instruct him [the labourer] how to obtain this desirable end [greater economy]; or if, from his situation and circumstances, or from his inveterate habits and predilections, he is ill-disposed to listen to, and still less to follow, any advice, which may be given him on the subject; to point out to his employer, those improvements, which his interest will prompt him, and his influence will enable him, by well-timed interference, gradually to introduce among those whom he employs: these, I conceive, are the most obvious methods of attempting to benefit the labouring classes with any probability of success...by pointing out to them the best means of reducing their expenses, without diminishing their comforts; by suggesting and explaining the mode of preparing cheap and agreeable substitutes for those articles of diet, which, in times of scarcity and distress, exhaust so much of the daily earnings of a working man.

In short, by imposing upon the labourer, via his employer if necessary, all “improvements in the useful arts” and “social improvements” possible, “domestic economy” would be improved, the budgets of the poor balanced and the issue of Speenhamland made redundant.¹⁹⁸ Sherman sees such “Improvement Police” as abnegating the poor’s subjective concerns and transforming the poor into “ciphers”, subjecting them to the iron laws of the market in place of the workings of the paternalist moral economy.¹⁹⁹ Yet for Eden the reduction of the poor to atomised individuals operating within an unfettered labour market placed the poor in a position where their quality of life was made coordinate of their own agency, and furthermore the adoption of techniques of frugality held out the prospect of immediate betterment in terms of meeting household costs. He is explicit about how “the poor should not be deceived: the best relief they can receive must come from themselves...To expend what labour actually produces, in the most beneficial manner for the labourer, depends entirely on good management and economy”.²⁰⁰ Self-help through greater

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. viii, 525-526.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 492-493.

¹⁹⁹ Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 98.

²⁰⁰ Eden, *State of the poor*, p. 587.

frugality and through the liberation of increased industry by improvements would effect an upturn in the fortunes of the poor but also for the community in general, and it was this bigger picture that justified and legitimated any “Improvement Police”, the operation of which should not be over-emphasised, Eden invoking it only for use in those situations where all else had failed.

Eden was also an admirer and supporter of friendly societies for these “useful institutions” promoted “a spirit of independence, and better habits of industry and frugality, than are usually found among the labouring classes of society” and, cardinally, established “one great and fundamental truth, of infinite national importance”, namely that, “with very few exceptions, the people, in general, of all characters, and under all circumstances, with good management, are perfectly competent to their own maintenance”.²⁰¹ The usefulness of these societies in establishing amongst their members a disposition towards solvency and consequentialism and, corroboratively, industry and frugality, held out the prospect of bringing to fruition all that Eden hoped to see and he called unequivocally for “a vigorous reform in the Poor laws, to promote a practice, which has hitherto been found successful, as far as it has been tried; and, by judicious measures, so to encourage these voluntary associations, as to render them general and universal throughout the kingdom”, reiterating such sentiments in his later pamphlet on friendly societies.²⁰² As Sherman has acknowledged, it is the potential of such institutions, coupled with a scaling back of more interventionist institutions such as the allowance system, apprenticeship laws or corporation laws, which Eden hoped would induce the desired “behaviour modification” requisite to facilitate national progress, for “the true principle of national interference with respect to the poor, and...the only one that is justifiable in the eye either of reason or religion, is, by no means to think of maintaining the poor as a nation, or a public, or even to contribute largely, as is now the case, towards their maintenance; but to enable them to maintain themselves. This principle is clearly recognised and proved to be not only perfectly practicable, but popular also, in the institution of Friendly Societies”.²⁰³

The constellation of sentiments within which Eden embedded his discussion of friendly societies is also detectable in his discussion of education, which he saw as an indisputable public good, advocating that parochial schools or such seminaries of learning be instituted nationwide so as to “direct the nascent passions, and mould the infant reason into such habits of thinking and acting, as may best promote not only the weal of each individual, but the general welfare”.²⁰⁴ Eden recognized

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. xxiv.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. xxv-xxvi.

²⁰³ See Ibid., pp. 435-436; Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 90; Eden, *State of the poor*, p. 599.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 423.

that “to impress the people with that energy of character which constitutes a great nation, cannot be effected by those...exertions of government, which secure to individuals the free application of their industry, and protect them in the enjoyment of their property”. There was therefore a need for state direction to implement a system of schooling, funded from charitable sources, with the poor paying small weekly contributions to the learning of their children, which would have the dual function of negating the baleful influences on children raised within the manufacturing system (responsible for most paupers being drawn from the ranks of manufacturing labour and not from agriculture), as well as forming a workforce both more useful and industrious as well as better disposed towards the future security of the state. Education had the role of regulating public opinion, which exerted “great influence on the public practice”, helping to infuse the public “with the best elements of political knowledge, and the firmest foundations of moral virtue”. Moreover, “wholly to neglect all culture, and all instruction, of even the poorest classes of the community, will, in all governments, produce a relaxation of principle, and a corruption of manners: and these must eventually terminate in the destruction of order, and the dissolution of government”.²⁰⁵ Eden was anxious that he wished never to see “either parental authority, or parental duty, abridged in a single atom of what it now possesses”, yet he drew a distinction between “habits of industry and perseverance” which, although “undoubtedly of so much importance, that they cannot be too early or too strongly inculcated” could safely be “in general, acquired at home...full as effectually, and at less cost and at less risk, than in working schools, or manufactories”, and those “intellectual acquisitions” such as “reading, writing, and arithmetic” which were so “beneficial to every class of the community” and that would help “the children of our labourers...to become useful members of the state, in that sphere of life for which they are probably destined”. Both of these sets of qualities should be propagated and encouraged amongst the poor, Eden denying the claims of writers such as Mandeville or John Weyland in his *A short inquiry into the policy, humanity and past effects of the poor laws* (1807), that the threat of dissatisfaction and insurrection would grow alongside the progress of education, as it seemed clear that “idleness, discontent, and a dislike to subordination and order...most frequently arise, and are more easily diffused among the ignorant and uneducated, than among those who have passed some part of their early years in the acquisition of intellectual endowments”.²⁰⁶ Eden thus allowed the education of the rising generation, especially of their social and religious duties, to join the extremely limited ranks of active duties that government should perform, the others being the protection of property, the checking of vice and immorality and the

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 423-424, 427.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 426, 420, 427, 428.

maintenance of commercial relations abroad, anything superfluous to these duties being representative of over-government and thus “of very doubtful advantage”.²⁰⁷

Eden thus called for a scaling back of state interference in the workings of the market, which would enable the “active principle” to flourish, both in terms of increased industry and in terms of greater frugality. By limiting the operation of the poor laws to the relief of extreme want, which could be met by restricting assessments for the maintenance of the poor “to the average of the last seven, or last three years, or whatever other average might be found to be more proper”, this goal could be met and, furthermore, the abuse of a lack of discretion when awarding relief, which Eden considered as endemic in the contemporary climate, could be eliminated too. In the big picture, “were the rates once limited, the price of labour would necessarily advance” and the net effect would be the dissemination of that “behaviour modification” of the poor which would “make them happy” whilst it also increased national wealth and progress.²⁰⁸ Such modification was necessary as “the great misfortune of the poor, as well as of the rich, is not so much the being ignorant of what is proper for them to do, as the being indisposed to do even what they know, and allow, to be proper”, for the poor this being too often due to “their own carelessness and mismanagement”. The kind of behaviour that Eden wished to see reproduced across the nation is illustrated by the example he gives of Dame Strudwick from Wisley in Surrey, who, once widowed, “was too proud either to ask or receive any relief from her parish”, the example of “all her virtue, and all her merit” making her “not much liked in her neighbourhood” as her life served as a “reproach” to the paupers of her parish.²⁰⁹ Independence from relief based around exploitation of opportunities within a free labour market and economising of resources would enable the labouring poor to realise greater happiness and quality of life, contributing to the greatness of the country and international success. Although Eden claimed not to have offered any prescriptive conclusions, his support for the market over all institutional considerations itself speaks volumes of his intent, and his portrayal of the poor through the medium of budgets and statistical tables reinforces his message that it is the market aggregate, or an abstract conception of the poor, that should carry the most weight when discussing policy.

In proffering the market abstract of the poor as the most suitable vehicle both for addressing the poor and for alleviating their distress, Eden was adopting a path that had been trodden before, most

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 587, 437.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 484, 587; Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 90, 95.

²⁰⁹ Eden, *State of the poor*, p. 428, 579.

notably perhaps by the Rev. David Davies, the deacon of Barkham, Berkshire, opponent of the slave trade (he gave evidence before a select committee on the African slave trade in 1791) and social commentator whose *The case of labourers in husbandry stated and considered* (1795) proved an influential tract, being widely commented on in the *Annals of Agriculture* and even earning praise from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which expressed a hope that it would “attract a degree of attention proportioned to the importance of the subject, and the merit of the execution”.²¹⁰ Davies was driven to write when, “visiting the labouring families of my parish, as my duty led me, I could not but observe with concern their mean and dispirited condition...Yet I could not impute the wretchedness I saw either to sloth or wastefulness. For I knew that the farmers were careful that the men should not want employment”. In response Davies, like Eden, undertook a quantitative study of the condition of the *labourers* (i.e. not *the poor per se*), painstakingly compiling tables of figures and statistics on the expenditure and incomes of the poor (the totality of which is included in an appendix stretching to 73 pages), so as to acquire a “perfect knowledge of The state of the poor”, this being “the only basis upon which any regulations respecting them can be safely raised”.²¹¹ However, unlike Eden, Davies supported the existing poor laws and how they had “on the whole produced a great deal of good”, yet he was concerned about their imperfect operation and how overseers did “not always regard strict justice” or could “rob the poor” through embezzlement. He likewise lamented how they “neglect their [official] duty in setting the poor to work” and how this lack of employment was having an adverse effect upon the moral condition of the lower strata: “Can we wonder at that widespread dishonesty, and profligacy of manners, the fatal effects of which we are daily lamenting? Our astonishment will assuredly cease, if we do but reflect that the very best education will scarcely keep a man honest and virtuous, whose family is perishing for want of necessaries”.²¹² Davies made much of the causal nature of immorality, agreeing with the poor law commentator John Howlett that it was mainly a consequence, not a cause of poverty. However, Davies emphasised the complicity of the rich and the gentry in encouraging immorality (and the subsequent decay of religion) by not doing more to alleviate distress or provide employment. In contrast to Eden he is advocating a greater role for intervention in the operation of the labour market so as to secure employment for the labouring poor, calling for tighter adhesion to the strictures of the Elizabethan poor laws rather than supersession.

²¹⁰ *Gentleman's Magazine* 65 (December 1795), p. 1023, cited in P. Horn, “Davies, David (1742–1819)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn, May 2009) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7229>, accessed 2 Nov 2012].

²¹¹ Davies, *The case of labourers in husbandry*, p. 5.

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 25, 26, 27, 29.

Both commentators stressed a fundamentally hierarchical conception of society, yet Davies coupled his with conservative views on many aspects of ‘modernisation’ as hurtful to the lower orders and the community at large. He was against enclosing and engrossing as denying the labourers in husbandry hope of owning land, and the disincentive effect of this, and he was seemingly opposed to towns as, “by living in towns, and associating at publick-houses, they [labourers] are habitually improvident, and mind nothing but present enjoyment; and when flung out of work, they are immediately in want”. He also opposed “luxury” on the grounds that it soon became “excessive” and therefore, through raising “the price of the most necessary articles by wasting on a few what would suffice for the maintenance of many” it rendered “subsistence dear”, and “first produces distress, and afterwards depopulation. Many, dreading the expense of a family, avoid marriage; and many emigrate to cheaper countries”.²¹³ Here his argument seems to run counter to that of Malthus and Townsend, stressing the *depopulating* effect of improvidence and an *inconsequentialist* ethic. The concern with depopulation shown here underlies Davies’ latent project of protecting the strength of the nation. He is actually bemoaning the Malthusian rectitude of labourers in abstaining from marriage when they are unable to support a family, due to the wretchedness of their condition as forced upon them by their low income, which in turn encourages hedonistic improvidence in place of familial thrift. Davies places the moral burden onto the gentry for not trying to support the labourers and making them unable to marry, whereas Malthus and Townsend stress the thoughtless immorality of the same group for recklessly marrying and starting families when they cannot support them. Davies sees the labourers as “useful to the community” for it is to “the patient industry of these [people] that the higher ranks are everywhere indebted for most of their enjoyments. It is chiefly on these that every nation depends for its population, strength, and security...But of all the denominations of people in a state, the labourers in husbandry are by far the most valuable”.²¹⁴ The usefulness to the common good of this class of people, the “greater part of the nation”, obliges their superiors to “never let it be forgotten that the labourer ought to be enabled to subsist his family; and consequently that *his pay* should be made to keep pace with the general advance in the prices of necessaries, of which wheat is now the principal article”, which would therefore succeed in allowing them to “meritoriously” contribute “to the population of the kingdom”.²¹⁵ Again Davies is taking a line opposite to that of Eden, advocating the imposition of wage hikes to counter the inflationary erosion of living standards and halt the “distresses of our lower peasantry”: “what is

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 47.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 1.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 52, 120.

wanted *now* is to prevent masters from taking advantage of the numbers and necessities of the poor, and allowing them too small wages; and therefore it is proper now to fix the *minimum* [wage]”.²¹⁶

Davies’ concern for the numbers of the poor harks back to what Mitchell Dean has called the mercantilist “Discourse of the Poor” in which the population of the poorer strata was made the source of national strength, and the control of that population the object of paternalism.²¹⁷ But, whereas Eden saw the state of the poor as stemming from market conditions, which if meritoriously aligned would promote growth, Davies’ position is closer to older mercantilist notions of promoting a growing and healthy population, by which the strength of a state could be measured. Yet, for all his similarity to Dean’s “discourse of the poor”, Davies is not concerned so much with control of the population but with a loosening of the reins so that the population can become autonomous. By this I mean that the requirements of elite intervention will be abrogated in favour of parliamentary intervention and the labourers conditioned to look after themselves. His sociology is one that seeks to ossify a hierarchical population structure, yet eliminates “the poor” as an epistemological category. It establishes a structure which is self-regulating because it is tied to the market system, yet abrogates paternalist responsibility in favour of personal responsibility within a role-dependent paradigm. The situation he describes in *The case of labourers in husbandry* is one where the rich and the gentry have, by using the market system and concomitant engrossment, luxury, and relative depression of wages, economically repressed the labourers to the point where they are forced onto the rates for subsistence, which “tends to sink their minds in despondency, and to drive them into desperate courses”. Similarly, this amorality and immorality has become inscribed in the lower strata, for “without doubt some of their vices have descended to them from above”.²¹⁸ Davies thus makes the rich both directly and indirectly responsible for the economic and moral plight of their inferiors. His is a vision of paternalism gone wrong. Yet the hierarchy paternalism supports should be maintained. The way to do this was to make the labourers self-sufficient as far as possible, by establishing a minimum wage covering subsistence rights, and then encourage self-responsibility for moral rectitude and improvement.

Self-responsibility should be encouraged as it was improvidence on the part of the poor that exacerbated the immiserating effects of low wages and was conducive of that “spirit of dissipation” and “carelessness” with regard to savings that had resulted in a situation wherein the poor “commonly mis-spend those earnings, which, if used with frugality, would render their condition

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 106, 111.

²¹⁷ See M. Dean, *The constitution of poverty: Toward a genealogy of liberal governance* (London, 1991), esp. Ch. 1.

²¹⁸ Davies, *The case of labourers in husbandry*, pp. 26, 94.

comfortable and themselves happy”.²¹⁹ The problem was that the “great plenty of working hands always to be had when wanted” had “kept down the price of labour below its proper level”, resulting in “an increased number of dependent poor” which in turn, due to the poor laws “making an indiscriminate provision for *all* in want” had culminated in a “prevailing corruption of morals in the common people”. The situation then became a vicious cycle for “carelessness about the future seems to have increased in proportion as the shame for applying for parish-relief has worn off”.²²⁰ What was needed was to restore the price of labour to its proper level, to raise the earnings of the poor above the subsistence bar through a combination of an increase of work done, including that by women and children, and the establishment of a minimum wage. Such a situation would enable greater discrimination on the part of the justices “to distinguish the deserving from the idle poor”, and, coupled with a network of schools of industry, would see an “industrious spirit...universally diffused through the kingdom”. However, the principal means of improving the morals and usefulness of the labouring poor would be through encouraging frugality and correcting improvidence, which would be effected in the three-step plan of, firstly, “removing the cause of their [the poor’s] too great reliance on parish relief”, secondly; “instructing them how to secure and improve such savings as they might make out of their pay”, and, thirdly; “by holding out to them a probable prospect of bettering their condition in consequence of such frugality”.²²¹ Thus in the final analysis, from a conceptual schema at cross-purposes to that of Eden, Davies also expounded the self-reliance of labourers as the surest safeguard against poverty and the correct moral arrangement under which the progress of national strength should be effected.

The rhetorical and conceptual tool that Davies used to adumbrate this future was the elimination of “the poor” as an absolute and encroaching category. In his work he is careful to distinguish between “the poor” as that impotent group in receipt of relief, and the “day-labourer”, “lower peasantry”, “lower ranks” or “common people” who constitute the “great body of a people”. In doing this Davies is divorcing the *condition of poverty* from the *category of the poor* so that it becomes a relative and therefore treatable problem. Like Eden’s deployment of budgets, Davies’ statistical tables created the abstract condition of poverty by making it a situation of surplus or deficit that could be *changed*. He then seeks to pass responsibility for this treatment onto the labourers themselves, paving the way by providing a minimum wage. His message is that, through encouragement of an “industrious spirit” the “rising generation” might be able to “earn their bread” and that therefore “if it be reasonable that idleness and improvidence should be discouraged and punished, it is without doubt

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 98, 55.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 57, 98, 59, 58.

²²¹ Ibid., pp. 91-92, 98.

equally so that industry and parsimony should receive their proper reward".²²² By emphasising personal industry to stave off poverty, rather than receipt from the parish of poor relief, connoted with immorality and "that spirit of dissipation which has descended" to the lower strata, Davies is hoping to create a social structure in which the poor cannot be an expansive category. He reduces the problem of "the poor" to one of subsistence, and corroborates the basic paternalist tenet of meeting this subsistence (and therefore can be said to uphold the basic tenet of the moral economy) by allowing relief to this group, yet by placing the means of subsistence within the hands of all (via provision of a minimum wage) he is disavowing the gentry of that paternalist responsibility and placing it onto individual heads. He is undermining the community-centred system of moral economy in favour of a national system of individuated responsibility. In this way, the "national happiness" is promoted by making all "useful to the community", in the process rescuing "national manners".²²³ Poverty is made a question relative to subsistence, and the means of sinking into it put beyond the reach of the labourers by provision of employment and the moral authority of the common, national, good. His reading of his times constructs poverty as a condition imposed by the failings of paternalism, not as something inherent to the lower strata. He therefore opens up the conceptual space to envision a system in which paternalism, with the minimum wage scaling back the provision of relief, is translated into self-reliance and the "lower ranks" abstracted as an indeterminate mass of statistics rather than as individuals within communities. However, this system is not *demoralised per se*, rather moral rectitude is still tied to economic propriety but the locus of responsibility for it is placed on an individual level and made coordinate with the good of the community at large. As a condition, not as a distinct body of people, responsibility of poverty is divorced from the community, whereas the poor live within the community. This shift in outlook had far-reaching repercussions for the analysis of poverty, as it was made a subject of macro, not microeconomics.

Both Eden and Davies used household budgets to underpin an analysis of the poor that saw macroeconomic conditions as determinate of increasing rates and both advocated an alteration in the existing framework of relief towards greater individual responsibility, centred on frugality and rising productivity.²²⁴ The central figure in their texts was that of the labourer struggling to make ends meet, subject to the vicissitudes of market economics, rather than the traditional bogeyman of the idle and degenerate pauper, as such the continuum of crime and poverty identified by Bentham

²²² Ibid., pp. 92, 102.

²²³ Ibid., pp. 125, 93, 94.

²²⁴ For an exploration of the role of household budgets in the evolution of how the labouring classes were imagined as consumers and how this consumption was recognized as a way of improving the nation see J. White, "Luxury and labour: Ideas of labouring-class consumption in eighteenth-century England" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), esp. the summary pp. 329-337.

and Colquhoun is not discussed and the moral state of poverty is relegated to a subtlety instead of providing the main course. Both envisioned an altered role of paternalism in accordance with this, envisioning an interested gentry that passed on encouragement and know-how for the poor to live more closely within their means. However, where Davies extolled the virtues of a “proper level” of income for the poor below which the market rate should not be permitted to fall, Eden took the opposing line of advocating complete freedom of the market pricing mechanism with a minimum standard of relief appended as a safety net for “extreme want”. Both wished to see a sharp curtailment of the rates by ending dependency on parochial relief and enabling the labourer to raise his standard of living by the sweat of his brow, but outlined different roles for the market. Yet their shared affording of primacy to an abstract conception of the poor, focused on the key constituent trope of an imbalanced budget, served the self-fulfilling purpose of describing poverty whilst simultaneously signposting its alleviation. By extricating the condition of poverty from the community identity of being poor, the narrative identity of paupers was curtailed and overwritten by an image of the labouring poor, a device that, reflexively, brought the abolition of poverty within reach. It is the continuities between Eden and Davies that are of most significance, for they describe a shift in the discourse of the poor towards a model of abstraction and market mechanisms, with a sharply contracted sphere of responsibility on the part of the gentry: “By the obliteration of the rationale for face-to-face negotiation among the poor and their betters, the plans erased the idea that individuals and families had particular needs”.²²⁵ This step away from paternalist intervention was only lengthened by Malthus’s extension of market mechanisms into the realm of natural (and divine) laws.

Sandra Sherman has explored the contribution of such abstracted accounts and quantifying practices to a re-conceptualisation of the labouring poor that cast them as “eating functions”, noting the production of a raft of texts such as the anonymous *Proposal for a perpetual equalization of the pay of the labouring poor* (1795) or *Outlines of an attempt to establish a plan for a just and regular equivalent for the labour and support of the poor* (anon., 1797), which sought to establish a subsistence level of income for the poor based on bread scales, numerically constructing the poor in terms of bread. The cognitive impact of such tracts was that the reduction of the poor to “ciphers” allowed them to free the confines of community identity and become players on the macroeconomic canvas, which in turn paved the way for poverty to be treated as an economic condition and thus capable of being ameliorated by a poultice of self-help concocted so as to increase the efficacy of a labourer’s agency *viz-a-viz* their fortunes in the labour market.²²⁶ Such a

²²⁵ Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, p. 125.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-140.

quantitative approach was exhibited by Eden and Davies, helping to create the condition of poverty in confrontation to the community status of “the poor”. This “cognitive reconstruction” facilitated an “imaginative economics” whereby societal improvement could be delegated to the actions of people rather than the interactions between groups of people.²²⁷ Sherman emphasises how the poor were reduced to “eating functions”, that they were, by the use of numerical tables, represented as “discursive constructs, metonymic “mouths” to be fed on condition that their hands are kept busy”.²²⁸ This was achieved by equating the price of bread with the price of labour, for “by this regulation the common people would be effectually secured from wanting the absolute necessities of life, provided they were always employed”.²²⁹ This ontological transformation cast the poor as social equations that needed to be balanced in accordance with the rules of the market, a transformation that was implicitly critical of the paternalist paradigm and that re-framed the very structure of debates over the poor. As Davies recognised and Sherman has commented upon, “whether or not such plans are tried, they affect discourse, generating models of poor relief that concede its present inadequacies. He [Davies] is one of the first to notice the discourse of competing plans *qua* discourse and to comment on their affective intentions...For Davies and his competitors, poor-relief-as-discourse shows the failure of traditional paternalism and suggests that alternatives must be tried in the public sphere”.²³⁰

Here we see dissatisfaction with the current Poor laws expressed in terms of market rules, the issue of government intervention being central to discussion. Where Burke and Townsend sought to reduce relief to discretionary charity and to use the discipline of the market to coerce the poor into habits of industry and moral rectitude, Eden and Davies conceptualised poverty as an abstracted social condition and emphasised self-help as the means to work within market strictures to overcome a position of dependency, although they disagreed on the appropriate level of provision of subsistence security. As Himmelfarb has noted, “Burke’s distinction did not take hold in general discourse. ‘Labourers’ and ‘Poor’ continued to be used interchangeably, and were often amalgamated in the term ‘labouring poor’. The poor thus remained what they had always been: a generalized, undifferentiated, heterogeneous body of people subject to all the vicissitudes that might at any time require them to seek relief of some kind of other, from some source or other.”²³¹ It was this blending of indigence and poverty that enabled self-help to dominate poor law discourse, for it was possible for the labouring poor to help themselves, by definition. As poor law

²²⁷ Ibid., pp. 11, 13.

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 125, 138.

²²⁹ Davies, *The case of labourers in husbandry*, p. 118.

²³⁰ Sherman, *Imagining poverty*, pp. 130-131 .

²³¹ Himmelfarb, *Idea of poverty*, p. 77.

traditionalists and conservatives claimed, those who could labour were not the proper object of relief, yet they were central to debates and widely blamed for rising relief costs. Unemployment, life-cycle and structural poverty were beginning to play a crucial role in conceptions of the poor that altered the understandings of deserving and undeserving. A new criterion was necessary to distinguish between the industrious but unemployed labourer and the idle wastrel who did not wish particularly to work. This criterion was character, and it was this trope that came to pervade poor law discourse, enabling self-help to be both the means of new avenues of poor relief and the unit of measurement of the old methods. However, for this rhetorical and conceptual move to be completed it would take a further twist of market-based analysis, that of apportioning the blame for market failure onto the shoulders of the poor in terms of overpopulation, a theory hinted at before by Burke and Townsend but given new resonance within the schema laid out by Malthus.

Chapter 3: Malthus

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), parson, demographer and political economist, was appointed professor of history and political economy at the newly established East India College at Haileybury in 1805. His seminal works on population and political economy, advocating abolition of the Poor laws as the only cure for structural dependent poverty, proved massively influential in poverty debates, persuading a generation of the merits of abolitionist sentiment. Malthus has subsequently been identified by historians such as Himmelfarb as the prime mover in the de-moralisation of political economy and Poor Law discourse, blaming the poor and their immorality for burgeoning poverty.²³²

Over the course of 38 years from 1796 until his death in 1834 Malthus was to write and publish on a variety of topics, making great advances in the science of political economy (formulating theorems of rent, effective demand and diminishing returns in particular) and commenting upon the great issues of the day such as the corn laws, poor laws, the bullion question, Ireland and parliamentary reform, with his celebrated principle of population at the core of his output.²³³ He formed a close and lasting friendship with his rival, David Ricardo, Malthus declaring in their correspondence that “I never loved anybody out of my own family so much”; wrangling over their doctrinal differences was to dominate much of his output in the 1820s, beginning with his under-appreciated *magnum opus*, *Principles of political economy* in 1820.²³⁴ Malthus’ influence on his own times and beyond was massive, and he is said to have induced a “revolution in the public mind”, to have created “an entirely new feeling on his subject”, to have “formulated the terms of discourse on the subject of poverty for half a century”, and to have been “the grandfather of the [1834 Poor Law] amendment act”.²³⁵ No less an authority than John Maynard Keynes declared that: “If only Malthus, instead of

²³² See Ibid; Biographical detail is taken from J. M. Pullen, ‘Malthus, (Thomas) Robert (1766–1834)’, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn., May 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17902>, accessed 21 June 2012]. See also D. Winch, *Malthus* (Oxford, 1987), Ch. 2. Malthus gave evidence to several parliamentary committees (in 1824 before the select committee on artisans and machinery, and in 1827 before the select committee on emigration), was elected fellow of the Royal Society in 1818, joined the Political Economy Club as a co-founder in 1821, became one of ten royal associates to the Royal Society of Literature in 1825 and helped to inaugurate the Statistical Society of London (later the Royal Statistical Society) in 1834.

²³³ For some of the more obscure texts see B. Semmel (ed.), *Occasional papers of T. R. Malthus on Ireland, population, and political economy from contemporary journals, written anonymously and hitherto uncollected* (New York, 1963).

²³⁴ Quoted in W. Empson, “Life, writings and character of Mr Malthus”, *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 64 (Jan., 1837), pp. 469–506, p. 499, cited in Pullen, “Malthus”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography (ODNB)*. For a comparison of Malthus and Ricardo see J. Wolff, “The economic thought of T. R. Malthus”, in J. Dupâquier, E. Grebenik and A. Fauve-Chamoux (eds.), *Malthus past and present* (London, 1983).

²³⁵ J. R. Poynter, *Society and pauperism: English ideas on poor relief, 1795–1834* (London, 1969), p. 172; W. Bagehot, “Malthus” (1880), in *Collected works* (London, 1978), Vol. XI, 331, cited in G. Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty: England in the early industrial age* (London, 1984), p. 127; Ibid., p. 126; Poynter, *Society and*

Ricardo, had been the parent stem from which nineteenth-century economics proceeded, what a much wiser and richer place the world would be today!”.²³⁶ Yet for all his admirers (Pitt, Bentham, Brougham, McCulloch, Macaulay, both Mills, to name but a few) and accolades Malthus was also “the best abused man of his age”, derided as a “shameless sycophant of the ruling classes”, a “stumbling block” in the development of political economy, his thought a “continued contradiction” (not without some measure of truth) and “a revolting blasphemy against nature and mankind”, likened to “menstrual pollution”.²³⁷ Such impassioned invective largely stems either from an incomplete appreciation of Malthus’ works or a diametrical opposition to his stance, and any grotesque caricature of this “perfectly unaffected, amiable, gentlemanlike man...of strict truth, perfect integrity and rational benevolence”, “one of the best of men” and an ardent “advocate of the poor” must be taken with more than a pinch of salt.²³⁸ Turning to Malthus’ oeuvre now, we can discover why this should be the case and why his work enjoyed the success that it did, stemming from a peculiar resonance with the existing tide of poor law discourse towards self-help and an abnegation of gentry responsibility for poverty.²³⁹

Malthus’ first foray into writing for public consumption was in 1796 when he unsuccessfully submitted a pamphlet entitled *The crisis, a view of the present interesting state of Great Britain, by a friend of the constitution* for publication. This tract, a pithy criticism the principal object of which was “to impugn the measures and general government of Mr Pitt”, demonstrated “considerable political

pauperism, p. 109. For Malthus’ contemporaneous popularity see J. P. Huzel, *The popularization of Malthus in early nineteenth-century England: Martineau, Cobbett and the pauper press* (Aldershot, 2006).

²³⁶ This quotation, taken from J. M. Keynes, “Robert Malthus: The first of the Cambridge economists”, *Essays in biography* (London, 1933), pp. 93-148, can be found in *Collected writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. 10 (MacMillan for the Royal Economic Society, 1972), cited in Winch, *Malthus*, p. 10.

²³⁷ J. Bonar, *Malthus and his work* (New York, 1924 [1st edn., 1885]), p. 1, cited in Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, p. 124; R. L. Meek (ed.), *Marx and Engels on Malthus: Selections from the writings of Marx and Engels dealing with the theories of Thomas Robert Malthus* (London, 1953), p. 123, cited in Pullen, “Malthus”, *ODNB*; W. Hazlitt, *A reply to the Essay on population, By the Rev. T. R. Malthus* (London, 1807), pp. 15–16; F. Engels, “Outline of a critique of political economy” (1844), in K. Marx, *Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844* (London, 1958), p. 201, cited in Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, p. 124; The quote is from a letter from Southey to John Rickman, in K. Curry, ed., *New letters of Robert Southey* (1965), Vol. 1, p. 357, cited in Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, p. 168.

²³⁸ *M. Edgeworth: Letters from England, 1813–1844*, ed. C. Colvin (Oxford, 1971) p. 64, 331; W. Empson, “Life, writings and character of Mr Malthus”, reprinted in B. Semmel (ed.), *Occasional papers of T. R. Malthus*, pp. 235-236.

²³⁹ For a more substantial introduction to Malthus and his thought see Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, pp. 144-185; D. Winch, *Malthus*; James, *Population Malthus: His Life and Times* (London, 1979); W. Petersen, *Malthus* (London, 1979), also; D. V. Glass (ed.), *Introduction to Malthus* (London, 1953). The historiography on Malthus is voluminous to see the least: a useful overview of the Anglophone world literature is provided by J. Pullen, “The last 65 years of Malthus scholarship”, *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1998), pp. 343-352, also; A. M. C. Waterman, “Reappraisal of ‘Malthus the Economist’, 1933–97”, *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1998), pp. 293-334, yet much has been written of Malthus in other languages too, noticeably in Japan where there exists a Japan Malthus Society with its own *Annual Bulletin*. For reasons of space, time and linguistic difficulties I shall only be able to address a portion of the Anglophone literature.

sagacity and observation” and was of note “especially as exhibiting his early views and opinions respecting the condition of the poor”.²⁴⁰ Unfortunately it has only survived as fragments reproduced in William Empson’s article on Malthus for the *Edinburgh Review* in January 1837 and Bishop William Otter’s *Memoir of Robert Malthus* that prefaced the second, posthumous, edition of the *Principles of political economy* in 1836.²⁴¹ Aside from demonstrating a “noticeably latitudinarian view of the rights of dissenters”, consistent with his educational upbringing, Malthus in *The crisis* seems to have been concerned with parliamentary reform and with the concurrent condition of the poor, two issues which could be joined at the heart of a critique directed towards a government seemingly coping inadequately with the aftermath of the French Revolution.²⁴² In *The crisis* Malthus is said by Empson to have “seen so little of his way, that he was a warm advocate of Mr Pitt’s Poor Law Bill” but that “the truth was forced upon him” by the controversy between Price and Howlett over the “increase or decrease of the population of England since the Revolution”.²⁴³ In 1796 Malthus was interjecting a political piece criticising Pitt’s administration in the context of the fallout from the French wars and his focus was not directed so much towards the poor laws as towards the government. However, the subject of the poor was integral to any appreciation of governance in the intellectual milieu of revolution, and as such Malthus became drawn into a study of the poor laws as a necessary corollary of the politics of the age of revolution. Certainly Empson viewed Malthus as motivated by a resolution to reduce “the hardships of the poor within the smallest compass” when he set himself to work producing the 1798 *Essay on the principle of population*.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Bishop W. Otter, “Memoir of Robert Malthus”, preface to T. R. Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy* (2nd edn., London, 1836), accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/2188/202512> on 2012-06-23.

²⁴¹ For the fragments of *The crisis* see Empson, *Life, writings and character of Mr Malthus*, pp. 241-244; W. Otter, “Memoir of Robert Malthus”, pp. xxxvi-vii. A convenient juxtaposition of these two sources can be found in James, *Population Malthus*, pp. 50-54. For further discussion of *The crisis*, see also D. Winch, *Riches and poverty: An intellectual history of political economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 253–255; D. Winch, “Higher Maxims: Happiness versus wealth in Malthus and Ricardo”, in S. Collini, D. Winch and J. Burrow (eds.), *That noble science of politics: A study in nineteenth-century intellectual history* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 75–76; Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, asterixed note p. 102; S. Hollander, “Malthus and Utilitarianism with special reference to the *Essay on population*”, *Utilitas*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1989), pp. 170-210, p. 203.

²⁴² Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 254. For Malthus’ views on dissenters in *The crisis* see Empson, *Life, writings and character of Mr Malthus*, p. 243. Winch has shown how Malthus was in disposition a Foxite Whig, an opponent of executive tyranny and supporter of gradual reform. Malthus’ Country Whig sympathies remained the basic framework for his political views throughout his life and are evident in his deployment of this standard oppositional language of the day. Malthus bemoaned that the polity lived in fear of the mob, attributing the development of executive tyranny and repressive measures to the malign influence of this fear. See Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 253. See also S. Hollander, “On Malthus’s population principle and social reform”, *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer, 1986), pp. 187-236, esp. sections VII and VIII; See also Winch, *Higher maxims*, p. 75; T. R. Malthus, *Essay on the principle of population*, 2nd edn., Book IV, Chs. 6 and 7, cited in Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 76; *Ibid.*, p. 123 cited in Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 254.

²⁴³ Empson, *Life, writings and character of Mr Malthus*, p. 246.

²⁴⁴ Cited in James, *Population Malthus*, p. 52.

It was the investigation of claims linking population, happiness and unrest that led Malthus into the controversy over demographics and attendant utilitarian debates over the happiness of populations, paving the way for the First essay.²⁴⁵ This controversy, involving luminaries such as the philosopher, demographer (who was also heavily involved in early insurance and annuity schemes) and political radical Richard Price (1723-1791) and the economist and poor law commentator Rev John Howlett (1731-1804), as well as lesser lights such as William Eden (1744-1814) and William Wales (1734-1798) concerned the increase or decrease of population in Britain as an indicator of national strength and wellbeing, shown in even sharper relief and lent greater urgency by the shadow thrown over Britain by the French Revolution in 1789. According to Eden in *The state of the poor*, Price gave a figure of the population as at 5 million, Howlett 8,691,597 and Young 8,500,000.²⁴⁶ In short, Price saw a declining population whereas Young and Howlett claimed that population had increased since the Revolution. The matter was of importance as an indicator of the military and financial strength of the nation (even given the likelihood of being able to service the national debt) as it embarked upon the prolonged struggles with revolutionary France that saw out the century. Furthermore, it was imbued with a utilitarian and humanistic penumbra that concerned itself with the condition of that population and the cost of any required upkeep, thus drawing in on-going discussion over the Poor laws. By joining the controversy Malthus was intervening directly in the state of the nation question through an established medium, and his secondment to these debates provided a crucial avenue of influence and reception of his ideas. Yet the First essay was written very much in the spirit of *The crisis* in that the centre of its attention was the French Revolution and it was written as a means of explicating and absolving the politics of the time with regard to the condition of the poor in the light of the proliferation of pro-Jacobin sentiment. It was born from the investigations of *The crisis*, with an expanded remit and point of view as Malthus came to perceive the issues of population and poverty as inextricably and fatally linked and that as of yet, dangerously, this bond

²⁴⁵ That this nexus of concern was at the forefront of Malthus' mind between *The crisis* and the *First essay* is shown by the following passage: "On the subject of population, I cannot agree with Archdeacon Paley, who says, that the quantity of happiness in any country is best measured by the number of people. Increasing population is the most certain possible sign of the happiness and prosperity of a state; but the actual population may be only a sign of the happiness that is past", Malthus, *The crisis*, cited in James, *Population Malthus*, p. 52.

For the population controversies referred to here see D. V. Glass, *Numbering the people: The eighteenth-century population controversy and the development of census and vital statistics in Britain* (Farnborough, 1973), also D. V. Glass, comp. *The population controversy: a collective reprint of material concerning the 18th century controversy on the trend of population in England and Wales* (Farnborough, 1973). For how this was taken forward into the first censuses see D. V. Glass, comp. *The Development of population statistics: a collective reprint of materials concerning the history of census taking and vital registration in England and Wales* (Farnborough, 1973). For the contributions of Richard Price and Arthur Young more narrowly conceived see J. Bonar, *Theories of population from Raleigh to Arthur Young: Lectures delivered in the Galtonian Laboratory, University of London, under the Newmarch Foundation, February 11th–March 18th, 1929, with 2 additional lectures and with references to authorities* (London, 1966), Chs. VII–VIII.

²⁴⁶ F. M. Eden, *The state of the poor* (3 vols. London, 1797), Vol. 1, p. 336.

had not been invested with an appropriate degree of gravity. In this vein, the First essay of 1798 formed a direct intervention in the poor law debates of the 1790s.²⁴⁷

That Malthus wrote his *Essay on the principle of population* as for the main part a rebuff of Jacobin sentiment and as an “answer to radicalism” is well-established in the historiography.²⁴⁸ A. M. C. Waterman has discussed the intellectual climate in 1798 in relation to the First essay, discussing the intersection of the ‘English Jacobins’ with Rational Dissent and the contributions of thinkers such as Paine, Priestley, Burke, Wollstonecraft, Horne Tooke and others to a political literary debate which had opened in 1789 with Richard Price’s *Discourse on the love of our country* and that was to culminate in 1798 with Malthus “capturing the high ground once again for conservatism and throwing ‘Jacobin’ thought on the defensive for more than a generation”.²⁴⁹ The widely held belief, epitomised by the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, that there existed “a Jacobin faction, in the bosom of our country”, whose members were “vigilant, persevering, indefatigable; desperate in their plans and daring in their language” and ready to heed Price’s call for “friends of freedom” to oppose “slavish governments”, which should “restore to mankind their rights and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together”, led to a conservative backlash that saw systematic repression of sedition (such as with the Two Acts of September 1795, or Sidmouth’s later Six Acts) and the concerned propertied classes to demand “that the poor be reassured that the inequities of rank, wealth and power were indeed part of a grand design to maximise human happiness”.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Malthus’ first edition of his *Essay on the principle of population* was published in 1798 and the second edition followed in 1803. All references to the 1798 edition will be abbreviated as *First essay* and refer to Malthus, T.R. *An essay on the principle of population, as it affects the future improvement of society. With remarks on the speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other writers* (London, 1798). The version consulted was released in 2003 in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (Gale Cengage Learning).

The 1803 edition, abbreviated hereafter as *Second essay*, refers to D. Winch (ed.), *An essay on the principle of population; or, A view of its past and present effects on human happiness; with an inquiry into our prospects respecting the future removal or mitigation of the evils which it contains* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edn., Cambridge, 1992).

²⁴⁸ T. Sowell, “Malthus and the Utilitarians”, *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (May, 1962), pp. 268-274, p. 272.

²⁴⁹ A. M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion: Christian political economy, 1798–1833* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 18-28.

²⁵⁰ *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 1798, pp. 1–2, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 18; R. Price, “A discourse on the love of our country, delivered on November 4th 1789, at the meeting house in the old Jewry, to the society for commemorating the revolution in Great Britain” (1789), in D. O. Thomas, ed., *Political writings* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edn., Cambridge, 1991) pp. 195-196; R. Soloway, *Prelates and people: Ecclesiastical social thought in England 1783–1852* (London, 1969), p. 58. For more on Price see D. O. Thomas, *The honest mind: The thought and work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977).

In such discussions, which tended to centre on the sanctity of the social hierarchy and what Arthur Lovejoy described as an eighteenth-century “great chain of being” social ontology – derived from Aristotle and developed fully in Neo-Platonism – the issue of the Poor laws was an important consideration, as revolution was dependent upon the political will of the populace.²⁵¹ Hence did William Paley pen his *Reasons for contentment* (1792) which beseeched the labouring poor that “To abolish riches, would not be to abolish poverty; but, on the contrary, to leave it without protection or resource”, that “some of the necessities which poverty (if the condition of the labouring part of mankind must be so called) imposes are not hardships, but pleasures” for “frugality itself is a pleasure”; such “pleasures” as these, coupled with enjoyment of the “domestic affections” promote a lifestyle amongst the ‘poor’ “more sensible of ease, more susceptible of pleasure” and that it was only through an appreciation of an avoidance of the “heavy anxieties which rich men feel” and of such “reasons for contentment” that the labourer would “learn what happiness actually consists in”.²⁵² Elsewhere Paley has a poor man declare that “I can become by industry and economy equally rich as a lord, and, while I behave myself with propriety, am equally independent as the king”, whilst a “country curate” advised the poor to recognise that “no Equality can benefit us” and Hannah More’s Jack Anvil, a blacksmith, echoed this sentiment in a dialogue with Tom Hod the mason: “A levelling will rob thee of thy ale more than the malt tax does”.²⁵³

²⁵¹ See A. O. Lovejoy, *The great chain of being: A study of the history of an idea* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970) – based on the 1933 William James lectures delivered at Harvard University by Lovejoy and published under the same title in 1936. The cosmology of the great chain of being and its propinquity to the principle of plenitude (which held that God is justified in having created a world populated by imperfect as well as perfect creatures since this kind of world maximises being in the way that a wholly perfect world could not) were commonplace in eighteenth-century theology, reaching fruition in that brand of Neo-Platonism prevalent in Cambridge at the turn of the century in which Malthus’ undergraduate education was steeped, championed by thinkers such as Paley, who gave it a theological utilitarian slant. For a discussion of Malthus’ debt to such theology, particularly in the theodicy detailed in the last two chapters of the *First essay* which bordered on annihilationism, see E. N. Santurri, “Theodicy and social policy in Malthus’s thought”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Apr., - Jun., 1982), pp. 315-330. For the relevance and contribution of Malthus’ theodicy to his political economy see M. B. Harvey-Phillips, “Malthus’ Theodicy: The intellectual background of his contribution to political economy”, *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1984), pp. 591-608.

²⁵² W. Paley, “Reasons for contentment, addressed to the labouring part of the British public” in G. Claeys, (ed.), *Political writings of the 1790s: The French Revolution debate in Britain* (8 vols., London, 1995) Vol. 7, *Loyalism: 1791–1793*, pp. 219-226.

²⁵³ W. Paley, “Equality, as consistent with the British constitution, in a dialogue between a master-manufacturer and one of his workmen” (1792), in *Ibid.*, pp. 232; Anon., “A country curate’s advice to manufacturers” (1792), in *Ibid.*, pp. 299; H. More, “Village politics. Addressed to all the mechanics, journeymen, and day labourers in Great Britain. By Will Chip, a country carpenter” (1792, 4th edn., 1793), in G. Claeys, *Political writings of the 1790s*, Vol. 8, *Loyalism: 1793–1800* (London, 1995), p. 9. For more on Hannah More’s contribution to the anti-Jacobin cause see M. Scheuermann, *In praise of poverty: Hannah More counters Thomas Paine and the radical threat* (Lexington, Kentucky, 2002). The literary device of a dialogical enquiry, almost elenchus, into the rights of the poor in relation to the social hierarchy, property redistribution and poor relief was a popular means of explaining anti-Jacobin sentiment as it allowed the writer a demotic façade from behind which to present their arguments as belonging to those honourable members of the labouring poor who defended the status quo in the face of the imbecilic charges of their gullible brethren, thus

Paley himself, although a staunch advocate of the social hierarchy (despite misgivings over the system of property ownership, as indicated by his famous fable of the pigeons in his *The principles of moral and political philosophy*, where he also called for a graduated income tax to avoid the consolidation of wealth in the hands of too narrow a strata of England's elite) as a prominent theologian was equally adamant to demonstrate a concern for the plight of the poor and developed a justification of minimal poor relief predicated upon a natural right of necessity to subsistence superseding that of a human property right rooted in utilitarian considerations. He argued that the natural right to subsistence was stronger than the adventitious right to property marked out by positive law and invoked a theory of an original Christian communion of goods (derived from the scholastic and natural laws tradition of Aquinas, Grotius, Pufendorf and Locke) to argue that "The poor have a claim founded in the law of nature...and, therefore, when the partition of property is rigidly maintained against the claims of indigence and distress, it is maintained in opposition to the intention of those who made it" and, according to T. A. Horne, to call for the enjoining of private charity, to which the poor had an imperfect right, with government assistance as "the care of the poor ought to be the principal object of all laws; for this plain reason, that the rich are able to take care of themselves".²⁵⁴ Such arguments as Paley's (or Paine's – see below) for the natural right of the poor to subsistence were directly countered by Malthus, who argued on the same Newtonian terms and from the same intellectual milieu as Paley (who dominated the undergraduate curriculum at Cambridge during Malthus' studies) that there could exist no natural right to subsistence as it was the function of the principle of population and, by extension, the divine plan that "a part of the

adding an oblique appeal to the vanity and repute of the reader in corroboration of the mechanical appeal to their reason and self-interest.

²⁵⁴ W. Paley, *The principles of moral and political philosophy* (2 vols., 1785; 14th edn., London, 1803) Vol. 1 pp. 252–253; 247, cited in T. A. Horne, "'The poor have a claim founded in the law of nature': William Paley and the rights of the poor", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Jan., 1985), pp. 51-70, pp. 58-59. See also, T. A. Horne, *Property rights and poverty: Political argument in Britain 1605–1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), esp. Ch. 4. For more on Paley's views on poverty see Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, pp. 252–253. For more on Paley generally see M. L. Clarke, *Paley; evidences for the man* (London, 1974), also D. L. LeMahieu, *The mind of William Paley: A philosopher and his age* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1976). For an examination of the natural jurisprudence tradition and its contribution to such debates see I. Hont and M. Ignatieff, "Needs and justice in the Wealth of nations: An introductory essay", in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and virtue: The shaping of political economy in the Scottish enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983).

society must necessarily feel a difficulty of living; and this difficulty will naturally fall on the least fortunate members”, hence the positive check of misery (starvation) would operate regardless.²⁵⁵

Hence also were the poor laws given due coverage in the writings of political radicals such as Thomas Paine, whose *Rights of man* (1791), a rebuttal of Burke’s *Reflections on the revolution in France* (1790), called for the institution of a “social budget” and a major reform of taxation, with the poor laws replaced by allowances to children and the aged. However, Paine was explicit that such relief was only for the needy poor, not the labouring poor, displaying a similarity of views to an anti-rates-in-aid-of-wages orthodoxy that was cemented during the 1790s and enshrined by Eden in 1797. Yet Paine went on to advocate a new tax on landed estates and that the onerous burden of taxation should be rendered “more equal”, thus establishing a principle of progressive taxation, coupled with a concomitant subversion of the law of primogeniture and ending of hereditary government; such a schema displaying that measure of radicalism in his views that was to lead to his exile from 1792. Whilst in exile his views became more extreme and in 1797 he returned to the front line with his *Agrarian justice opposed to agrarian law and agrarian monopoly*, this time laying the blame for poverty not so much on taxation and misgovernment but on the inequitable distribution of property that came with civilization, displaying a marked Rousseau-ist accent to his thinking.²⁵⁶ Paine called for a “national fund” to be created from an inheritance tax on personal and landed property that would pay out a sum of £15 at the age of 21 and a £10 annuity from 50 until death by means of compensation for the property that had been communal in the state of nature.²⁵⁷ Such views, although radical, were on a par with those of other ‘agrarian radicals’ such as the Professor of Humanity at the University of Aberdeen William Ogilvie (1736 – 1819, in *An essay on the right of property in land*, 1781) and the London bookseller Thomas Spence (1750 – 1814, in *The real rights of*

²⁵⁵ Malthus, *First essay*, p. 79. Malthus and Paley enjoyed a long and mutually influential relationship, with Paley’s revisions of Malthus’ theodicy in his *Natural theology; or, evidences of the existence and attributes of the deity* (1802) helping to popularise Malthus’ views as well as influencing later editions of the *Essay* and John Bird Sumner, Bishop of Chester’s later *A treatise on the records of the creation and the moral attributes of the creator* (2 vols., London, 1816), which fully set out the revised Malthusian theology. Eden similarly denied the existence of any right or duty (of relief) that was in practice impossible to meet, as no right “the gratification of which seems to be impracticable, can be said to exist”, *The state of the poor*, Vol. 1, p. 448.

²⁵⁶ Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was an influential Genevan philosopher, writer and composer. He wrote widely on issues such as political theory, education and religion, achieving great celebrity. His views on the inequalities attendant upon property and how civilization was the origin of inequality, spelt out in his *Discourse on the origin and basis of inequality among men* (1754), developed into a theory of direct democratic government that he outlined in his later work, *Of the social contract, or principles of political right* (1762), which was taken up as a key text by the French revolutionaries. See V. Gourevitch (ed.), *Rousseau: The social contract and other later political writings*, (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edn., Cambridge, 1997). For a sustained analysis of Rousseau and his thought see R. Wokkler, *Rousseau* (Oxford, 1995) and H. Gildin, *Rousseau’s social contract: The design of the argument* (Chicago, 1983).

²⁵⁷ See Himelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, pp. 86-99. For more on Paine see G. Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and political thought* (London, 1989).

man, 1793), who between them had earlier and concurrently aired an agenda of land redistribution formulated on the natural right to an equal property in land and born from a shared “visceral antipathy to large landowners” and conviction of the “the economic and moral primacy of agriculture”.²⁵⁸ What made Paine so intolerable to the establishment was his argument that “the English political system was unconstitutional and tyrannical, that only a republican form of government was in accord with the rights of man, and, by implication, that revolution was morally and politically defensible, indeed necessary”; concern over the circulation of his seditious writings amongst the impressionable lower classes and the activities of the Constitutional Societies and London Corresponding Society (which met at Spence’s premises) in popularising his *The rights of man* bred real fear of the revolutionary mob of the type invoked by Malthus in *The crisis* and formed the major impetus for the ensuing conservative backlash.²⁵⁹ However, with regard to the poor laws it was Paine’s fundamental assumption that poor relief was “not charity but a right, not bounty but justice” that so irked conservatives such as Eden and Burke and concerned commentators such as Malthus, who declared with knowing irony that “nothing could so effectually counteract the mischiefs occasioned by Mr Paine’s *Rights of man* as a general knowledge of the real rights of man” and furthermore that “there is one right which man has generally been thought to possess, which I am confident he neither does nor can possess – a right to subsistence when his labour will not fairly purchase it”.²⁶⁰

Gareth Stedman Jones has described the fecund literary landscape of the 1790s and the debate over most especially the French but also the American Revolutions as “the moment of convergence between the late Enlightenment and the ideals of a republican and democratic revolution” which marked “a fundamental historical turning point...it marked the beginning of all modern thought about poverty” for, “politically, the effect of the American and French Revolutions was to dislodge or undermine early modern commonplaces about the place of the poor in the social hierarchy” as it became clear that there “need no longer be such a thing as ‘the poor’” and “there emerged the

²⁵⁸ N. Thompson, *The real rights of man: Political economies for the working class 1775–1850* (London, 1998), p. 17-18. See Ch. 1 of this work for an extended discussion of Spence and Ogilvie, who, although similar in outlook and purpose, proposed divergent means of achieving their desired ends as “Spence thought in terms of a social revolution predicated on the collective ownership of the primary means of production” whereas “Ogilvie, even at his most radical, looked only to the social change that would eventuate from the multiplication of a virtuous and independent peasantry” (p. 19). Spence’s tract was based on a lecture that he had given on 8th November 1775 to the Newcastle Philosophical Society entitled *On the mode of administering the landed estate of the nation as a joint stock property in parochial partnerships by dividing rent*, a title that “provides an accurate summary of the essence of what was subsequently labelled *Spence’s plan*” (p. 7).

²⁵⁹ Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty*, p. 96.

²⁶⁰ T. Paine, *Rights of man* in P. Foner (ed.), *Complete writings*, Vol., p. 617, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 94; Malthus, *First essay*, cited in Horne, *Property rights and poverty*, p. 168.

beginnings of a language of social security as a basis of citizenship”.²⁶¹ Stedman Jones places Paine as central to this emergence, yet in terms of poor law discourse and social policy Paine’s influence was small. It is rather to a re-framing of the poor law question in terms of re-integrating the poor into the body of society through the abstracting processes of political economy that we should look for any seismic shift of the level Stedman Jones suggests. As Daniel Baugh has shown, by the beginning of the Nineteenth Century “the poor were no longer regarded as mere handmaidens of society, but as constituent elements of the civil order. Society was now seen as the sum of its human parts, and each part was capable of responding to the same set of incentives”.²⁶² The revolutions of the late Eighteenth Century had the effect of politicising the issue of poor relief to a much greater degree because they had brought the poor into the polity and thus politicised them in the eyes of their superiors, placing the discourse of poverty at the heart of state politics, as events had thrown “new and extraordinary lights...on political subjects, which dazzle, and astonish the understanding”.²⁶³ From the 1790s we see the government playing a much more proactive role in the formation of social policy, in the gathering of vital statistics and in investigating the socio-economic as much as the political goings-on of the nation, and we see those in poverty as, if not yet enfranchised then certainly brought closer to the polity.²⁶⁴ This was achieved circuitously via a double-phase movement (that maps loosely onto our schema of discursive formation followed by a regime of practices) of, firstly, abnegating responsibility for poverty on the part of the government in favour of the natural and iron laws of the market and, secondly, emphasising the benefits of self-help in alleviating or avoiding poverty and valorising the political responsibility of such behaviour. As we shall see, Malthus had a crucial role to play in these movements and in the deployment of accompanying ideology, yet he was not operating within a vacuum and his contributions to poor law discourse were successful precisely because they interlocked with existing trends, helping to shift the terms of

²⁶¹ G. Stedman Jones, *An end to poverty? A historical debate* (London, 2004), pp. 9-10, 13. For the political and literary debates attendant upon the French Revolution see I. Kramnick, “Religion and radicalism: English political theory in the age of revolution”, *Political Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Nov., 1977); T. P. Schofield, “Conservative political thought in Britain in response to the French Revolution”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 29 (1986), pp. 601-622; A. Goodrich, *Debating England’s aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, polemics and political ideas* (Woodbridge, 2005); K. Gilmartin, *Writing against conservatism: Literary conservatism in Britain, 1790–1832* (Cambridge, 2007); Gilmartin, *Print politics: The press and radical opposition in early nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1996), also; P. Clemit (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to British literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s* (Cambridge, 2011). For the parallel critique of corruption, advancing retrenchment, see P. Harling, *‘The waning of old corruption’: The politics of economical reform in Great Britain, 1779-1846* (Oxford, 1996).

²⁶² D. A. Baugh, “Poverty, Protestantism, and political economy: English attitudes towards the poor, 1660–1800, in S. B. Baxter (ed.), *England’s rise to greatness, 1660–1763* (London, 1983), p. 93.

²⁶³ Malthus, *First essay*, pp. 1-2.

²⁶⁴ See J. Innes, *Inferior politics: Social policies and social problems in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), Chs. 1, 3 & 4, also B. L. J. Gordon, *Political economy in parliament, 1819–23* (London, 1976).

the debate into a new, if related constellation more suited to the political exigencies of the post-revolution era.

Although the year 1797 saw a slew of unfortunate events from the French landing in Pembrokeshire in February, causing a run on the banks and the Bank of England to suspend cash payments for over twenty years, to the fleet mutinying at Spithead and Nore, through to the defeat of Grey's ill-timed campaign for parliamentary reform and the *Anti-Jacobin Weekly* beginning its assault on Dissenting intellectuals, Malthus' *Essay* of 1798 owes its nativity "to a conversation with a friend, on Mr Godwin's *Essay, on avarice and profusion*, in his *Enquirer*".²⁶⁵ This "friend" was Malthus' own father Daniel and the writer that stirred Malthus to put pen to paper was William Godwin (1756–1836), philosopher, novelist, dissenter and later widower of the political radical and proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (d. following childbirth 1797).²⁶⁶ In the summer of 1791 he quit writing for the *New Annual Register* and persuaded its publisher George Robinson to financially support him whilst he composed a treatise on political principles, which was completed and published in 1793 as *An enquiry concerning political justice, and it's influence on morals and happiness*. This work was "an immediate success, establishing Godwin as the undaunted champion of philosophical enquiry, private judgement, and public benevolence, who predicted the gradual liberation of mankind from the shackles of government and, ultimately, mortality through the development of knowledge and the powers of the mind", and lent him instant celebrity and acolytes amongst the overlapping literary and political reform circles of the metropolis.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ For the "climactic" events of 1797 see Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion*, p. 25; Malthus, *First essay*, p. i.

²⁶⁶ See Empson, *Life, writings, and character of Mr Malthus*, p. 246. Godwin had been born into a tradition of dissent, supplemented by the touch of Sandemanianism (an especially virulent form of Calvinism based on the teachings of the hyper-Calvinist Robert Sandeman (1718–1771) who had held that salvation was dependent solely upon the right or wrong judgement of the understanding) during a pupillage with the independent minister Samuel Newton in Norwich; from thence he proceeded to the Hoxton Dissenting Academy in London before taking a position as minister at Stowmarket in Suffolk in 1780. During this period, under the influence of the works of Baron d'Holbach (1723–1789), Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771) and Rousseau he moved towards Deism and fell into dispute with his congregation, before moving to London and taking up writing as his occupation. After some early moderate success Godwin took up writing for the *English Review* and the *New Annual Register* together with a brief involvement with the Whig journal the *Political Herald* (in 1785–1786) and published a series of novellas. Biographical material is taken from M. Philp, "Godwin, William (1756–1836)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn., May 2010) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10898>, accessed 25 June 2012].

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Godwin went on to pen *Things as they are, or, the adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), the first mystery novel and an attack upon aristocratic privilege, followed by *Cursory strictures on the charge delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the grand jury* (1794), which attacked the high treason charges handed down to political radicals and members of the London Corresponding Society and the Society for Constitutional Information in 1794. Radical credentials established, Godwin wrote *The enquirer: Reflections on education, manners, and literature, in a series of essays* (1797), which volume contained the offending essay "Of avarice and profusion". For the correspondence of Malthus and Godwin and the mutual influence which it exerted for the development of their respective views (especially on Malthus' deployment of moral restraint in later

In the *Enquiry*, according to Winch, Godwin showed himself to be an exponent of what might be called a “post economic utopia”, an anarchistic ideal that could be realised only by allowing the “unjust institutions of existing commercial society to sink beneath the weight of their own imperfections”.²⁶⁸ Following Rousseau, Godwin’s views form an execration of private property and he claims that property created dependence and servility and directed human effort away from moral and intellectual improvement towards sordid material pursuits. In such a paradigm, “nothing less than the abandonment of private property (including spouses!) and the sharing of labour equally would answer, with change being effected without coercion through general moral and intellectual improvement achieved by means of public debate and the exposure of error”. The ideal that Godwin held up was “an economy of abundance, judged not in terms of material goods and services – the need for which could be reduced in a world where uniformity of basic wants was recognised – so much as in minimum unnecessary labour and the maximum scope for leisure”.²⁶⁹ Godwin based the achievement of this utopia on a psychology of human motivation that was essentially necessitarian in character, wherein human mind and character were formed by circumstances and the rational mind held a capacity to exert control over more sensual or selfish passions; the development of reason would lead to the recognition of property as an imposition upon the natural freedoms and abundance offered in creation, followed swiftly by the construction of a social state better attuned to such sentiments.²⁷⁰ Malthus categorically rejected Godwin’s system along these two central lines, those of equality of property and the perfectibility of man, for it was “to the established administration of property, and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love, that we are indebted for all the noblest exertions of the human genius, all the finer and more delicate emotions of the soul, for everything, indeed, that distinguishes the civilised, from the savage state.”²⁷¹

editions of the *Essay*) see Winch, *Riches and poverty*, Ch. 10. For more on Godwin’s thought see F. Rosen, *Progress and democracy; William Godwin’s contribution to political philosophy* (London, 1987); D. H. Monro, *Godwin’s moral philosophy: An interpretation of William Godwin* (London, 1953); D. Fleisher, *William Godwin: A study in liberalism* (London, 1951). For the critical reception of Godwin’s writings see K. W. Graham (ed.), *William Godwin reviewed: A reception history, 1783–1834* (New York, 2001).

²⁶⁸ Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 258.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ See *Ibid.*, p. 262. Necessitarianism is the doctrine that all events, including acts of the will, are determined by antecedent causes. The poor law commentator and early socialist Robert Owen shared a similar conception of human character, this conception forming a central bulwark in his schema of poor relief, reform of the labouring poor and social regeneration centred on communitarianism. For Owen’s necessitarianism see G. Claeys, *Citizens and saints: Politics and anti-politics in early British socialism* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 115-119. For Owen’s place within the thought of the period more generally see G. Claeys, *Machinery, money and the millennium: From moral economy to socialism, 1815-60* (Cambridge, 1987).

²⁷¹ Malthus, *First essay*, pp. 286-287

Godwin's vision of a future "amelioration of society to be produced merely by reason and conviction" wherein benevolence acted as "the master-spring and moving principle of society, instead of self-love", although at first appearing to be "a consummation devoutly to be wished", was soon shown by Malthus to be "little better than a dream – a phantom of the imagination".²⁷² Malthus was able to achieve such an excoriation of Godwin's visionary social state by ratiocinating from the principle of population to an unveiling of the "great error under which Mr Godwin labours throughout his whole work", namely that of attributing "almost all the vices and misery that prevail in civil society to human institutions" and that it was rather to "the laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man or of human institutions" that the faults of society, misery and vice, should be attributed.²⁷³ Firstly, therefore Malthus had to outline his principle of population, before explaining exactly how this functioned to explode Godwin's and others' systems of equality. Then, in the manner of eighteenth-century *philosophes*, he appended a theodicy to his views, which had the effect of promoting his study of tendencies in human civilization to a cosmological *système*, fortifying the conclusions he had reached earlier with Christian crenellations.²⁷⁴ This, then, formed the basic tripartite structure of the *First essay*: setting out the principle of population, followed by the dismissal of Godwin, Condorcet, and their ilk, rounded off with a lecture on how God was only being cruel to be kind, for "evil exists in the world, not to create despair, but activity".²⁷⁵

Malthus deployed his principle of population, namely that "the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man" (the former advancing in a geometric ratio and thus outstripping the latter, which advanced in an arithmetic ratio), as the keystone of "an inquiry concerning the future improvement of society" that would demonstrate against expecting "any very marked and striking change for the better, in the form and structure of general society".²⁷⁶ In the final analysis, the principle of population could be summarised in a concatenation of three interrelated points: Firstly, "that population cannot increase without the means of subsistence"; Secondly, "that population does invariably increase, where there are the means of subsistence", and; Thirdly, "that the superior power of population cannot be checked, without producing misery or vice".²⁷⁷ The divergence in reproductive capacity of land and man would see population double every 25 years in a bountiful country, yet eventually nature's gifts

²⁷² Ibid., pp. 173-175.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 176, 207.

²⁷⁴ See Harvey-Phillips, *Malthus' theodicy*, p. 607: "The *Essay* of 1798 was very much in the eighteenth-century tradition, in which it was *de rigueur* to couch a scientific treatise within some sort of philosophic *système*". See also Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion*, pp. 62-81.

²⁷⁵ Malthus, *First essay*, p. 395.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 13; Malthus, *Second essay*, p. 13; *First essay* p. 276.

²⁷⁷ Malthus, *First essay*, p. 37.

would fail to keep up with the rate of increase of population, invoking the operation of a “positive” check to human numbers, i.e. scarcity of sustenance causing malnourishment, disease and starvation (collectively labelled “misery”). The rate of increase of population might also be restrained by the operation of a “preventive” check, i.e. delayed marriage, but such restraint “almost necessarily, though not absolutely so, produces vice”, i.e. sexual immorality.²⁷⁸ Thus Malthus seemed to offer society a choice between misery or vice, and it was such a pessimistic conception of the options available to mankind that necessitated the inclusion of his theodicy chapters. Even if the rate of increase of food resources was extended by the employment of greater capital or new technologies on the land or an extension of cultivation, for any temporary surplus of food there would naturally be a concomitant rise in population as the availability of food would encourage reproduction, and thus the stark alternatives of misery or vice remained, if forestalled. Malthus saw such natural swings as reproduced in human society through the signals of falling/ rising prices and real wage levels, although the implementation in the market of such signals would engender a time delay in the pattern of population increase or decrease such that mankind would be “condemned to a perpetual oscillation between happiness and misery”, around a culturally-determined minimum standard of living.²⁷⁹ He declared the recent distress of the mid-1790s, occasioned by high grain prices, to be the product of such an imbalance between population and food resources, aggravated by deficient harvests (although he was to revise this claim in later editions to assert that such a critical period had not yet actually arrived, in line with a more optimistic vision of human progress).

Although the fundamentals of the principle of population were “certainly not new”, Malthus’ ascription of mathematical ratios to illustrate their inexorable operation was a novel progression and, coupled with his attempts at the empirical reconstruction of population trends, set his *système* upon much firmer foundations than a merely qualitative conjecture would have provided.²⁸⁰ Another factor which multiplied the efficacy of Malthus’ tract was its application to policy debates as it proffered a largely original (save for a debt to Townsend’s *Dissertation*) schema for disavowing the beneficent effects of poor relief. By coupling a demographic rationale to a rejection of institutionalised poor relief Malthus was re-framing the debate over poverty not just in an abstract sense of market principles, as Eden had done, or in the philosophical sense of a Christian community

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 2. For Malthus’ own account of the principle of population see Ch. 2.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 8. Malthus acknowledged a debt to earlier works such as Robert Wallace’s (1697–1771) *Various prospects of mankind* (1761), and to thinkers such as Price and Townsend – the general principles of his population theories may be construed as dating back even to Plato. See Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion*, pp. 37–38. As Poynter admits, the essay “was an effective piece of pamphleteering, claiming originality only in the application of ideas and not in the ideas themselves”, Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, p. 144. See also Bonar, *op cit.*, D. Winch, “Introduction” to *Second essay*, pp. vii–xxiii, and B. Stapleton, “Malthus: The origins of the principle of population?”, in M. Turner (ed.), *Malthus and his time* (Basingstoke, 1986).

of goods and the rights of necessity as the natural jurisprudence tradition and (to a certain extent) Paley had done. Rather, Malthus was contextualising the issue of poor relief within a deistic Newtonian paradigm of the natural laws of creation and mechanics of existence, relegating the interventions of humanitarian legislators to a position of solecistic wastefulness and misguided strategy, for “the truth is, that the pressure of distress” on the “lower classes of society” is “an evil so deeply seated, that no human ingenuity can reach it”.²⁸¹ Here Malthus was subverting “the radical interpretation of the science of politics” wherein “politics connoted the activity of human reason operating directly through the laws and via the remodelling of political institutions to improve the lives of individuals and nations”, instead “standing this proposition on its head, Malthus maintained that misery and vice were attributable to a fundamental law of human nature that was impervious to institutional change and legislative contrivance”.²⁸²

Malthus’ used the logic of the principle of population to demonstrate that the poor laws, far from alleviating distress, actually operated to “depress the general condition of the poor” and “create the poor which they maintain”. This was because the “positive check to population, by which I mean, the check that represses an increase which is already begun, is confined chiefly, though not perhaps solely, to the lowest orders of society”, as these are the people who have the least command over the necessaries of life. The resultant “mortality among the children of the poor”, or diminished living standards of this strata of society, by which “the sons of labourers are very apt to be stunted in their growth, and are a long while arriving at maturity”, induced the creation of the poor laws in 1598-1601 to ameliorate such unsavoury scenes. However, according to Malthus, the redistribution of money resources to those at the margins of society merely had the effect of putting a greater quantum of resources within their reach, and enabled a greater number of them to survive to adulthood. This caused an increase in demand for food resources and the resultant price rise pressured the living standards of a wider swathe of society. Thus the poor laws can be seen to have “spread the general evil over a much larger surface”. Moreover, those in receipt of relief found themselves unable to command any increase in purchasing power, as “it is of little consequence whether the lowest members of the society possess eighteen pence or five shillings. They must at all events be reduced to live upon the hardest fare and in the smallest quantity”. Poverty was shown to be relative, and absolute levels of income mattered not one jot if the ratio of population to agricultural produce was such that the lowest proportion of society were unable to purchase what they needed to survive. Moreover, by counterbalancing nature’s positive check and facilitating the support of a larger population via redistribution, the poor laws encouraged a greater level of

²⁸¹ Malthus, *First essay*, p. 95.

²⁸² Winch, *Introduction*, p. viii.

reproduction and so would ramp up the future pressure on resources, exacerbating the existing imbalance. They did so by encouraging labours to marry by holding out the prospect of relief regardless of employment. Yet, it was “not in the nature of things, that they can be awarded such a quantity of money or subsistence, as will allow them all to marry early, in the full confidence that they shall be able to provide with ease for a numerous family”. By encouraging population the poor laws were merely ensuring the division of the resources of society amongst a larger body of people, forcing a larger proportion of the populace below the subsistence level as food became proportionately scarcer: “an increase of population without a proportionate increase of food, will evidently have the same effect of lowering the value of each man’s patent [share of society’s wealth]”. In addition, betraying a similar nexus of concerns to Eden, any increase in the wages of labourers may not be commensurate with the same “quantity of work” being done as before, for “the receipt of five shillings in a day, instead of eighteen pence, would make every man fancy himself comparatively rich, and able to indulge himself in many hours or days of leisure”; “This would give a strong and immediate check to productive industry; and in a short time, not only the nation would be poorer, but the lower classes themselves would be much more distressed than when they received only eighteen pence a day”. The inevitable conclusion was that “the rich might become poor, and some of the poor rich: but a part of the society must necessarily feel a difficulty of living; and this difficulty will naturally fall on the least fortunate members”. Malthus here diverged from Eden and Smith in doubting the ability of economic growth to forestall the operations of nature’s positive check, especially if that growth was focused on manufactures instead of agriculture, as this would lead to an even greater imbalance between population and society’s alimentary arsenal. The counterexample Malthus offers to Smith, of an expanding industrial sector offering higher money wages to labourers, would induce the transfer of labour from the land into industry, facilitating population growth, but would consequentially see a static or reduced agricultural output hold the living standards of labourers to their level, meaning that they would enjoy “no greater command over the necessaries and conveniences of life”.²⁸³ Indeed, Ch. XVI of the *First essay*, concerned with the “probable error of Dr Adam Smith in representing every increase of the revenue or stock of a society as an increase of the funds for the maintenance of labour”, holds that labourers would spend any additional earnings on food, enabling higher fertility – the price elasticity of supply for food was held to be low, with the poor seeming “always to live from hand to mouth”. In later editions of the *Essay*, as we shall see, Malthus was to alter his views in accommodation of a more sophisticated psychological reading of the poor that portrayed them as active and discerning consumers of conveniences and luxuries and able to make the correspondent lifestyle choices. This

²⁸³ Malthus, *First essay*, p. 83, 74,77, 278, 82, 78, 79.

was entirely consistent with a more optimistic reading of the poor that placed greater emphasis on the operation of moral restraint to forestall misery.²⁸⁴

Nevertheless, the thrust of Malthus' argument in 1798 was clear: poverty is relative and the product of tendencies animated by natural laws, and therefore inescapable. All that may be achieved is a partial alleviation of the consequences attendant upon such a natural covenant by encouraging a more discriminatory attitude towards the provision of relief and by cultivating an ethos of self-help amongst the labouring classes, such measures having the effect of hopefully decreasing the rate of increase of population. Malthus directed his analysis towards this end by praising the "spirit of independence" which still remained amongst the peasantry (if perhaps not among manufacturing labourers) despite the poor laws being "strongly calculated to eradicate this spirit". He went on: "hard as it may appear in individual instances, dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful...such a stimulus seems to be absolutely necessary to promote the happiness of the great mass of mankind". For as the overseer "cannot by means of money raise a poor man, and enable him to live much better than he did before, without proportionately depressing others in the same class", so by the same logic "a labourer who marries without being able to support a family, may in some respects be considered as an enemy to all his fellow labourers".²⁸⁵ The Poor laws, by ensuring subsistence to all, not only encouraged the poor to reproduce without fear of not being able to feed their children but in an adjunct fashion "powerfully contributed to generate that carelessness, and want of frugality observable among the poor, so contrary to the disposition frequently to be remarked among petty tradesmen and small farmers". As "the poor laws of England may...be said to diminish both the power and the will to save, among the common people, and thus to weaken one of the strongest incentives to sobriety and industry, and consequently to happiness", so "the labouring poor...seem always to live from hand to mouth...they seldom think of the future". For Malthus it seemed "highly improper, by positive institutions, which render dependent poverty so general, to weaken that disgrace, which for the best and most humane reasons ought to attach to it". For although the poor laws might "mitigate some cases of very severe distress which might otherwise occur", in general "The state of the poor who are supported by parishes, considered in all its circumstances, is very far from being free from misery".²⁸⁶ However, Malthus did propose a series of three broad measures by which a "palliative" of the scenario could be effected".²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ See G. Gilbert, "Economic growth and the poor in Malthus' *Essay on population*", *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1980), pp. 83-96.

²⁸⁵ Malthus, *First essay*, pp. 84-85, 79.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87, 89, 91.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

The first and most important step to be taken was “the total abolition of all the present parish laws”, which would at least “give liberty and freedom of action to the peasantry of England, which they can hardly be said to possess at present”. The removal of poor relief would encourage a beneficent disposition of futurity and consequentialism whilst the removal of the settlement laws would render the market for labour free and thus enable the price of labour to rise according to the demand.²⁸⁸

Secondly, there should be premiums offered on new cultivation and “all possible encouragements held out to agriculture above manufactures, and to tillage above grazing”, coupled with an end to “all those institutions relating to corporations, apprenticeships, etc. which cause the labours of agriculture to be worse paid than the labours of trade and manufactures”, as “a country can never produce its proper quantity of food while these distinctions remain in favour of artisans”.²⁸⁹ Such a redistribution of capital and economic resources in favour of agriculture was crucial to Malthus’ schema as it not only held out the prospect of retarding the progress of the principle of population but the agrarian bias codified within sat consonantly with his country Whig ideology as well as a marked sympathy for physiocracy, and distaste for urbanization, which several commentators have uncovered in his work.²⁹⁰ Whether Malthus’ preference for an agrarian economy stemmed from physiocratic beliefs or was engendered from the logic of the principle of population is a somewhat moot point, the salient detail being that in the *First essay* he distrusted an industrial economy and doubted the ability of manufactures to stave off misery and/ or vice. Rather, the effects of “such encouragement to agriculture” would be:

...to furnish the market with an increasing quantity of healthy work, and at the same time, by augmenting the produce of the country...raise the comparative price of labour, and ameliorate the condition of the labourer. Being now in better circumstances, and seeing no prospect of parish assistance, he would be more able, as well as more inclined, to enter into associations [such as friendly societies] for providing against the sickness of himself or family.²⁹¹

The hope was that a removal of the safety net of parish relief would induce the poor to care for themselves and improve their own, and society’s prospects.

Lastly, “for cases of extreme distress”, county workhouses should be established supported by rates levied upon the whole kingdom, and “free for persons of all counties, and indeed of all nations”. Within these workhouses “the fare should be hard, and those that were able obliged to work”. The

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 95-96.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ See B. Semmel, “Malthus: Physiocracy and the commercial system”, *Economic History Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1965), pp. 522-535; S. Hollander, “On Malthus’s Physiocratic References”, *History of Political Economy*. Vol. 24, No. 2 (1992), pp. 369-380.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 97.

goal of such institutions was not that they should be considered as “comfortable asylums in all difficulties”, but rather “as places where severe distress might find some alleviation”. In addition, “a part of these houses might be separated, or others built for a most beneficial purpose, which has not been unfrequently [sic] taken notice of, that of providing a place, where any person, whether native or foreigner, might do a day’s work at all times, and receive the market price for it”.²⁹² This subsidiary function of the workhouses would aid the creation and maintenance of habits of industry as well as ensuring that those who received relief contributed to their upkeep, especially the able-bodied labouring poor. This rationale behind the workhouses was not dissimilar to that of Bentham, except that Bentham emphasised the economic efficacy of such institutions in offsetting the cost of the relief they provided, whereas Malthus emphasised the incentivising effects of “hard fare” and less eligibility upon the poor in terms of self-help. Elsewhere Malthus had opined against the current system of workhouses on the grounds that they effected an inappropriate redistribution of resources that only served to “depress the condition of those out of the workhouses, by occasioning a rise in the price of provisions”, as the quantity of provisions consumed therein “diminishes the shares of that would otherwise belong to more industrious and more worthy members; and thus in the same manner forces more to become dependent”. This critique was entirely consistent with his general attack upon the principles of poor relief, yet his later advocacy of workhouses was predicated upon grounds of less eligibility and a utilitarian and humanitarian desire to avoid instances of starvation. Even with a network of county workhouses “many cases would undoubtedly be left for the exertion of individual benevolence”.²⁹³ The three-fold measures that Malthus posited for the reform of provision for the poor was in effect a scaling back of parochial assistance to the bare minimum consistent with responsible governance but offset by an increase in self-help and a re-balancing of the economy such that distress would naturally dissipate. In this respect Malthus’ platform is redolent of that of Eden. Yet whereas Eden saw the good of a societal whole through rising productivity as his rationale for reform, Malthus took his justification from a more typical utilitarian conception of governance, declaring his proposals to be “the best calculated to increase the mass of happiness among the common people of England”.²⁹⁴ Before considering the implications of Malthus’ principle of population and his opposition to the poor laws in terms of Godwin’s utopian schema, a digression on Malthus’ utilitarian leanings is necessary.

Malthus’ utilitarianism has been commented upon in the historiography, sparking debate as to the extent of its influence upon his policy prescriptions and the shape of his thinking. Samuel Hollander views the *First essay* as riven through with an “implicit secular utility calculus” and a strong

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 97-98.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 84, 98.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

“utilitarian perspective on moral behaviour” the function of which operates outside of and at cross-purposes to, the theodicy chapters of the *Essay*, which are deemed “extraneous to policy”. In this line of thought there were two theological Malthuses at work, one offering an ideal solution to the threat of poverty caused by population pressure and the other taking the whole as it actually is and offering a wholly different set of recommendations, such that there was “nothing to separate Malthus from the secular utilitarians”. In short, “the theological chapters worked on a presumption of actual population pressure, whereas Malthus had in mind elsewhere in his first edition and throughout the later editions *potential* population pressure”, this potentiality was emphasised more in later editions as “the original theological problem had...been entirely superannuated by events” considering the “on-going acceleration of national product”. That is to say, Hollander rejects Malthus’ debt to Paley as a brand of theological utilitarianism and instead highlights the continuity of Malthus’ utilitarian ethics and their centrality in his policy recommendations, centred on per capita income rather than on the Universalist perspective of the theodicy chapters.²⁹⁵ Elsewhere, conversely, Sowell has described Malthus as “by no means a utilitarian himself” (indeed, the Benthamite utilitarians “uncritical acceptance of Malthusianism...remains an unresolved problem”), yet he does admit that Malthus “pictured the ordinances of God as directed towards maximising human happiness”, nevertheless where “Malthus and the utilitarians were agreed as to the efficient cause of the population problem”, for Malthus there was also “a final cause – the value of adversity as a spur to exertion, in which the meaning of life is deepened”. Despite its policy recommendations the “anticipated benefits” of the population principle in all editions of the *Essay* “lay less in the direction of solving the social problem of poverty than in the direction of solving the moral-political problem of assigning blame for that poverty” and thus the *Essay* “never lost its essential character as an answer to radicalism”. For Sowell, the population principle was first and foremost a means of vindicating the inequalities of the status quo and rebutting the attacks of radicalism, a *raison d’être* only helped by the inclusion of a theological dimension. Yet the fundamental methodological question was “whether increased food supply led to higher standards of living or to increased population at substantially the same standard of living. Malthus’ theory led to the latter conclusion; history showed the former. Malthus was wrong”. It was this finding (from the 1801 census) that, for Sowell, governed the alterations Malthus made to subsequent editions of the *Essay* and that required a focus on improvement and self-responsibility as a mechanism for the increased living standards – Malthus had to drop his conception of “differential behaviour patterns”.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Hollander, *Malthus and Utilitarianism*, p. 180, 207, 195, 207-208.

²⁹⁶ Sowell, *Malthus and the Utilitarians*, p. 273, 270, 268-269, 272, 271. Petersen has also suggested that the breakdown of the institutional checks at the age of marriage in the late Eighteenth Century was a powerful

Hollander and Sowell come at the problem of Malthus' utilitarianism from opposite sides, the one emphasising its primacy in a secular construction, the other downgrading its relevance in a theological capacity. Yet both rely on the pivot between the 1798 and 1803 editions of the *Essay* as the primary mechanism for illustrating their theorems. In contrast, and more accurately, Donald Winch has described Malthus as a "Christian moralist", the defining role of which was to "discover those fixed laws which had been established by a beneficent deity with man's ultimate welfare in view...how humankind should best comport itself so as to minimize pain and evil, or maximize happiness and virtue in such a universe"; this remit "united Newtonian science with theological utilitarianism as a criterion for judging individual moral behaviour and public outcomes".²⁹⁷ Winch views Paleyite theological utilitarianism as providing the scaffolding for the edifice of Malthus' *Essay*, according to which "a beneficent Deity, anxious to maximise happiness and minimise vice, had attached pleasure to those activities that were conducive to happiness and pain to those that were vicious. This constituted a fixed system of laws of nature designed to place man under sufficient tension between needs and resources to ensure that he did not fall backward along the scale of civilization".²⁹⁸ However, Malthus, as a practical moralist, had also to deal with pragmatic real-world solutions to social ills such that "a balance between vice and virtue, and sometimes between the lesser of two vices, would often have to be struck, with the added complication that short-term gains or losses had to be set against expected long-term results".²⁹⁹ This, then, composed the ethical framework within which Malthus proposed moral restraint (in contradistinction to prudential restraint – see the discussion of the 1803 *Second essay*, below); as an arbiter between vice and misery and "adapted to man as he is rather than how he ought to be or could be".³⁰⁰ Winch sees "no conflict between Malthus the Christian moral philosopher and Malthus the scientist. The retention of the categories of vice and virtue, alongside, indeed attached to, pain and happiness, testify to their continuing importance".³⁰¹ Malthus' brand of utilitarianism held God to be a beneficent designer but that individual choice should be guided in line with the maximization of the happiness of the community, and the minimization of misery/ vice. His approach was different to that of the Benthamites, who stressed positive institutions as the means to conflate duty and interest, rather

stimulant to the *First essay* but that the information made available by the 1801 census assisted in the process of Malthus' change of emphasis in favour of the preventive check. See W. Petersen, *Population* (London, 1969).

²⁹⁷ D. Winch, "Robert Malthus: Christian moral scientist, arch-demoralizer or implicit secular utilitarian?", *Utilitas*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Nov., 1993), pp. 239-253, p. 248.

²⁹⁸ Winch, *Riches and poverty*, pp. 260-261.

²⁹⁹ As Malthus himself saw it, "it appears to me, that he is a much greater benefactor to mankind, who points out how an inferior good may be attained, than he who merely expiates on the present state of society, and the beauty of a different state, without pointing out a practical method, that might be immediately applied, of accelerating our advances from the one to the other", Malthus, *First essay*, p. 290 FN.

³⁰⁰ Winch, *Introduction*, p. xvi.

³⁰¹ Winch, *Malthus*, p. 37.

Malthus espoused a conception of virtuous conduct as that opposed to the multiplication of vice and misery, i.e. prudential self-responsibility, with a guiding role for positive laws.³⁰² In Bentham's words, Malthus saw himself more as an *expositor* than a *critic* (although he retained elements of both) – Newtonian laws existed and if they were not heeded misery and vice would result. The practical and optimum solution was to act in accordance with a minimization of the pejorative externalities attendant upon the operation of those laws.³⁰³

More often than not such action involved treading a middle course between two evils, or choosing a lesser evil, such as vice over misery or hard labour over dependence (see below), and in adopting such an approach Malthus employed a “doctrine of proportions” that was derived from “the traditional ethical notion of the just mean or middle way. Its extension from ethics to political economy was a logical step for Malthus, because he believed the laws of political economy resembled those of morals and politics”. According to Pullen, Malthus “regarded the just mean not as a fixed and absolute quantity, but as something moving and relative...as a quantity that depends upon a wide range of circumstances...as a dynamic rather than a static concept”.³⁰⁴ Hence there could be an optimum level of population growth below the limits of food production and consistent with rising real wages, if managed correctly. Moreover, although usually it was “beyond our ability to determine or recognise” the golden mean, more often than not “it will be attained through the operation of the natural forces of self-interest, unimpeded by government interference”, in accordance with Malthus' Newtonian theology. Malthus “attached the utmost importance” to this doctrine “as a general methodological principle” and in accordance with such an approach frequently stressed “the need for limitations and exceptions to the general principles of political economy”.³⁰⁵ We can detect such an equivocating approach in Malthus' concerns that “the form welfare assumed” must not be allowed “to destroy the very possibility of welfare for all”, and the

³⁰² In his later article on “Population” from the 4th–6th editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Vol. VI, Edinburgh, 1824), Malthus described the role of government as being to direct the checks to population and other societal forces “in such a way as to be the least prejudicial to the virtue and happiness of society”, although “the power of government is rather indirect than direct”, the “object to be attained” depending “mainly upon such a conduct on the part of individuals, as can seldom be directly enforced by laws, though it may be powerfully influenced by them”, E. A. Wrigley and D. Souden (eds.), *The works of Thomas Robert Malthus*, Vol. 4 (London, 1986), p. 317.

³⁰³ See R. Harrison, “Introduction” in J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (eds.), J. Bentham, *A fragment on government* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edn., Cambridge, 1988), p. xi. However, Malthus stopped well short of a stricter line of ethics (that approaching Kantian ethics) for he declared that “if no man were to allow himself to act, till he had completely determined, that the action he was about to perform, was more conducive than any other to the general good, the most enlightened minds would hesitate in perplexity and amazement; and the unenlightened would continually be making the grossest mistakes” (*First essay*, p. 295 FN).

³⁰⁴ J. Pullen, “Malthus on the doctrine of proportions and the concept of the optimum”, *Australian Economic Papers*, Vol. 21 (1982), pp. 270-285, p. 270, 282.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

direction of his projected amendments towards internalising “those externalities that might be pro-natalist in their effects”. In effect Malthus was advocating a balancing of short-term suffering for those left worse-off by an abolition of relief, with the long-term good of a stable standard of living at a higher wage level. However, the question of relief in times of acute scarcity “depends mainly upon the feelings and habits of the labouring classes of society, and can only be determined by experience”, an acceptance of an exception to the general rule that would find its level dependent upon pragmatic experience.³⁰⁶ Although this methodology has caused Malthus’ work to be sometimes contradictory and often lacking in clarity, it is apparent that “in the matter of the just mean his ethics were utilitarian rather than stoic” and that this stemmed from an application of Paleyite utilitarianism (in turn derived from a Newtonian theology) to the practical constraints of the real world.³⁰⁷

Malthus’ opposition to Godwin took a bifold form, demarcating forceful negation along the dual lines of equality of property and the perfectibility of man, or what Waterman has conceived of as a “negative polemic” refuting Godwin’s model of perfectibility and a “positive polemic” claiming that the established administration of property was a social good.³⁰⁸ Malthus deployed the logic of his principle of population to deconstruct Godwin’s “fanciful structure”, employing a mental experiment to “investigate the behaviour of a social system in disequilibrium”.³⁰⁹ This experiment envisioned, in accordance with Godwin’s plan, “a state of society, where men lived in the midst of plenty, and where all shared alike the bounties of nature”, where there consequently existed no spirit of servility or oppression or of fraud and no envy, malice or revenge, and consequently no selfishness. In such a state “each would lose his individual existence in the thought of the general good” and “mind would be delivered from her perpetual anxiety about corporal support” and left “free to expiate in the field of thought”.³¹⁰ Malthus goes on: “Let us suppose all the causes of misery and vice in this island removed. War and contention cease. Unwholesome trades and manufactories do not exist. Crowds no longer collect together in great and pestilent cities...The greater part of the happy inhabitants of this terrestrial paradise live in hamlets and farm houses scattered over the face of the country...all men are equal. The labours of luxury are at an end. And the necessary labours of agriculture are shared amicably among all...the spirit of benevolence, guided by impartial justice, will divide this

³⁰⁶ See R. M. Smith, “Welfare of the individual and the group: Malthus and externalities”, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 145, No. 4 (Dec., 2001), pp. 402–414, p. 406, 410; Malthus, *Works*, Vol. 4, p. 331. Malthus admitted the beneficial nature of relief in times of scarcity in his *An investigation of the cause of the present high price of provisions* (1800).

³⁰⁷ Pullen, *Malthus on the doctrine of proportions*, p. 284.

³⁰⁸ See Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion*, pp. 37-57.

³⁰⁹ Malthus, *First essay*, p. 277; *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

produce among all the members of the society according to their wants". In addition, Godwin viewed marriage as "a fraud and a monopoly", and imagined a society of communal parenting, hence removing both that anxiety for the future of their offspring and the "irremediableness of marriage" that currently operated to slow the progress of population, as any impediment to early attachments would have been removed.³¹¹

Malthus declared himself unable to "conceive a form of society so favourable upon the whole to population", wherein "the numbers would necessarily increase faster than in any society that has ever yet been known", and yet "there is no person, with the smallest knowledge of land, but would say, that it was impossible that the average produce of the country could be increased during the second twenty-five years by a quantity equal to what it now yields". In other words, after twenty-five years the population would have doubled but food production would not have kept pace, Malthus calculating that the food for twenty-one million people would have to be divided between twenty-eight million. The inevitable result was that the "beautiful fabric of imagination vanishes at the severe touch of truth. The spirit of benevolence, cherished and invigorated by plenty, is repressed by the chilling breath of want. The hateful passions that had vanished, reappear. The mighty law of self-preservation, expels all the softer and more exalted emotions of the soul". Malthus goes on to paint a vivid picture of the institutions so maligned by Godwin, namely an identical or near-identical administration of property and the institution of marriage (as making each man responsible for his own children would operate as a check to population), being introduced so as to mitigate the effects of such an imbalance between population and food resources, the net outcome being that "inequality of conditions, must necessarily follow" as variegated inheritance condemned some men to sell their labour.³¹² The complete retrospective picture would thus portray the process whereby:

a society constructed, according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving principle, instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason and not force, would, from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, in a very short period, degenerate into a society, constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known State at present; I mean a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, and with self-love as the mainspring of the great machine.³¹³

Malthus was thus able to describe the necessary existence of social inequality through the operation of natural laws, in the process demolishing Godwin's ideas on the perfectibility of man. For if all

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-183.

³¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185, 188-190, 204.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

would have to work and be subject to “perpetual anxiety about corporal support”, mind would not be free to correct the abuses of current society through the free application of reason. Malthus elaborated on this theme through his denial of the possibility of any “extinction of the passion between the sexes”, which would render the very realization of Godwin’s utopia, let alone its maintenance, an impossibility.³¹⁴ Malthus saw no evidence in history for any diminution of sexual congress between the sexes, and saw no valid reason to hope for one as virtuous love “seems to be that sort of mixture of sensual and intellectual enjoyment particularly suited to the nature of man, and most powerfully calculated to awaken the sympathies of the soul”. Malthus also denied that man could become “beings wholly intellectual”.³¹⁵ For, although “in the pursuit of every enjoyment, whether sensual or intellectual, Reason, that faculty which enables us to calculate consequences, is the proper corrective and guide”, and it may have been probable that “improved reason will always tend to prevent the abuse of sensual pleasures”; it did *not* follow “that it will extinguish them”. Malthus used this same distinction “between an unlimited progress, and a progress where the limit is merely undefined” to argue against Condorcet’s views on the organic perfectibility of man through selective breeding – inherently, man could not be perfected *per se*, merely improved. Somewhat pessimistically Malthus concluded, there was a strong improbability “that the lower classes of people in any country, should ever be sufficiently free from want and labour, to attain any high degree of intellectual improvement”. Thus Malthus was able to counter Godwin’s propositions on the perfectibility of man and the equal distribution of property as these qualities were products of the natural laws of existence, in comparison to which human institutions “are mere feathers that float on the surface”.³¹⁶ Yet he added greater depth to his arguments by a consideration of God’s intentions in setting out these natural laws, a consideration which can be shown to link the whole together in defence of the status quo.

Malthus introduces his theology through his justification of the present distribution of property as derived from the principle of population. We have seen how Malthus outlined inequality of property in terms of a function of society dealing with an imbalance between population and food resources, employing a sort of contractarian argument for private property as a social concord designed to ward off scarcity and misery. The division of property was agreed to as a legal and fair system of securing subsistence in the face of population pressure, avoiding a Hobbesian state of nature of perpetual war and anarchy.³¹⁷ Furthermore, the inequality of property was necessary for producing a

³¹⁴ Ibid., p. 210.

³¹⁵ Ibid., p. 213 .

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 167, 218, 177.

³¹⁷ Drawing this division out further, Malthus goes on to declare that “it is to the established administration of property, and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love, that we are indebted for all the noblest exertions

surplus beyond subsistence, this surplus then enabling the extension of cultivation or the creation of manufactures. If wages were not exchanged in a fair transaction for labour in production but rather surplus freely given to the poor, the end result would be the dependence of the poor upon the surplus of the rich, yet for Malthus, although he “perfectly agree[s] with Mr Godwin therefore in the evil of hard labour; yet I still think it a less evil, and less calculated to debase the human mind, than dependence”, for it was only by “the introduction of manufactures” that the poor “had been enabled to give something in exchange for the provisions of the great Lords, instead of being dependent upon their bounty” and it was through this mechanism that “we now enjoy our present degree of civil liberty”, as Hume had shown earlier.³¹⁸ It was this mechanism of exchange, facilitated by inequality of property, that caused the labouring poor to labour, but it also necessarily enabled social mobility (as one man may offer more labour in exchange, or his labour may prove more efficient, and thus be ascribed a higher monetary value) and activated that desire of bettering one’s condition or falling in the social scale which Malthus saw as integral to maximising the happiness of the populace at large. The “civilized state” was therefore inclusive of those “middle regions of society” which “seem best suited to intellectual improvement”, as “if no man could hope to rise, or fear to fall, in society; if industry did not bring with it its reward, and idleness its punishment, the middle parts would not certainly be what they are now”.³¹⁹ The purpose that Malthus attributed to the production of a stratified society by natural laws was the *shaping* (not testing) of humans into beings worthy of ascending to heaven, for Malthus, in contradistinction to Paley and more orthodox conceptions of creation, viewed “the world, and this life, as the mighty process of God, not for the trial of, but for the creation and formation of mind; a process necessary to awaken inert, chaotic matter into spirit”, and “in this view of the subject, the various impressions and excitements which man receives through life, may be considered as the forming hand of his creator, acting by general laws, and awakening his sluggish existence, by the animating touches of the divinity, into a capacity of superior enjoyment”.³²⁰ The net result of the Newtonian structure of the universe was the maximisation of happiness through the existence of a minimal amount of evil, as Malthus summarised it: “Evil exists in the world not to create despair, but activity”. Amelioration of evil was part of the divine plan for “it would not act so powerfully as an excitement to exertion, if the

of human genius, all the finer and more delicate emotions of the soul, for everything, indeed, that distinguishes the civilized, from the savage state”, *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287. Although Malthus declares in a footnote here that “the present great inequality of property...must be considered as an evil, and every institution that promotes it...essentially bad and impolitic”, he doubts “whether a government could with advantage to society actively interfere to repress inequality of fortunes” and that consequently “perhaps the generous system of perfect liberty, adopted by Dr Adam Smith, and the French oeconomists, would be ill-exchanged for any system of restraint”. Again, he is dealing with the world *as it is* and drawing his conclusions accordingly.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 292-293. For Hume, see Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion*, p. 50.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 367-368.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 353-354.

quantity of it did not diminish or increase, with the activity or indolence of man". Man "not patiently to submit to it", but rather "exert ourselves to avoid it", for it was "not only the interest, but the duty of every individual, to use his utmost efforts to remove evil from himself, and from as large a circle as he can influence" and in so doing to "fulfil the will of his creator".³²¹ However, Malthus' theodicy was at odds with established Anglican orthodoxy, displaying annihilationist ideas and denying the omnipotence of God. Malthus felt it necessary to remove these sections from subsequent editions of his *Essay*, incorporating the principles of his theodicy into the main thrust of his thesis with a greater emphasis on self-help.³²² Just as the *First essay* had been written to expand on the discussions of poverty and poor relief, in the context of the French Revolution, in *The crisis*, so the *Second essay* was penned to expand upon the discussions of political economy entered into in the *First essay*.³²³

³²¹ Ibid., p. 395.

³²² What is not so clear, and has been much debated, is whether Malthus' omission of chapters 18 and 19 from the 1803 *Second essay* was simply a direct response to outside pressure or rather the result of a change of mind regarding his theology, or perhaps that the core of his theology is still present but interwoven more subtly into his writing as a tacit accompaniment, perhaps because it did not fit well with the enlarged and explicitly political economic remit of the later editions. See J. M. Pullen, "Malthus' theological ideas and their influence on his principle of population", *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1981), pp. 39–54; D. L. LeMahieu, "Malthus and the theology of scarcity", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 40 (1979), pp. 467–474; S. Rashid, "Malthus' theology: An overlooked letter and some comments", *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1984), pp. 135–138. Against Pullen's claim that Malthus' theology was integral to his thinking, Rashid finds that "orthodoxy provided more incentive to accept the moral restraint" and that it was "Malthus the utilitarian population theorist that determined the beliefs of Malthus the theologian", p. 138. According to A. M. C. Waterman, Malthus' theology in the *First essay* does not stand up to either contemporary or modern intellectual scrutiny, perhaps suggesting that it was never supposed to be a serious contribution to theology but was rather a necessary adjunct to complete his système and increase the effectiveness of the *Essay* in appealing the poor. See A. M. C. Waterman, "Malthus as a theologian: The first essay and the relation between political economy and Christian theology", in J. Dupâquier, E. Grebenik and A. Fauve-Chamoux (eds.), *Malthus past and present* (London, 1983).

³²³ Between the *Essay* of 1798 and the second edition of 1803 Malthus published a short tract conducting *An investigation of the cause of the present high price of provisions* (1800), which served to reinforce the principles expounded in the *First essay* and prepare the ground for the second edition which was to be aimed at "applying the principle directly and exclusively to the existing state of society, and endeavouring to illustrate the power and universality of its operation from the best authenticated accounts that we have of the state of other countries", Malthus, *An investigation*, p. 28. In this interim period Malthus had also been on a tour of Scandinavia which had cemented in his mind the universality of the principle of population and the pernicious effects of a permanent establishment for the relief of the poor, as he had observed in Drontheim (1799) the presence of several "publick institutions for the poor" but that the "number of poor in Drontheim has in consequence of these establishments greatly increased", P. James (ed.), *The travel diaries of Thomas Robert Malthus* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 160. See also L. Magnusson, "Malthus in Scandinavia 1799", in M. Turner (ed.), *Malthus and his time* (Basingstoke, 1986). The message of *An investigation* was reiterated in the *Second essay*: "The intention is merely to show that the poor laws, as a general system, are founded on a gross error; and that the common declamation on the subject of the poor, which we see so often in print, and hear continually in conversation, namely that the market price of labour ought to be found for all those who are willing to work, is in effect to say that the funds for the maintenance of labour, in this country, are not only infinite, but not subject to variation", however: "As a temporary measure, it is not only charitable but just to spread the evil over a larger surface, in order that its violence on particular parts may be so mitigated as to be made bearable by all", p. 108, 113. A central thrust of the argument that Malthus outlined here was that the "labouring poor

The *Second essay* of 1803 was a very different work to that of 1798. It had been re-titled *An essay on the principle of population; or, a view of its past and present effects on human happiness*.³²⁴ The changed title is consistent with Malthus' desire to focus his attention more closely on "the existing state of society", and he includes a wealth of material in Books I and II on the operation of the checks to population in other societies, past and present. The basic tripartite structure is retained, but the empirical analysis of the checks to population forms the opening part of the work, with the rebuttals of systems of equality amalgamated into a second section on the systems and expedients adopted (or proposed) by societies in consequence of population pressure (wherein we find an updated discussion of the English Poor laws), followed by the third and last section on the future prospects "respecting the removal or mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population". If we can draw any implications from a comparison of the structures of the books then it would seem to be the case that the replacement of his theodicy with the section on mitigations, headed-up by moral restraint, suggests that Malthus saw a functional equivalence between the two, i.e. that by holding out a definite plan for mitigating the effects of population pressure the need for a theodicy to reconcile humanity to its fate was less pressing. In other words, this was more a work of practical didacticism than revolutionary appeasement and as such an explicitly theological section was of less relevance. Aside from ideological considerations, it has been suggested that it was experience of his own times that influenced Malthus the most towards this change, and that "changes in fertility exercised a substantially greater influence than changes in mortality on population growth rates", perhaps effecting a happy confluence of evidence and ideology that fundamentally altered the tenor and direction of Malthus' work.³²⁵

It is Malthus' ascription of a more muscular role to the prudential check upon population, in the form of moral restraint (defined as "restraint from marriage which is not followed by irregular gratifications" i.e. the prudential restraint without vice), which provides the most important development between the two essays and for the future direction and application of his thought.³²⁶

must realise that "the society in which they live, and the government which presides over it, are totally without power in this respect", *An investigation*, pp. 228-229, 121. See also E. A. Wrigley, "Corn and crisis: Malthus on the high price of provisions", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1999), pp. 121-128.

³²⁴ The full revised title is: *An essay on the principle of population; or, a view of its past and present effects on human happiness; with an inquiry into our prospects respecting the future removal or mitigation of the evils which it occasions. A new edition, very much enlarged*.

³²⁵ E. A. Wrigley, "Malthus's model of a pre-industrial economy", in J. Dupâquier, E. Grebenik and A. Fauve-Chamoux (eds.), *Malthus past and present* (London, 1983), p. 122. See also the discussion in M. W. Flinn, "Malthus and his time" in the same volume. For the opposite view, that Malthus was wrong and misread his times, see J. P. Huzel, "Malthus, the poor law, and population in early nineteenth-century England", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 23 (1969), pp. 430-451, also S. Williams, "Malthus, marriage and poor law allowances revisited: A Bedfordshire case study, 1770-1834", *Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2004), pp. 56-82.

³²⁶ Malthus, *Second essay*, p. 23.

The central thrust of the new edition can be extracted from Malthus' treatment of Godwin's response to the 1798 *Essay*, wherein Malthus rephrases the fatal flaw of Godwin's system in relation to the principle of population:

The tendency to early marriages is so strong that we want every possible help that we can get to counteract it; and a system which in any way whatever tends to weaken the foundation of private property, and to lessen in any degree the full advantage and superiority which each individual may derive from his prudence, must remove the only counteracting weight to the passion of love that can be depended upon for any essential effect.

Furthermore, any romantic proclivities towards "sacrificing all for love, naturally fascinating to a young mind" might be negated by the addition of "a sense of duty" to the "motive of interest". If this were achieved then "in delaying the gratification of passion from a sense of duty, the most disinterested spirit, the most delicate honour, might be satisfied...and the dictates of worldly prudence might be followed with the cheerful consciousness of making a virtuous sacrifice". As virtue consists in "educing, from the general materials which the Creator has placed under our guidance, the greatest sum of human happiness", and as "natural impulses" were to be considered good unless "distinguished by their consequences", it was clear that "a strict attention to these consequences, and the regulation of our conduct conformably to them, must be considered as our principal duty" and, as the dictates of God, nature and society, should be followed accordingly.³²⁷ Such an alteration of subjectivity was "the object of the latter part of this work", and for Malthus it did "not seem absolutely hopeless that some partial improvement in society should result from it".³²⁸ Malthus went on to reiterate his attack on systems of equality as they were unsuitable to "the production of those stimulants to exertion which can alone overcome the natural indolence of man, and prompt him to the proper cultivation of the earth and the fabrication of those conveniences and comforts which are necessary to his happiness" and would destroy "the encouragement and motive to moral restraint" as "there would be no reason why any individual should think himself obliged to practice the *duty of restraint* more than another" [my emphasis].³²⁹ The above discussion encapsulates the theoretical direction of Malthus' updated edition: moral restraint would take centre stage by the dual action of a morality of duty and the motive of self-betterment, effecting a change in the habits of the poor towards greater prudence, foresight and industry and, concomitantly, a revision of the ratio between the supply and demand for labour that would enable the purchase of greater conveniences and luxuries and induce an altered lifestyle to take root, the

³²⁷ Ibid., p. 213.

³²⁸ Ibid., pp. 72-73. Godwin's reply was in the pamphlet *Thoughts occasioned by the perusal Of Dr. Parr's Spital sermon, preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800: Being a reply to the attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the author of an Essay on population, and others* (London, 1801).

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 76, 78, 79.

net effect of which would be an increase of virtue and happiness throughout society, to the glory of God. However, as a practical moralist Malthus found it necessary to spell out exactly how such a shift in the state of society was to be brought about, and to this end he centred his discussion on a revision of the current positive laws that hindered moral restraint, an increase of the purchasing power of the poor for non-alimentary goods that would encourage it and a focus on the education of the poor of their duty in observing it.

Malthus' views on the poor laws, that "monstrous deformity in society" which had witnessed "the larger half of the people reduced to the condition of paupers", had changed little.³³⁰ He remained adamant that they "attempt an absolute impossibility", that the Elizabethan edict for setting the poor to work was a ludicrous expectation that actually led to a "decrease [of] the real funds for the maintenance of labour in any country" and that, "by turning a considerable share from the support of the diligent and careful workman to the support of the idle and negligent" they depressed "the condition of all those who are out of the workhouses" and forced more into them. The only hope lay in the fact that "the desire of bettering our condition and the fear of making it worse...is continually counteracting the disorders arising from narrow human institutions".³³¹ The term "narrow" is apposite, for Malthus was at pains to stress that the solution could only stem from general principles, as "the partial and immediate effects of a particular mode of giving assistance are so often directly opposite to the general and permanent effects"; hence his opposition to the population-swelling tendencies of schemes such as Arthur Young's call for a cow or potato plot for every family.³³² Malthus had already advocated the abolition of the poor laws in the *First essay*; in subsequent editions he was to go further in proposing an actual plan for the gradual introduction of abolition (as "no man of humanity could venture to propose their immediate abolition") that would see "no child born from any marriage taking place after the expiration of a year from the date of the law, and no

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 259.

³³¹ Ibid., p. 106, 105. Malthus' position on workhouses appears to have hardened in 1803 as he describes them as places "where every vice is propagated", where the poor are "bred up in filth and rags" in "utter ignorance of every moral obligation", p. 234. The implication from the *First essay* is that Malthus was perhaps in favour of poorhouses for extreme cases of distress, but he does not revisit the issue in the *Second essay*. Although Malthus does declare in hesitant favour of Count Rumford and Von Voght's continental workhouse less eligibility schemes, his approval is conditional upon them proving successful at controlling population in the longer term, p. 234.

³³² Ibid., p.313. For Malthus' strictures on general principles see Ch. 13 of the *Second essay; Of the necessity of general principles on this subject*. For his opposition to Young's (outlined in *A question of scarcity plainly stated*, 1800) and other poor law reform schemes see Ch. 11, *Of the errors of different plans which have been proposed, to improve the condition of the poor*, and Ch. 12, *Continuation of the same subject* (added in 1817 to counter Owen's proposals).

illegitimate child born two years from the same date...ever be entitled to parish assistance".³³³ To ensure the efficacy of this measure clergymen in every parish,

previously to the solemnization of a marriage, read a short address to the parties, stating the strong obligation on every man to support his own children; the impropriety, and even immorality, of marrying without a fair prospect of being able to do this; the evils which had resulted to the poor themselves, from the attempt, which had been made to assist, by public institutions, in a duty which ought to be exclusively appropriated to parents; and the absolute necessity which had at length appeared, of abandoning all such institutions, on account of their producing effects totally opposite to those which were intended.³³⁴

This legal manoeuvre would "at once throw off the rising generation from that miserable dependence upon the government and the rich", forcing them to "depend more upon themselves" and would also, incidentally, remove that state of affairs which had caused the minds of the poor "to be continually in a state of irritation against the higher classes of society whenever they feel distressed from the pressure of circumstances". Any man who, being so informed, chose regardless to marry without hope of supporting his children, should be left "to the punishment of nature...the punishment of severe want", for he "should be taught to know that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, had doomed him and his family to starve, for disobeying their repeated admonitions; that he had no claim of right on society for the smallest proportion of food, beyond that which his labour would fairly purchase", and that if charitable aid intervened "he ought to be bound by the strongest ties of gratitude" and "no person could have a just right to complain". However, "the abolition of the poor laws is not, of itself, sufficient", but must be accompanied by correction of "the prevailing opinions which have the same or perhaps even a more powerful effect...by endeavouring to impress as strongly as possible on the public mind that it is not the duty of man simply to propagate his species, but to propagate virtue and happiness".³³⁵

The dissemination of moral restraint would have the desired effect of propagating virtue and happiness, but it should be accompanied by a further alteration in social attitudes "to award a greater degree of respect and of personal liberty to single women, and to remove the distinctions in favour of married women". Once this further obstacle to restraint had been overcome, society would be able to "reasonably require of its members" that they "should not have families without being able to support them", which should be "enjoined as a solemn duty". Furthermore, the extension of parochial education – Malthus felt it to be "a great national disgrace" that the education of the lower classes was confined to "a few Sunday schools – would enable the transfer of

³³³ Ibid., p. 259, 261.

³³⁴ Ibid, p. 261.

³³⁵ Ibid., pp. 261-263, 267, 271.

“a portion of that knowledge and foresight which so much facilitates the attainment of this object in the educated part of the community” to the lower classes, “where the point is of the principal importance”. Aside from that education commonly designed to make children useful in society, there should be “considerable stress on the frequent explanation of the real state of the lower classes of society, as affected by the principle of population, and consequent dependence on themselves, for the chief part of their happiness or misery”.³³⁶ Not only would such education induce greater fidelity to moral restraint amongst the labouring poor, and thus ultimately improve their condition, it would also serve to abnegate “their inveterate prejudices on the subject of grain”, which “degree of ignorance” Malthus felt to be of “absolute incompatibility” with a “government really free”. Moreover, “an instructed and well-informed people would be much less likely to be led away by inflammatory writings”, the message reinforced that “without an increase of their own industry and prudence, no change of government could essentially better their condition”.³³⁷ Malthus was here equating the level of education of the lower classes with the capacity of a society to maintain political and civil liberty, the fulcrum between the two being that of moral restraint, as the pressure of scarcity, “and the habit of attributing this distress to their rulers” was held to be inimical to political freedoms, and the “guardian spirit of despotism”. In 1806 Malthus went a little further, claiming that the “respectability and importance which are given to the lower classes by equal laws, and the possession of some influence in the framing of them” and the “more excellent therefore is the government” tended to “that prudence and elevation of sentiment by which alone, in the present state of our being, poverty can be avoided”.³³⁸ The logical extension of Malthus’ position was that suffrage extension would aid in the effectiveness of moral restraint, a position entirely consistent with his analysis that there was “something like a standard of wretchedness, a point below which they [the lower classes] will not continue to marry and propagate their species”; a standard which varied depending upon the particular circumstances of each country but that could be raised by “liberty, security of property, the spread of knowledge, and a taste for the conveniences and comforts of life”. The grand scheme in terms of poverty should be “to raise this standard as high as possible, by cultivating a spirit of independence, a decent pride, and a taste for cleanliness and comfort among the poor”, which habits would be “best inculcated by a system of general education and, when strongly fixed, would be the most powerful means of preventing their marrying with the

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 276, 274. Corroboratively, Malthus also advanced the cause of political economy as a subject of education, even advocating “that it ought to form a branch of a university education”, p. 275 FN.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 276, 277-278.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 243, 253.

prospect of being obliged to forfeit such advantages; and would consequently raise them nearer to the middle classes of society”.³³⁹

Interestingly, Malthus’ concern here for the culturally defined minimum standard of living around which population would tend to oscillate led him to reject Count Rumford’s calls for the adoption of soups as the general food of the common people as wages would soon come to be regulated by the price of soup and not bread, which would ultimately depress the condition of the labourer and diminish the happiness of the kingdom, as well as perhaps encouraging population in the interim period. As Malthus put it, in contrast to the utility of poverty doctrine espoused earlier in the century, it is “the hope of bettering our condition, and the fear of want, not want itself, that is the best stimulus to industry”, as “industry cannot exist without foresight and security”.³⁴⁰ It was thus important to engender amongst the labouring classes “a taste for the conveniences and comforts of life”, as this would “prevent people from marrying under the certainty of being deprived of these advantages”, inducing a shift towards a more aspirational lifestyle and thus strengthening the operation of the preventive check.³⁴¹ Although he still demonstrated an avowed preference for agriculture over industry, which was “less favourable to health and morals”, it was clear to Malthus that “the lower classes of society seldom acquire a taste for conveniences and comforts till they become plentiful compared with food, which they never do till food has become in some degree scarce”.³⁴² By this was meant that food should not be so cheap as to encourage the “luxury of idleness” but that the intersectoral terms of trade between agriculture and industry should be such that the “corn price of labour continues tolerably high while the relative value of commodities compared with corn falls very considerably”. In such circumstances “the main part of the labourer’s time [would] be occupied in procuring food”, generating habits of industry, but “the remaining time, which is but inconsiderable compared with the commodities it will purchase”, would be “seldom grudged”, creating a situation wherein the labourer “would not have the same power of maintaining a large family; but with a small family he may be better lodged and clothed, and better able to

³³⁹ Ibid., pp. 278-279. The issue of cleanliness in poor relief is underreported in the literature yet frequently referred to in the primary material. Certainly Bentham, Howard and those concerned with in-relief saw it as an important element of a reformative and hygienic environment, yet it also had connotations in out-relief of moral probity and conscientiousness – the old adage linking cleanliness with godliness is detectable here. Cleanliness later came to be discussed as one of the constituents of good moral character and as tending towards a disposition of self-help. For more on how cleanliness was seen as “conducive to good order and virtue” see K. Thomas, “Cleanliness and Godliness in early modern England”, in A. J. Fletcher and P. Roberts (eds.), *Religion, culture and society in early modern Britain: Essays in honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 80.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 298, 198. Perhaps the classic text of the utility of poverty doctrine is Bernard Mandeville’s *The fable of the bees, or, Private vices, Publick benefits; with an essay on charity and charity-schools. And a search into the nature of society* (6th edn., London, 1732, first published 1714).

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 278, 321.

³⁴² Ibid., pp. 189-190.

command the decencies and comforts of life”, which “at the same time that they gratify a natural or acquired want, tend unquestionably to improve the mind and elevate the character”.³⁴³

It was such an analysis that led Malthus to oppose Paley and declare that it was “the spread of luxury...among the mass of the people, and not an excess of it in a few, that seems to be the most advantageous, both with regard to national wealth and national happiness...and consequently that the spread of luxury...is particularly desirable; and one of the best means of raising that standard of wretchedness” by which population was regulated. Yet it was also abundantly clear that “nothing but the union of individual prudence with the skill and industry which produce wealth can permanently secure to the lower classes of society that share of it which it is on every account so desirable that they should possess”.³⁴⁴ In terms of increased national wealth ameliorating poverty through the actions of the labouring poor Malthus’ position was here demonstrably more optimistic than in 1798 and overlaps somewhat with that of Eden. However, where Eden emphasised frugality and budgeting at a wage level held steady by an increase in the wages fund, Malthus, due to his development of a theory of diminishing returns to agriculture, denied the equivalency of rising national wealth with the wages fund and instead envisaged a rise in the price of labour due to a retraction of supply, therefore making possible a scenario of rising real incomes for the poor in a stationary state of society, being able to assert that “the good or bad condition of the poor is not *necessarily* connected with any particular stage in the progress of society to its full complement of wealth”.³⁴⁵

Although unoptimistic about the prospects of friendly societies, in order to encourage a taste for conveniences and habits of industry Malthus supported savings banks as “the best” plan for helping the poor proposed to date and “the most likely, if they should become general, to effect a permanent improvement in the condition of the lower classes of society” for habits of saving went hand-in-hand with habits of “prudence and foresight” and hence moral restraint, the great *desiderata* Malthus had in mind for helping the poor. In 1803 Malthus advanced “country banks” as the best framework for nationwide saving, stipulating free withdrawal as essential for “encouraging the practice of saving”, yet by the 1817 edition he had been overtaken by events with the Savings Bank Act (1816). Malthus opposed the clause that allowed the poor to receive parish assistance despite having sums in the bank as a “short-sighted policy” which sacrificed the end to the means and thought that for maximum efficacy they should certainly be accompanied by “a formal

³⁴³ Ibid., 190. For Malthus’ views on wages see B. Eccleston, “Malthus, wages and the labour market in England 1790–1830”, in M. Turner (ed.), *Malthus and his time* (Basingstoke, 1986).

³⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 321–322, 191.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 191. For Malthus’ nascent theory of diminishing returns see pp. 181–189.

retraction of the *right* of the poor to support”. Yet aware of the waning enthusiasm for immediate abolition by 1817, Malthus suggested that even if abolition was so politically unacceptable as to never be viable (as proved to be the case), savings banks should be afforded a key role in helping to effect a transition to “a limitation of the amount of the poor’s rates, or rather of their proportion to the wealth and population of the country”, which he took to be the minimum requirement of any move “towards improving the habits and happiness of the poor”.³⁴⁶

The purpose of cultivating a taste for conveniences, educating the poor and abolishing the Poor laws was to induce a change of subjectivity in the poor, for “nothing perhaps would tend so strongly to excite a spirit of industry and economy among the poor, as a thorough knowledge that their happiness must always depend principally upon themselves”. The elimination of poverty and increase of aggregate happiness was “to be the result of the happiness of individuals, and to begin first with them” for “he who performs his duty will reap the full fruits of it, whatever may be the number of others who fail”.³⁴⁷ Yet if imprudent reproduction were to be considered “as a breach of duty”, “then we must explain to them the true nature of their situation, and show them that the withholding of the supplies of labour is the only possible way of really raising its price; and that they themselves, being the possessors of this commodity, have alone the power to do this”. The aim of society should be “to proportion the population to the food” as this, coupled with “our efforts in increasing the quantity of provisions”, would enable the level of population to remain “at such a distance behind” that of food “as to effect the relative proportion which we desire; and thus unite the two grand *desiderata*, a great actual population, and a state of society in which squalid poverty and dependence are comparatively but little known”.³⁴⁸

This, then, was the goal that Malthus had set, and it was realisable by a careful balance of the golden mean within the natural cycles of agriculture and manufactures, food and population. Malthus had set out the conditions for a stable equilibrium of increasing real wages and population, with moral restraint as the mechanism for elevating society to this state. It followed that it was “regulation and direction which are required with regard to the principle of population, not diminution or alteration” and that anyone who acknowledged “the principle of utility as the great foundation of morals” could not escape the conclusion that “moral restraint, till we are in a condition to support a family, is the strict line of duty” and that, “when revelation is taken into the question, this duty undoubtedly

³⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 318-319, 310-311.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 232, 226.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 230. For the balancing act of population and resources in conditions of growth and Malthus’ “two devils” of population and unemployed resources (his main concern with saving), see J. M. Keynes, “Some consequences of a declining population”, *Eugenics Review*, Vol. 29 (1937), pp. 13–17 and the discussion of this paper in N. Keyfitz, “The evolution of Malthus’s thought: Malthus as a demographer”, in J. Dupâquier, E. Grebenik and A. Fauve-Chamoux (eds.), *Malthus past and present* (London, 1983), esp. p. 11.

receives very powerful confirmation”, for “we can have no reason to impeach the justice of the Deity because his general laws make this virtue necessary”.³⁴⁹ Thus Malthus’ theodicy is reformed and smuggled in as part and parcel of the doctrine of moral restraint, which aimed at the maximisation of virtue and happiness. By constructing a view of society in which “each person gets his just desserts”, and “social problems” could “presumably be resolved into individual problems, which may be left to the individual to solve”, Malthus altered the context of individual development/ formation of mind such that it now explicitly encompassed virtuous actions in accordance with the duties of moral restraint and habits of industry, as these paved the path of maximal utility.³⁵⁰ Malthus had clearly adopted a Paleyite brand of utilitarianism consistent with that of the *Natural Theology* (1802), but it was not yet clear to what extent Malthus had abandoned his earlier position of formation of mind so much as adapted it. Nevertheless by the 1806 edition he had come to describe “the constant struggle...which was calculated to rouse the natural inactivity of man, to call forth his faculties, and invigorate and improve his mind” as a “state of probation”; by 1830 he had embraced orthodoxy enough to declare it “almost universally acknowledged, that both the letter and the spirit of revelation represent this world as a state of moral discipline and probation”.³⁵¹ Interestingly by 1806 Malthus had also come to a position where he could “not presume to say positively” that, for all their discouragements to sobriety, industry and economy, the poor laws “tend to encourage population”.³⁵² This suggests that as the pressure of population seemed to become further removed from the actual state of society, invoked more as a *deus ex machina* than a central protagonist, (perhaps as his knowledge of other political economic factors of distress such as effective demand grew), the role of divine testing grew in importance as a means of persuading men to do their duty.³⁵³ Certainly the public reception of Malthus’ thought was mediated by the interposition of divines such as Bishop Sumner who confidently decreed the role of population pressure and attendant evils to be the “trial and formation of moral character”; for the promotion of virtue and

³⁴⁹ Malthus, *Second essay*, p. 215, 225, 224.

³⁵⁰ R. B. Simons, “T. R. Malthus on British society”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan., 1955), pp. 60–75, p. 67. Harvey-Phillips, *Malthus’ theodicy*, pp. 604–605. Malthus defined utility as “the quality of being serviceable or beneficial to mankind”, or tending towards the increase of happiness. See Malthus, *Definitions in political economy* (London, 1827), p. 107.

³⁵¹ Malthus, *Second essay*, p. 361; Malthus, *Summary view of population*, cited in Glass, *Introduction to Malthus*, p. 180.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 357.

³⁵³ For the development of Malthus’ ideas on a lack of effective demand as contributory to the post-war glut and depression see S. Hollander, “Malthus and the post-Napoleonic depression”, *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1969), pp. 306-335.

happiness based on “moral habits” and played out in a mortal theatre “preparatory to a future and higher sphere of existence”.³⁵⁴

The fecund coupling of political economy with Christian theology developed later, yet we can see in 1807 how far Malthus had helped to wreak “a great revolution in the public mind” and how his ideas had been assimilated into the currents of poor law reform.³⁵⁵ In 1807 Malthus reiterated many of his concerns over the poor laws displayed in the *Essay in A letter to Samuel Whitbread*, a reply to Whitbread’s proposals in parliament to amend the poor laws and incorporate a series of measures designed to ameliorate poverty, including a cottage-building clause, national education, greater power for large ratepayers in vestries in deciding how their money was spent (i.e. greater discrimination), the maintenance of the established boundaries of the kingdom on the same grounds, and an end to the labouring poor workhouse system (although poorhouses were appropriate for the aged and orphans). Malthus opposed most of Whitbread’s measures on the grounds that they would either encourage population or else enable employers to depress wages to a degree prejudicial to utility and the attainment of Malthus’ wished-for state of rising real wages *and* rising population. If poor laws were to interfere with the workings of the labour market Malthus held it to be imperative that they “should be so confined in their operation, as not to depress the wages of labour below what is sufficient for the support of the *average* number of children that might be expected from each marriage”. This would preserve a reasonable expectation of independence after marriage and keep in check any extension of mortality corroborative of depressed wages inducing dependence.³⁵⁶ Whitbread’s proposals can be taken to be indicative of the current of poor law reform as they embody many of the principles later to be advocated by the 1819 select committees and Sturges-Bourne reforms and also because they demonstrate clearly the impact of Malthusian ideas on the existing trends of poor law discourse as inherited from the writers of the 1790s. There is a clear move away from institutional interference to make the poor pay for their upkeep and contribute to increasing the national product and a marked increase of concern, via a platform of self-help, “to exalt the character of the labourer” and to “awaken his laudable ambition to be distinguished above his associates”, which had taken a near-fatal beating in the 1790s as “necessity” overcame “honest pride”.³⁵⁷ Whitbread deferred to Malthus in acknowledging “the laws of God to be immutable” and

³⁵⁴ J. B. Sumner, *A treatise on the records of the creation and the moral attributes of the creator* (5th edn., 2 vols., London, 1833), p. 425, 419. For the important ramifications of Malthus’ work in the development of Christian Political Economy see A. M. C. Waterman, “The ideological alliance of political economy and Christian theology, 1798–1833”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Apr., 1983), pp. 231-244.

³⁵⁵ S. Whitbread, *Substance of a speech on the poor laws: Delivered in the House of Commons, on Thursday February 19th 1807, with an appendix* (London, 1807), p. 4.

³⁵⁶ T. R. Malthus, “A letter to Samuel Whitbread, Esq. M.P. on his proposed bill for the amendment of the poor laws” (London, 1807), reprinted in *The pamphlets of Thomas Robert Malthus* (New York, 1970), pp. 46-47.

³⁵⁷ Whitbread, *Substance of a speech on the poor laws*, p. 34, 71, 5.

admitted that he had abandoned his earlier schemes for minimum wages. He professed himself concerned to augment “human happiness and virtue” and saw the best means of accomplishing this through a system of national education (on the Lancaster model) and by encouraging the labourer to become “possessed of property” through instituting “one great national institution, in the nature of a bank, for the use and advantages of the labouring classes alone”, together with “an insurance office for the poor” and the ability to purchase annuities from this “Poor’s Fund”.³⁵⁸ In addition, a settlement was to be granted after 5 years residence without recourse to the rates, which should be levied on “all local and productive personal property”, equalising the burden somewhat. For Whitbread it was essential to “maintain the character of independent industry” and to this end the “criminal” (as opposed to the “unfortunate”) impotent poor should be badged or committed to a house of correction.³⁵⁹ Whitbread thus adopts the two central thrusts of Malthus’ 1803 reform package, and admits that “if legal relief be allowed at all...it must be made co-extensive with the necessity to which it is to be applied”, which is to say it must be minimised, and overall the aim must be “to exalt the character of the labouring classes of your community. To give the labourer consequences in his own eyes, and in those of his fellows, to make him a fit companion for himself, and fit to associate with civilized man”.³⁶⁰ Education would create “an enlightened peasantry, frugal, industrious, sober, orderly, and contented, because they are acquainted with the true value of frugality, sobriety, industry, and order” whilst saving would see “encouragement to frugality, security of property, and the large mass of the people connected with the state and indissolubly bound to its preservation”. Meanwhile, reform of the workhouse system, and the power of discrimination in administering relief” would witness “an abandonment of filth, slothfulness and vice, and a desirable and marked distinction between the profligate and the innocent”.³⁶¹ Any reduction in the burden of poverty “must depend upon the success of the measures which may be enacted for reforming the habits, and improving the resources of the poor”, a sentiment that Malthus endorsed.³⁶² Malthus agreed wholeheartedly with the tenor, if not the details, of Whitbread’s speech: “the great object should be, to elevate as much as possible the general character of the lower classes of the community, and to draw a more marked line between the dependent and independent labourer”.³⁶³

Whitbread was blending a Malthusian concern for the character and duties of the poor with a more traditional package of poor law precepts and institutional tools, mapping the new onto the old. This

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 1, 42-45.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 79- 80.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 15, 21.

³⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 95- 97.

³⁶² Ibid., p. 57.

³⁶³ Malthus, *A letter to Samuel Whitbread*, p. 38.

was the key to the success of Malthus' writings on the poor laws: by intervening in the poor law debates but linking them, through a concern for liberal politics and theological apologetics, to Newtonian natural laws, he removed the active sphere of influence for the reform of poverty firmly away from government and onto the shoulders of the individual labourer. His writings had great resonance as interventions in the debates on the poor laws, in terms of the revolutionary hangover, quest for improvement and the growing burden of poor relief, and his use of the politically and religiously loaded vocabulary of duty and virtue only served to increase the effectiveness of his sentiments. Social mobility became *the* tool of societal improvement, which "marked a departure away from the conventional thinking of the 1790s" which held social stability dependent "upon everyone accepting their station in life".³⁶⁴ The influence of the 1798 *Essay* lay more on the grounds of denying to radical forces either that government could provide permanent relief or that revolution was desirable whilst maintaining that a better understanding of their situation by the poor was consistent with political liberty and protection of the status quo – in this sense Malthus trod a middle line between Burke and Godwin.³⁶⁵ The aim of the revised *Essay* was to take the grounds of community duty and sacrifice to the common good usually occupied by the nebulous forces of moral economy and to demonstrate a consistency of these with improvement and the extended conceptual canvas of political economy. By universalising the arguments of improvement and political economy within a theological and political framework Malthus left his opponents with nowhere left to turn and thus can be said to have "completed that change of opinion with regard to the poor laws, which had before been in some measure begun".³⁶⁶

Malthus went on to publish further editions of the *Essay on population* in 1806, 1807, 1817 and 1826, alongside a litany of pamphlets on specific economic problems such as the two tracts setting out a defence of the corn laws (in opposition to his general principles against government interference in trade) in 1814 and 1815, on the grounds that a domestic supply of grain was strategically practical, a balance between agriculture and industry was desirable and that a high corn price of labour would help to realise his vision of the tortoise staying ahead of the hare.³⁶⁷ He later produced his *Principles*

³⁶⁴ LeMahieu, *Malthus and the theology of scarcity*, p. 473.

³⁶⁵ See Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 253.

³⁶⁶ Whitbread, *Substance of a speech on the poor laws*, p. 10. Malthus himself spelt out his case clearly in his reply to Whitbread: "if we weigh on the one hand the great quantity of subjection and dependence which the poor laws create, together with the kind of relief which they afford, against the greater degree of freedom and the higher wages which would be the necessary consequence of their abolition, it will be difficult to believe that the mass of comfort and happiness would not be greater on the latter supposition, although the few that were then in distress would have no other resource than voluntary charity", *A letter to Samuel Whitbread*, p. 33-34.

³⁶⁷ For the tortoise and hare analogy see Malthus, *Second essay*, p. 230. The pamphlets on the corn laws were: *Observations on the effects of the corn laws, and of a rise or fall in the price of corn on the agriculture and general wealth of the country* (1814), and *The grounds of an opinion on the policy of restricting the importation*

of political economy (1820), *The measure of value stated and illustrated* (1823) – in which he thought he had proved that the quantity of labour commanded in exchange is the only, and an invariable, measure of value – *Definitions in political economy* (1827) and *A summary view of the principle of population* (1830).³⁶⁸ The later works were mainly concerned with setting out his thoughts on political economy consistent with his principle of population and adhesion to the doctrine of the golden mean as he showed himself “less confident about the self-adjusting properties of markets and...attentive to the ways in which cycles and other irregular forces created short-term disturbance, unemployment and, possibly, long-term stagnation”.³⁶⁹ He was aware that public opinion was not yet ready to embrace abolition, remarking to Chalmers in 1822 that: “Practically, therefore, I am inclined to look forward to the first improvement as likely to come from an improved administration of our actual laws, together with a more general system of education and moral superintendence”.³⁷⁰ Yet by this point the damage had been done.

We have seen here that the tradition of market-based natural law reform came to cohere around self-help as the organising principle for a reduction of relief costs, pertaining towards abolition. This tradition favoured non-interventionist policies and instead hoped to effect a regime wherein habits of industry, frugality, economy and prudence would be coupled with a desire of bettering one’s condition to enable individual agency within the market as the key to reducing claims for relief. This behavioural shift was to be put into practice by a scaling-back of relief and greater discretion in its administration. The sum of aggregate happiness was made the justification for such retrenchment, with the political motivation of negating Jacobin and radical sentiment also a powerful consideration. Yet this tradition of natural law reform shared with the interventionist tradition of positive institutions of in-relief a desire to reform the poor and to make them more self-sufficient, to enable them to share the burden of their upkeep and to make them socially useful. Both traditions overlapped in their prioritisation of self-help as the key to societal regeneration, attributing to the poor an aspirational psychology hitherto shunned in favour of want as a motive force. This self-help

of foreign corn; intended as an appendix to ‘Observations’... (1815), in which Malthus declared that “the effects of opening our ports for the free importation of foreign corn” on the labouring classes would be “greatly to lower their wages, and to subject them to much greater fluctuations of price”, p. 158. For Malthus on the corn laws see W. Vamplew, “Malthus and the corn laws”, in M. Turner (ed.), *Malthus and his time* (Basingstoke, 1986). Another article of note was his *An inquiry into the nature and progress of rent, and the principles by which it is regulated* (London, 1815), reprinted in *The pamphlets of Thomas Robert Malthus* (New York, 1970), which called for landlords to permit a period of rising profits to tenants without increasing rents, so as to encourage further cultivation and a spirit of industry which would “most powerfully contribute to the progress of national wealth”, p. 223.

³⁶⁸ The *Summary view* was based on Malthus’ 1823 article on “Population” for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

³⁶⁹ Winch, *Introduction*, p. xxi.

³⁷⁰ Malthus to Rev. T. Chalmers 21 July 1822, quoted in James, *Population Malthus*, note 14, p. 450. Cited in A Digby, “Malthus and reform of the poor law”, in J. Dupâquier, E. Grebenik and A. Fauve-Chamoux (eds.), *Malthus past and present* (London, 1983), p. 107.

was a multi-faceted, encompassing calls for greater frugality (Eden, Rumford, Bentham, Davies), greater prudence (Townsend, Malthus), and, universally, greater industriousness. This, then, was the discursive formation of poor law discourse in the 1790s: in the next twenty years these themes were to be continued and elaborated, in particular through the contributions of Christian Political Economy. However, this discursive formation acted as a platform for a new regime of practices to be advanced, a regime based around more 'negative', permissive institutions that were designed to facilitate self-help, of the type that Colquhoun advocated. Such facilitation carried with it the implicit message that making use of such resources was a criterion of deservingness, this deservingness thus being morally loaded to a greater degree than mere ability to labour. It was this "moral dimension" that the natural law tradition instilled into the operation of the market, leading Malthus to declare that "the science of political economy bears a nearer resemblance to the science of morals and politics than to that of mathematics".³⁷¹ These institutions, such as soup kitchens, allotments, savings banks, friendly societies and schools of industry were drawn from debates on the poor laws but advanced as substitutes for parochial support and all designed to reform the poor, culminating in the Poor Law reforms of 1817-1819. As shown later, this altered institutional arrangement was "ideationally embedded" in the traditions of poor law discourse and was predicated upon the need to translate the function of paternalism into a new and macroeconomic guise.³⁷²

³⁷¹ Winch, *Riches and poverty*, p. 287; J. M. Pullen (ed.), Malthus, *Principles of political economy* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1989), Vol. 1, p. 2, cited in Winch, *Robert Malthus: Christian moral scientist*, p. 239.

³⁷² M. R. Somers and F. Block, "From poverty to perversity: Ideas, markets and institutions over two hundred years of welfare debate", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 260-287, p. 1.

Chapter 4: The Institutions of Self-Help

We have seen how the evolving debates over the poor laws amid the scarcities of the 1790s led to the re-framing of such discussion within a paradigm of an expanded common good along utilitarian lines, and to an emphasis on self-help as consistent with this widened common good, often equated with economic growth. In this respect the tensions that A. W. Coats has seen between the utility of poverty doctrine and that of individual improvement for labourers at mid-century (emphasising the contribution of Hume's psychological theory) were resolved, in favour of individual improvement through self-help. Coats has tracked an emergent and divergent reception to high wages, differing from the utility of poverty doctrine by praising high wages as conducive not of indolence and a leisure preference on the part of labourers but, conversely, as a stimulus to increased exertion and the tapping of a desire to better one's condition.³⁷³ Instead of merely satisfying natural subsistence wants, if artificial wants were excited and brought to bear upon the conduct of the labourer then rising productivity could be unleashed and national fortunes improved. Central to this change was the contribution of the economic and psychological theories of David Hume, who opposed high taxes on necessaries and conveniences as depressive of the labourer's horizon of activity, and who advanced appropriate incentives as the best means of extracting industry from labourers: "It is a violent method and in most cases impracticable, to oblige the labourer to toil, in order to raise from the land more than what subsists himself and family. Furnish him with manufactures and commodities and he will do it of himself".³⁷⁴ Jonathan White has also noticed such an ideological tension, and has portrayed the role of consumption on the part of the poor as integral to the developing strand of thought that prioritised the desire of bettering one's condition:

As the nation became conceptualised as a web of commercial transactions, and as labour became seen as an exchangeable commodity, the labouring classes were increasingly incorporated into the more progressive visions of commercial improvement. The labouring classes' consumption was recognised as a way of improving the nation and themselves simultaneously by extending the socialising benefits of commerce across the whole of society. Paternalistic notions of a right to comfort and convenience were fused with progressive notions of improvement through rational exchange, offering the labouring classes the chance to share in the moral and material rewards of society's progressive development. And as wage-labour came to be seen as an act of exchange, so domestic economy came to be seen as the management and distribution of material resources. The labouring-class home became a central category in social

³⁷³ See A. W. Coats, "Changing attitudes to labour in the mid-eighteenth century", *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1958), pp. 35-51.

³⁷⁴ E. Rotwein (ed.), D. Hume, *Writings on economics* (London, 1955) pp. 17-18, cited in *Ibid.*, p.40.

descriptions of the poor; a site of potential consumer agency through which the family could improve itself.³⁷⁵

This point, of the beneficence progressive wages, is perhaps best summarised by Arthur Young in 1771:

A fellow that has been used to lounge at home, in an idle cottage, may be tempted out by high wages, though not by low ones: Another that in cheap times used to bask himself all day in the sun, holding a cow by a line to feed on a balk in dear ones, betakes himself to the pick-axe and the spade...Thus a new race of the industrious is by degrees created, and its increase is proportioned to its creation"; "It is for these reasons, which are founded upon the most simple of all principles, the common emotions of human nature, that no industrious nation need ever fear a want of hands for executing any the most extensive plans of public or private improvement."³⁷⁶

The conflict that Young identified was between an idle but stable lifestyle predicated on common/cottage rights and one of dynamism and improvement. As self-betterment came to be identified

³⁷⁵ J. White, "Luxury and labour: Ideas of labouring-class consumption in eighteenth-century England", (Unpublished PhD thesis, Warwick University, 2001), p. 330. John Sekora has also noted how changing values of luxury, associated with consumption, "allowed the growth of a different notion of human psychology, in which subjects need no longer be defined entirely by status and function but might be viewed as independent personalities"; J. Sekora, *Luxury: The concept in Western thought, Eden to Smollett* (London, 1977), p. 285, see also; N. Mckendrick, J. Brewer, J. H. Plumb, *The birth of a consumer society: The commercialization of eighteenth-century England* (Bloomington, 1982). For the role of consumption in the development of economic thought see J. O. Appleby, "Consumption in early modern social thought", in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the world of goods* (London, 1992).

³⁷⁶ A. Young, *A six month tour through the north of England* (London, 1771), Vol. I, pp. 175-176, 176-177, cited in C. Muldrew, *Food, energy and the creation of industriousness: Work and material culture in agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 1-2, 260. Arthur Young (1741-1820) was an agricultural reformer and writer. Born at Whitehall in London Young started out as apprentice to a wine merchant but, finding trade not to his liking and barred by ill health from the army and by the lack of a university education from the Church, he turned to farming after his mother gave him tenancy of a farm at Bradfield. He later moved to a larger farm at Hatfield in Hertfordshire and in 1773 he took advantage of his proximity to London to become a parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Post*, which meant spending most of the week in London and walking home to his farm at weekends. Young built his international reputation on his writings in this period. His pamphlet *A letter to Lord Clive*, advising his lordship to invest his Indian fortune in becoming an improving landlord, appeared in 1767 and was followed, among lesser works, by *A six months' tour through the north of England* (4 vols., 1769), *The farmer's guide in hiring and stocking farms* (2 vols., 1770), *Rural economy, or, essays on the practical parts of husbandry* (2 vols., 1770), *A course of experimental agriculture* (2 vols., 1770), *The farmer's tour through the east of England* (4 vols., 1771), *The farmer's kalendar* (1771; this book went through ten editions in Young's lifetime), *Observations on the present state of the waste lands of Great Britain* (1773), and *Political Arithmetic: Containing observations on the present state of Great Britain and the principles of her policy in the encouragement of agriculture* (1774). Young returned to Bradfield in 1779 and launched his influential periodical *Annals of Agriculture* in 1784, although he remained disappointed with its sales. He was heavily involved in the launch of the Board of Agriculture in 1793, and in compiling the *County Reports* 1793-1795 and 1798-1817 (Young wrote six himself). Young underwent a religious conversion in 1797, stemming from personal loss at the death of two daughters and a close friendship with William Wilberforce, and from this point forward his views, particularly regarding the poor and the effects of enclosure, softened markedly. Young acquired an international reputation as an agricultural improver, corresponded widely with many distinguished figures of the time and died in London after a painful illness caused by bladder calculus. For biographical detail on Young see G. E. Mingay, 'Young, Arthur (1741-1820)', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Oct 2005) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30256>, accessed 27 July 2012].

with economic growth and rising standards of living, the problem of the Poor laws took on a new shape.

This ideological shift, which may perhaps be usefully described as a “progressive problem shift” in that it altered the intellectual landscape from which it emerged, underlay the annuity schemes of the 1770s and 1780s as the workhouse faded from view, only to re-emerge with the question of rising rates, scarcity and minimum wage discussions of the 1790s.³⁷⁷ At this point the influence of political economy came to be fully exerted, naturally lending its weight to the aspirational psychology understanding of the labouring poor, wherein proper incentives to labour rather than the force of subsistence want were construed as the best means of alleviating the condition of the lower classes, much like Aesop’s fable of the wind and the sun acting on an unsuspecting pedestrian to shed his coat. Political economy made possible an imagination of societal detachment from subsistence crises, provided that each laboured as he was able and could be incentivised by artificial wants. Moreover, the quantitative modelling of the poor in terms of budgets and statistics served to foreground domestic economy as the battleground site of such wants, the venue wherein appropriate habits of frugality, economy and industry could be harnessed to an aspirational economy.³⁷⁸ However, in order to complete the effectual implementation of substituting artificial wants for subsistence wants there needed to be a re-conceptualisation of society as a more fluid and expansive entity, a change which the greater intervention of the market into paternalist arenas could achieve. The stage was thus set for an updated remit for paternalism, a translation of its traditional roles of enforcing security and subsistence within a locality to fostering the attributes that the labouring poor needed to cultivate in order to be successful players in the market game. The attribution of greater autonomy to the labouring poor and decline of traditional paternalism was the necessary adjunct of a psychology of betterment and national growth, adjusting to altered economic forms and activities. This autonomy was to be secured by self-help.

The autonomy of the labouring poor from traditional paternalistic strictures took the form of trying to reconcile them to the vagaries of the market. As discussed earlier, frugality, economy, industry and prudence came to be the value-system for such autonomy, paving the way for a socially useful labouring class to inch away from dependent poverty. By analysing the regime of practices forwarded by poor law commentators and the legislative enactments of the period 1800-1820 the intellectual path of such projected autonomy can be tracked. These practices were in part drawn

³⁷⁷ For this term see I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the growth of knowledge* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 118, cited in A. M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798-1833* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 195.

³⁷⁸ See M. J. Cullen, *The statistical movement in early Victorian Britain, the foundations of empirical social research* (New York, 1975).

from the scarcities of the 1790s in that they urged the reconciliation of modes of living to the available means, but such behaviour modification was the analogue of the more fundamental predication of bettering one's condition, a predication that, despite the scale of such betterment depending on circumstances, nevertheless underlay campaigns for allotments, education and savings banks.

Potatoes and Allotments

We have already seen how the minimum wage debates and allowance system contributed to domestic economy assuming a place at centre-stage in the poor law debates, with the works of Rumford, Eden and Davies pivotal. The substitution of potatoes or coarse grains for wheaten bread was designed to enable a more frugal mode of living to which the poor should have recourse before falling on the parish, a move further facilitated by the movement for soup and public soup kitchens, as supported by Colquhoun. Redcliffe N. Salaman has traced the earlier course of a campaign within the poor law debates and in agrarian locales for the extension of potato cultivation, with Jethro Tull experimenting with the potato as a horse-hoed crop in Berkshire in 1733 and Thomas Hale advocating in 1756 that the crop should be cultivated in the fields "especially near big towns". The cause of the potato lost momentum in the years of relative prosperity after 1750, with wheaten bread making advances down the social scale; it was to return to the front lines from the 1770s – Arthur Young supported crop rotation "in which potatoes should play a minor part" in his *Tours* published in early 1770s.³⁷⁹ The cultural value of wheaten bread should not be underestimated, for it was a vehicle of emulation that quickly came to be taken as the right of labourers to enjoy, cultivating that resistance to alternative foodstuffs so bemoaned by commentators such as Rumford. Thomas Ruggles, the Poor Law authority, commented in 1792 that "everybody knows that bread covers at least two-thirds of the expenditure on food".³⁸⁰ As a "token of class distinction" and a "mark of privilege", its adoption by the working classes, coupled with the diffusion of habits of tea-drinking, irked those higher up the social scale. By 1770 "the great majority of the population was entirely dependent on wheat for its bread", with "white wheaten" and cheese "the staple food of the masses". Such a shift was aided and abetted by the enclosure of commons and the subsequent occlusion of foodstuffs such as milk or bacon, although traditional regional disparities persisted to a certain extent, with mixed grain breads and oatmeal persisting in northern areas, and Young finding in the North that "the potato was frequently to be found in the workers' gardens, and not seldom on

³⁷⁹ See R. N. Salaman, *The history and social influence of the potato* (Cambridge, 1985, originally pub. 1949), p. 481.

³⁸⁰ T. Ruggles, *Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. XVII (1792), p. 205, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 495.

a considerable scale in the farmers' fields", especially around towns, and "far commoner in the enclosed than in the open-field districts".³⁸¹ However, this earlier use of the potato was mainly as a fodder crop: "the barriers of prejudice in the 1770s were only beginning to give way: it needed the pressure of want to bring about their final collapse", and this process began in cottage gardens and with the introduction of four-course rotation, "which was becoming increasingly popular" in the period 1784-1794. Salaman compares household budgets from the 1760s and 1790s to show that the latter period was the turning point in the use of potatoes as common foodstuff, with an average of 8% surplus in household budgets from the 1760s compared to an average deficit in the latter period. Bread, remarkably, retained a constant proportion of household expenditure at around 60% but potatoes crept up to 4%; the displaced item of consumption was meat, which dropped as a proportion of household spending from 12% in 1789 to 9% in 1792 and just 0.08% in 1795. The scarcities and trade depressions of the 1790s had the cumulative effect of forcing the labourer to reduce his standard of living, which was often achieved by greater reliance on the potato, in tandem with a subsidisation of wages by the allowance system. In 1794 and 1795 the Board of Agriculture published a series of articles entitled *Cultivation and uses of the potato*; simultaneously Arthur Young, in his *Annals of Agriculture*, sent out a questionnaire appealing for information on the condition of corn crops, potatoes in store, what substitutes were or could be used for wheat, and the welfare of the labouring poor, with the returns indicating a good store of potatoes in cellars and houses (consistent with small personal crops). The Board pursued a policy of trying to persuade the people to substitute potatoes for bread, or to incorporate potatoes into bread, so as to reduce the use of wheaten flour. Detailed accounts were published of how such a loaf was to be prepared, with 12lbs of potatoes added to 20lbs of wheaten flour making for 42lbs of "excellent" bread. In *The Times* of 4th November 1795 even Pitt suggested a loaf of maize and potato as forming a pleasant and nutritious meal.³⁸² The policy clearly enjoyed some success, as *The Times* reported on 10th September 1795: "From the apprehension of a second year of scarcity, potatoes have been everywhere planted and their produce has generally been great". Notwithstanding the opposition of the poor, whose "daintiness...has been the chief obstacle" and who sometimes equated potatoes with the diet of Irish immigrant labour, the lowest strata of the labouring classes, the pressure of scarcity clearly induced a degree of that behaviour modification so wished for by Rumford and others.³⁸³ The Board of Agriculture put pressure on the Privy Council to pass an Order

³⁸¹ Salaman has posited a division along the coal line separating the north and west from the south and east for a division of potato husbandry, suggesting an association of the crop with industrialisation and manufactures.

Ibid., pp. 480-481, 482-483, 484-485.

³⁸² Ibid., p. 492, 497, 503-504.

³⁸³ T. Butts, *Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. XXIV (1794), p. 135, cited in Ibid., p. 507, 505.

recommending that bread be made from all the produce of the grain and that potatoes and vegetables should be eaten in place of bread. Alternatives such as rye, barley, oats and rice were also put forward, but the potato “was easily the favourite”.³⁸⁴ The scarcities of the 1790s thus paved the way for potato cultivation amongst the poor to become a staple feature of rural poverty, whilst soups and soup kitchens were used to alleviate distress in urban areas. Potatoes came to be given more and more as relief in kind in lieu of wheat, with a committee of the House of Commons recommending in 1800 that:

All charity and parochial relief should be given as far as is practicable, in any other articles except bread, flour and money, and that the part of it which is necessary for the sustenance of the poor should be distributed in soups, rice, potatoes, or other substitutes...if this regulation was generally adopted, it would not only, in a very great degree, contribute to economize at this time the consumption of flour, but that it might have the effect of gradually introducing into use a more wholesome and nutritious species of food than that to which the poor are at present accustomed.³⁸⁵

It seems likely that these were scarcity expedients designed to encourage self-sufficiency rather than a coherent policy of class manipulation predicated particularly upon the potato.³⁸⁶ This appears even more so to be the case once we consider how the campaign for potatoes as part of a frugal diet and programme of domestic economy segued into calls for putting the poor to work on the land and the allotment movement of the early Nineteenth Century, which had at its heart a rationale of self-help and self-sufficiency.

Arthur Young, perhaps the principal exponent of potatoes as a crucial facet of the movement for greater frugality on the part of the poor, was to advance in *The question of scarcity plainly stated and remedies considered* (1800) a far more controversial plan for the poor to be allotted land from the enclosure of wastes so that if “every country labourer in the kingdom, that has three children and upwards” was given “half an acre of land for potatoes and grass enough to feed one or two cows” then “the price of wheat would be of little more consequence to them than it is to their brethren in Ireland”.³⁸⁷ Whilst blaming the breadth of the “artificial” scarcity upon “a very bad government” he utilised the recent Board of Agriculture county surveys to show that premiums upon potato cultivation (in Staffordshire and Kent) and the enclosing of wastes and commons for the poor to work on (in Dorset, Suffolk, Kent) had proved effective in combatting distress and unrest. He

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 509.

³⁸⁵ Cited in Ibid., p. 512-513.

³⁸⁶ Whether this policy represented an attempt “permanently to reduce the standard of living of the working classes of the kingdom, by deliberately weaning them, in a season of distress, from a food proper to the upper classes, and inuring them to a subsistence level based upon the potato” or that it is to the “credit of the potato” that England avoided similar revolutionary upheavals to those of France in 1789 is not certain. Ibid., p. 513, 542.

³⁸⁷ A. Young, *The question of scarcity plainly stated and remedies considered* (London, 1800), p. 76-77.

bemoaned how scarcity was to be “attributed only to the unfavourable seasons”, and most especially not to middlemen, jobbers and speculators, the only true remedy being “ameliorating the condition of the labouring poor by means of LAND”, along with “patience and submission”. Young saw a partial solution and a stabilisation of the price of corn in encouraging “powerfully the culture of potatoes”, with premiums offered on potato cultivation, for “at a moment like the present, when every exertion ought to be made to increase the sustenance of mankind by all possible efforts”, the breaking of the monopoly of wheat was of paramount importance.³⁸⁸ This “moment” was an era that saw “the people increase more than cultivation extends”, making it of paramount importance to take a census of the people and, as near as possible, to match the supply of foodstuffs to the demand.³⁸⁹ Towards the same end horses kept for pleasure should not be fed on oats and, following the example of France and the recommendations of the Earl of Winchelsea and Sir Cecil Wray in Rutland and Lincolnshire respectively, “every scrap of waste and neglected land” should be “converted into little possessions by the poor, and cultivated most assiduously; much by means of potatoes”, which would “raise thousands of families from a state of poverty, and dependence on rates, to a situation of ease and comfort”.³⁹⁰ Where there were common pastures, every labouring man with children would have “a right to demand an allotment proportioned to the family, to be set out by the parish officers, under the control of two justices...and a cow bought”, with the labourer paying forty shillings a year till the price of the cow be paid off. Where there were no commons then child allowances could be demanded as of right, with potatoes distributed in kind “to those who want them most”. The “great object” was to “take the mass of the country poor from the consumption of wheat, and to give them substitutes [oats, barley; most especially potatoes] equally wholesome and nourishing” so as to “habituate the poor to a cheaper way of satisfying their hunger”.³⁹¹ Furthermore, as cultivation was to be extended, especially of cheap substitutes, a general enclosure bill should be enacted to facilitate this, a measure that the Board of Agriculture and its president John Sinclair had been agitating for, unsuccessfully, since the Board’s inception in 1793.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 8, 1, 54-55, 65.

³⁸⁹ Young had earlier called for annual censuses to be taken in his *Proposals to the legislature for numbering the people. Containing some observations on the population of Great Britain, and a sketch of the advantages that would probably accrue from an exact knowledge of its present state. By the authors of the Tours through England* (London, 1771), the idea being that such a tool, acting as the “thermometer of the state” would highlight the importance of “increasing the most valuable” classes of the population only or decreasing the idle so as to increase the industrious for “taking from the number of the non-industrious is an advantage” (p. 21, 24-25).

³⁹⁰ Young, *The question of scarcity plainly stated*, p. 69.

³⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 77-80.

Young's proposals were aimed squarely at alleviating the recurrent distress and scarcity of the 1790s, yet there was a persistent undercurrent that highlighted the good effects of allotments on the disposition of the poor towards the higher classes by helping them to understand the providential nature of the scarcity and by making them more self-sufficient and raised to a situation "of ease and comfort". This was consistent with his 1798 tract *An enquiry into the state of the public mind amongst the lower classes: And on the means of turning it to the welfare of the state*, which had affirmed the duty of "a wise and humane government" to make the situation of those "forced to labour for life...as light as is compatible with human affairs, and as easy to the lowest classes as the distinction between wealth and poverty admits".³⁹² In this piece Young inveighed against Jacobin sentiment, emphasising the "duty which every man owes to the community in which he lives" and praising the "national character of the English poor", seeking to inculcate through such sycophancy a recognition that "it is the undoubted and genuine interest of all the lower classes to keep things as they are, because every change must be for the worse". He also stressed the need to "build new churches in those parts of the town where the poor are most numerous" (anticipating Thomas Chalmers' calls for the same, and the Church Building Acts of 1818 and 1824, which were another strand in attempts to morally police the poor) so as to correct "the present state of public worship" and to spread the "gospel doctrine of content, and submission to legal authority, to the hearts of many thousands at present debased, profligate and ready for mischief". By improving the "system of moral police" in the face of the corruptions of "worldly prosperity", the poor would be led to return to "honest principles and sober lives" and the danger of sedition and insurrection would accordingly recede.³⁹³ The tenor of Young's writings in this period present a reconciliation with their position in

³⁹² A. Young, *An enquiry into the state of the public mind amongst the lower classes: And on the means of turning it to the welfare of the state: In a letter to William Wilberforce, Esq.* (London, 1798), p. 6.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4, 17, 24, 29, 33. The Church Building Act of 1818 voted £1 million towards the building of churches in areas where population growth had overwhelmed Anglican resources or where abuses such as pluralism had led to the needs of parishioners being unfulfilled, for example Stockport had a population of 34,000 but church seating for only 2500 – such imbalances were helping to fuel the popularity of Dissent. The legal structure of the Church of England made it difficult to build new churches and to split a parish an act of parliament was essential, in addition to which there remained the problem of obtaining an income for clergy in poorer, especially urban, areas; most clergy being maintained by tithes or the sale of pews. The Act of 1818 established a Church-building Commission to provide grants of money out of the £1 million fund, and held powers to divide and subdivide parishes and to provide endowments accordingly. By February 1821 85 churches had been built with seating for 144,190 people, but only £88,000 of the original grant remained. The shortage of funds led to the Church Building Act of 1824 granting a further £500,000 – this money was distributed much more widely, with less generous grants; the first grant was shared between less than 100 churches, whereas the second grant aided 500 churches. The Church Building Commission continued to function until 1857, when it was absorbed into the Ecclesiastical Commission. See M. H. Port, *600 New churches: The Church Building Commission 1818-1856* (2nd ed., Reading, 2006). Church-building was a policy designed to buttress the social order and national morals and manners, most especially in poorer or neglected areas and therefore held sympathy of ambition with the institutions of self-help outlined in this chapter.

society and an alleviation of that position through the cultivation of potatoes and management of an allotment as breeding contentment and moral rehabilitation.

Young was not a staunch advocate of the aspirational psychology of improvement, preferring a class of labouring poor with a less expansive but more stable horizon of expectation based upon traditional means of self-improvement rather than social mobility. Yet he was not trying to depress the condition of the poor as he considered that as already sunk far enough, rather he aimed at stability and in this sense took a conservative line in the poor law debates. He did, however, emphasise self-help in the form of working parcels of land and in this respect the allotment scheme that he and others outlined as a cure for scarcity and discontent was a pivotal cog in the development of arguments for allotments based on the engendering of habits of industry and of the bettering of one's condition which allied allotments more firmly to the poverty discourse of self-help. This turn becomes more apparent if we consider the introduction that Young gave to his scheme in the *Annals of Agriculture* in 1800, where he asked the reader to imagine visiting an alehouse kitchen in an old-enclosed parish, where the poor would enlighten him: "For whom are they to be sober? For whom are they to save? Such are the questions for the parish. If I am diligent shall I have leave to build a cottage? If I am sober shall I have land for a cow? If I am frugal shall I have half-an-acre of potatoes? You offer no motives! You have nothing but a parish officer and a workhouse! Bring me another pot".³⁹⁴ Young may not have been an admirer of the type of social fluidity implied by Malthus (indeed, he was to enter into a long dispute with Malthus over the appropriate level of wages for agricultural labourers and the population incentives of allotments) but he recognized the value of some expectation of reward and betterment as crucial to liberating motive industry.

Young was not the only writer who saw in allotments, cottage gardens or a return to agriculture as the means of engineering a moral reformation of the labouring poor and a cure to the social ills of poverty.³⁹⁵ Tangential to the agrarian radicalism of Spence or Ogilvie some poor law commentators sought a return to farming the land and/or putting the poor to work on the land as the solution to the problems associated with machinery and manufacturing, such as the Rev. J. G. Sherer, who sought a return to more traditional paternalism and a landowning class supporting a regime of self-help.³⁹⁶ In a similar vein the penal reformer Alexander Popham submitted a failed bill (it was

³⁹⁴ A. Young, *Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. XXXVI (1800), p. 508, cited in Salaman, *The history and social influence of the potato*, p. 513.

³⁹⁵ See also E. Murphy, "The metropolitan poor farms, 1722-1834", *London Journal*, Vol. 27 (2002), pp. 1-18.

³⁹⁶ J. G. Sherer, *Remarks upon the present state of the poor* (London, 1796), pp. 7-10. He looked to a return of responsible paternalism on the part of the gentry as the means of solving the woes of the labouring poor, with relief restricted to "the infirm and the helpless", for: "It is not till their own exertions are insufficient to support them, that the poor are legally entitled to public protection; and their right to that protection is then established by privileges, prior to any laws. For mutual is the dependence of the rich and the poor upon each

considered too radical) to amend the Poor laws in 1790-91, proposing small allotments of land as one means of helping the poor, whilst George Dyer called in 1793 for a sweeping away of all the remaining “outlines of feudal vassalage” such as primogeniture, for these “prevent the improvement of land, which is best promoted on small estates, where proprietors cultivate the land, not for a lord, but for themselves”.³⁹⁷ Here we can see how the debate over allotments overlapped with that of enclosure, for a central question to the poor law debates was whether enclosure increased production and productivity or, by divorcing labour from the land, actually decreased productivity and eroded social ties.³⁹⁸ Reasons of time and space preclude a more detailed examination of the enclosure issue here, suffice to say that the Board of Agriculture’s movement for a general enclosure bill, culminating in John Sinclair’s General Enclosure Bill of 1796, was not realised, enclosure continuing in an ad-hoc fashion.³⁹⁹ Instead, the cause of allotments was raised as one way of retaining the labourer’s personal interest in his industry and productivity, in the same way that piece work and working one’s field had traditionally been. Indeed, the self-help movement can be construed, and was indeed often presented as, a desire to return the labourer to supposed former habits of industry, perhaps reminiscent of a time when labourers were tied to the land and dependent upon their produce or cottage industry rather than manufacturing wages. Industry was seen in itself as morally good and industriousness as contributing to the common good not only by keeping the poor man off the rates but also contributing to the common stock of the kingdom. This was traditional moral economy, whereas the revised platform of self-help was not concerned merely with a subsistence ethic but also with a rising real wage enabling the purchase of manufactures and driving the economy forward; a sense of self-betterment and social standing was therefore necessary, as was an appreciation of the geographical fluidity of people and markets. This was a macroeconomic, modern conception of moral economy that saw improvement as a social duty, for

other, and mutual are their obligations. Their rights and duties are reciprocal”. Instead, the “competent maintenance” that the labourer was owed as of right should be provided by his occupation of a small parcel of land, “as this would probably prove the most eligible way of increasing their supplies”, *Ibid.*, p. 14, 9, 33. He proposed that 1% of all land should be set aside for allotments for the rural poor at reasonable rents, parliament providing the authority to do so in such a way as to avoid infringing on ordinary property rights. Allotments were to be smaller than half an acre to enable the labourer to maintain focus on his normal employment.

³⁹⁷ For Alexander Popham’s scheme see D. C. Barnett, “Allotments and the problem of rural poverty, 1780-1840”, in E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay (eds.), *Land, labour and population in the industrial revolution: Essays presented to J. D. Chambers* (London, 1967), p. 178; G. Dyer, *The complaints of the poor people of England* (London, 1793), p. 186.

³⁹⁸ Edward Harries commented in 1791 how small commons were “unprofitable” but that a general enclosure bill would take “many thousands of acres of naturally good land”, alter them “from their present neglected and unprofitable state” and hence “find employment and food for the people”, in opposition to William Joliffe in 1790 who took such an act to be tyrannical. See *Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. XV (1791), p. 73 and Vol. XIV (1790), pp. 306-313.

³⁹⁹ Sinclair’s bill stipulated that in any future enclosure cottagers would acquire small plots near their cottages as compensation for any loss of their share of the common wastes or open fields.

the national common good and for the raising of subsistence levels of income. This confrontation might be styled as that between “security” and “improvement”, overlaying the enclosure debates with poor law debates to produce a picture of changing notions of society.⁴⁰⁰ The transition to institutionalised paternalism and self-help is part and parcel of this trend.

The allotment movement was forged in the debates over enclosure, frugality, productivity and social change in the 1790s, and was closely connected with the potato movement, itself part and parcel of the drive towards greater frugality and retrenchment in poor law expenditure and on the part of the poor. Hence we see Mr Estcourt at Long Newton, Wiltshire, allowing labourers an allotment on a fourteen year lease provided that they plant at least one quarter of it with potatoes and stay off the parish whilst labourers in Bedfordshire dug up lots on the side of the road in order to plant them with potatoes.⁴⁰¹ The underlying principles of allotments were consistent. They became a staple of poor law reform schemes with Sir Edgerton Brydges calling for (among other plans) the poor to be provided with cottages or small portions of land by way of a loan, the good effects of which, whilst “equally conducive to the morals and comforts of the poor, and the relief of the poor-rates [Brydges estimated an annual saving of three quarters of a million pounds]” seemed to him to be “generally felt” in the perennial poor law debates.⁴⁰² Elsewhere, Robert Gourlay, Young’s sometimes assistant, waged a campaign in Somerset for giving the poor land and returning the commons to public use and Henry Barnet Gascoigne called for a national institution to put the poor to work in agriculture with schools of “self-support” for training the young, who would earn a small holding upon successful graduation.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ See D. Filtness, “A Duty of Care: The Political Thought of Moral Economy, 1775-1795” (unpublished MPhil. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2007).

⁴⁰¹ Salaman, *The history and social influence of the potato*, p.525. The issue at stake is clouded by a confusion of terms, with allotments sometimes being a mere potato patch, or else a cottage garden, whilst garden could mean a few square feet to two and a half acres at Burscough in Lancashire, See Barnett, *Allotments and the problem of rural poverty*, p. 166.

⁴⁰² E. Brydges, *Arguments in favour of the practicability of relieving the able-bodied poor, by finding employment for them; and of the beneficial consequences of such employment, both to the morals of the poor, and the national wealth. Addressed to the committee of the poor laws*. (London, 1817), p. 24. Brydges also brought in a Poor Removal Bill in February 1817, hoping to restore “foresight, self-regulation and self-denial” by the provision of a cottage, garden and cow for the poor to enable industriousness men to provide for a family, and to raise the value of a tenement that should give a settlement from £10 to £20 so as to enable farmers to provide such a “boon” without granting a settlement (which many were reluctant to do for fear of a future rise in the rates burden). Such measure would “stimulate the labourer to look to his own resources” and any who wasted such an opportunity would be left to “suffer for it”. See *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. XXXV (1817) pp. 759-762.

⁴⁰³ For Gourlay and his tracts such as *Tyranny of the poor laws exemplified* (1815), *Right to church property secured* (1815), or *The village system* (1817), as well as Gascoigne and his works (under the pseudonym ‘Farmer Meanwell’) such as *The antidote to distress* (1817), *Suggestions for the employment of the poor of the metropolis : and the direction of their labours to the benefit of the inhabitants* (1817), *Pauperism - its evils and burden reduced by calling into action the labours of the poor, and by the useful direction of charity : containing*

In 1830 Benjamin Wills helped to found 'The Labourer's Friend Society' for the improvement of working class conditions, most especially by demonstrating "the utility and national advantage of allotting land for cottage husbandry", with seventeen auxiliary societies, all but one in the South. The Society published the *Labourer's Friend Magazine*, and in 1844 changed its title to the 'Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes', becoming the first Model Dwellings Company in 1844.⁴⁰⁴ It was from 1830, under the auspices of the Labourer's Friend Society that the allotment movement really came to national prominence as a coherent platform for social reform and the alleviation of The state of the poor. Before this "the extent of allotments seems often to have depended on local tradition amongst landowners", and allotments should be seen firmly "in the context of philanthropy and self-help, not state action", whereas after the early 1830s "their incidence seems very much to have depended on the incidence of rural poverty".⁴⁰⁵ Following D. C. Barnett, it seems likely that the early allotments, initially in response to scarcity, were taken up as a tool for self-help before becoming once again primarily a tool for enabling self-sufficiency in straitened times, with a harsher line on poor relief. That is to say that after 1800 it is the moral dimension of allotments in terms of self-help rather than sufficiency that is stressed more, whereas for Young and the commentators of the 1790s allotments held out a promise of self-sufficiency at a subsistence level, thus scaling back the costs of scarcity. Barnett has tracked a bifold peaking of the allotment pamphlet literature in 1816-19 (with 40 pamphlets published at 21.7% of the total), and 1830-33 (62: 33.7%), and has stressed a feature in common of all allotment plans from 1795-1835, namely that the possessor of an allotment should be excluded from relief (besides all allotments

the substance of an essay on the means of employing the labouring poor, to which a premium was lately awarded by the Hon. Board of Agriculture : humbly dedicated to His Royal Highness the Duke of York, patron of the society for the suppression of mendicity (1818), both in the context of make-work schemes, see J. R. Poynter, *Society and pauperism: English ideas on poor relief, 1795-1834* (London, 1969), pp. 254-257.

Gascoigne advocated spade cultivation as a method of maximal employment and the imparting of habits of industry, a proclivity shared by J. Bosworth, Earl Stanhope in the Lords in 1820 and Robert Owen in his championing of his projected new society of "unity and mutual cooperation" which would also return to the labourers duties of work and self-sufficiency. For these writers see Poynter, *Society and pauperism* pp. 255-257. For Robert Owen (1771-1858), the early socialist and social reformer, see Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, pp. 257-262; G. Claeys, "Owen, Robert (1771-1858)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21027>]); G. Claeys, *Machinery, money and the millennium: From moral economy to socialism, 1815-60* (Cambridge, 1987). See also Sir G. Nicholls, *Eight letters on the management of the poor* (Newark, 1822), pp. 33-34, cited in Barnett, *Allotments and the problem of rural poverty*, p. 177, and; J. Bosworth, *Practical means of reducing the poor's rate, encouraging virtue, and increasing the comforts of the aged, afflicted and deserving poor; as well as of repressing able-bodied pauperism, by a proper application of the existing laws respecting select vestries, and incorporated houses of industry* (London, 1824), pp. 8-9.

⁴⁰⁴ See Barnett, *Allotments and the problem of rural poverty*, p. 167.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178, 172.

being about a quarter-acre and cultivated by the spade).⁴⁰⁶ This trend clearly demonstrates the advocacy of self-help and independence that lay at the core of the allotment movement, situating it firmly within that shift in the discourse towards greater stress on self-help, illustrated by Young's observation in Cambridgeshire in 1801 that "very few of the poor who occupy a garden or a rood of land received relief from parish rates".⁴⁰⁷ Yet the allotment movement as a particular facet of this shift did garner staunch opponents, and opposition to it can be used to illustrate the issues in point more brightly.

The association of allotment-style land distribution with the labouring poor was tainted, to a certain degree, by its relation to the agrarian radicalism tradition of Spence and Ogilvie, yet once Chartism took hold in the 1830s following the 'Captain Swing' unrest from 1830 and the 1832 Great Reform Act the allotment movement in terms more of gardens for self-sufficiency than of land redistribution seemed a great deal less contentious. The principal strands of opposition were those of tenant farmers who feared that a more self-sufficient labour force would be harder to coerce to labour, driving up wages, with the vestry of Bishop's Waltham, Hampshire declaring opposition to a proposal by the radical journalist William Cobbett that each married labourer be given an acre of waste to farm on the grounds that it would make the men "too saucy", that they would have more children and "want higher wages".⁴⁰⁸ Somewhat similarly men such as Lord Sheffield, R. Fellowes and Robert Southey "repeated the old objections that small gardens produced indolence and the brutish habits of the Irish".⁴⁰⁹ Such concerns were echoed elsewhere in the history of poor law discourse, such as in debates over educating the poor. However, most opposition and the greatest theoretical drawback of the movement revolved around the issue of how exactly the land was to be allotted to the labourer and how such a move was to be financed; proposals such as those by Sinclair in 1796 or that of Gascoigne, that his scheme be funded by a revival of the hated property tax, not proving popular. Again the nexus of issues here revolved around conflicting notions of motivation to work and conflicting notions of property rights and of improvement centred on enclosure. Yet there was much coherence around a theoretical aversion to waste lands being left idle, coupled with "a backward-looking appeal to a golden age of a landholding peasantry", that hoped to realise greater

⁴⁰⁶ For the allotments/ gardens movement in terms of make-work schemes see Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, pp. 254-257, including discussion of pamphleteers such as Fellowes, Parr and Jerram who were critical of workhouses.

⁴⁰⁷ A. Young (ed.), *Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. XXXVI, p.377.

⁴⁰⁸ J. L and B. Hammond, *The village labourer 1760-1832: A study in the government of England before the reform bill* (London, 1911), p. 159, cited in Salaman, *The history and social influence of the potato*, p. 529.

⁴⁰⁹ See Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, p. 256. Southey/ Rickman declared in the *Quarterly Review* of January 1818 that "if a garden be such as to take the labourers away from farming employments, in that degree must other labourers be introduced into a parish, and the poor rates increased accordingly: - the legitimate limit of cottage gardens therefore is very confined, and they are now, where they exist, too frequently in a neglected state - as unprofitable to the labourer as to the public at large", p. 279.

national wealth through physiocratic principles as a cure-all for scarcity, distress, and an idle pauper class. This receptive bedrock for a renewed platform of allotments or gardens allowed the movement to gather momentum, and it proved a principle strand of the self-help portfolio advanced in our period for combatting poverty and supposed indolence. By the time of the 1833 Commissioners in the Rural Districts all or most of the poor in 57% of parishes covered in the South possessed a garden; in 32% some had them, and; in only 11% few or none of the poor possessed them. The correspondent figure for the North was that in 33% of parishes did most or all of the poor have them.⁴¹⁰

Nevertheless, it seems clear that uneasiness at the social effects of the 3500 enclosure acts passed between 1760 and 1830 added to a nostalgic desire to return to the traditional agrarian social system with pliant labourers set out a conceptual space for the affinity of allotments with rural self-help to flourish.⁴¹¹ Allotments offered self-sufficiency, habits of industry, a reduced poor law bill and greater social cohesion, and thus can be seen to answer the same cluster of motive desires as the savings banks.⁴¹² As primarily associated with philanthropic endeavour focused on self-help, the issue of land redistribution or the lack of available land (for instance in areas already under enclosure) could be circumnavigated by a permissive rather than a structured, systematic approach and as such the 1817 committee on the Poor laws proposed to “follow the example of those individual proprietors of land, who have been in the practice of letting very small portions of land, on reasonable terms, to industrious labourers, to cultivate on their own account”, with parochial farms suggested as a broader means of putting those who came on the parish to work, this answering the

⁴¹⁰ Barnett, *Allotments and the problem of rural poverty*, pp. 171-172.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

⁴¹² Indeed, in the parliamentary debates over Poor Law reform in 1819, which drew on the example and impetus of savings banks, the issue of gardens and potatoes figured prominently. J. C. Curwen, who moved for the forming of a committee on the poor laws in 1816, thought potatoes a “great blessing to any country in case of famine”, but a “decided evil” when they formed “the principle article of a nation’s food”; it would be better if the taxation of the rates was halted and the wages of the poor allowed to rise, enabling the purchase of more traditional and prestigious foodstuffs such as wheaten bread. In the same debate and along more mainstream lines Colonel Wood suggested that “all cottages should be furnished with gardens at a cheap rate”. See *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. XXXIX, (Feb., 9th 1819), pp. 400-415. For a reading of the deployment of cottages in poor law debates that emphasises how “cottage scenes...made explicit reference to manliness, a virtue that connoted independence, moral fortitude and foresight” and how cottages “could be mobilized as one strategy in the shift away from institutional relief...and towards mechanisms that encouraged self-reliance” see S. Lloyd, “Cottage Conversations: Poverty and Manly Independence in Eighteenth-Century England”, *Past and Present*, No. 184 (Aug., 2004), pp. 69-109. Lloyd also, interestingly, notes that “the cottage grew relevant because commentators now valued family affection as a work incentive and located it in dwellings”, an additional motivation that may have given impetus in practice to forms of self-help and self-restraint. For Lloyd, the poor law debates aimed to “locate pauperism in failures of lower-class masculinity”, yet in fact the opposite emphasis shines through: for the poor masculinity was not lost but rather attained through self-responsibility and the duties of self-help, allowing an imaginative move closer to the upper classes to occur. See the discussion on languages of character and manliness below. See also S. Lloyd, *Charity and poverty in England, c. 1680-1820: Wild and visionary schemes* (Manchester, 2009).

call of providing “an adequate supply of provisions” for those on relief whilst also “bringing to the test the willingness to work of some of the applicants for employment”, repair of the roads being a useful alternative.⁴¹³ The Select Vestries Act of 1819 duly made allowance for a parish to obtain up to twenty acres of land to be let at reasonable rents to poor and industrious labourers. Barnett has complained of a lack of interest and “a complete lack of any really practical machinery for its enforcement”, yet this misses the point of the legislative enactments of this moment presenting a portfolio of measures for particular parishes to pick and choose from in assembling their own answer to dependent poverty and furthering the cause of self-help (see below). Allotments were one such measure; savings banks and schools of industry were another, and crucial, two.⁴¹⁴

Savings Banks

In every new disciple of the Savings Bank, I see at least two apostates from the Poor Rate and in fifteen or twenty years there is no reason to doubt that the inherent and progressive principle of the Savings Bank will have not only stopped the progress but will have entirely routed the influence of its antagonist, the Parish Rate. Next to the road to the Church, I would teach the young the road to the Savings Bank.⁴¹⁵

Thus did the poor-law commentator S. W. Nicoll praise the savings banks as holding an Alexandrian-style solution to the Gordian knot of the Poor laws, a view shared by many of his contemporaries and under-investigated in the historiography of the poor laws to date. Yet his encomium is notable not just for its enthusiasm, but also for its juxtaposition of the savings bank with religious moralism and education for the young. Such a constellation of reforming initiatives helps to contextualise the savings bank movement at that point when it passed over from grass-roots campaign to government-sponsored poverty palliative and is illustrative of changes in attitude to poverty and poor relief across our period. By examining the savings banks movement as an intervention in poor law debates we uncover a shift in approach that in turn can be construed as descriptive of elite responses to wider socio-economic change.

The savings banks movement, especially in its earliest form where banks functioned more as philanthropic endeavour than banking network has tended to be overlooked in the extant literature. What little attention has been paid to them has tended to focus on a more narrative treatment of the early years of the movement, building up to later developments in the mid-Victorian era. There has been almost no attempt to analyse the position of the movement within and its influence on

⁴¹³ See *House of Commons select committee report on the poor laws* (1817), p. 19.

⁴¹⁴ Barnett, *Allotments and the problem of rural poverty*, p. 179.

⁴¹⁵ S. W. Nicoll, *A summary view of report and evidence relating to the poor laws* (1818), p. 102, cited in Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, p. 291.

poor law discourse, and such banking initiatives are usually dismissed as epiphenomenal or bracketed with charitable initiatives.⁴¹⁶ Yet to do this obscures much of the contemporary resonance of savings banks in terms of renovating paternalism by encouraging self-help, and the movement is actually crucial to appreciating the enactments associated with the 1817 Poor Law committees as they took centre stage in the poor law discourse. In addition, a more nuanced reading of the movement in relation to the 1816-1819 interventions helps to set the scene for the 1834 Poor Law Reform Act. The savings banks were a new addition to the policy toolbox of poor law reform, and they set the tone for a generation.

From humble parochial beginnings the institution of the savings bank came to dominate the post-Waterloo poor relief scene, given tremendous impetus by the Savings Banks Act of 1817 such that by the end of 1818 there were something like 465 separate savings banks in the British Isles, by 1830 commanding some £14million in deposits for 400,000 depositors.⁴¹⁷ In terms of institutional background, it is perhaps not a coincidence that the onset of the period of determined growth of savings banks overlaps somewhat with the apogee of country banks around 1813, but any inter-linkage between the two should probably be seen in terms of impressionistic models and finance-mindedness rather than any fiscal interrelatedness per se. Certainly the machinery of remittances, the discount market and investment in government funds, as developed in tandem with country banks, especially during the suspension from cash payments of the Bank of England (1797-1821), played an integral role in the formalization of savings banks in England from 1817, yet there is little evidence that the two overlapped operationally to a significant degree.⁴¹⁸ Indeed, initially they operated at cross purposes for whilst savings banks were supposed to allow the poor a safe place of deposit in case of emergency, the country banks were arguably much more concerned with sustaining liquidity and providing capital for commercial enterprise.⁴¹⁹ The provision of facilities for

⁴¹⁶ The cursory treatment of savings banks by R. G. Cowherd in *Political economists and the English poor laws: A historical study of the influence of classical economics on the formation of social welfare policy* (Athens, Ohio, 1977), pp. 49-54, and by Poynter in *Society and pauperism* (pp. 289-294) are typical of the historiographical handling of the movement. No effort is made to track the influence of the movement upon the tenor and course of poor law debates; instead the focus is on savings banks as a substratum within poor law discourse. Sherman (in S. Sherman, *Imagining poverty: Quantification and the decline of paternalism* (Columbus, Ohio, 2001)) and Himmelfarb (in *The idea of poverty*) make no mention of savings banks. Instead, I wish to show here that savings banks were the principal part of an important development in poor law discourse towards self-help and the availability of such institutions crucially informed the direction of poor law policy in 1819 and beyond.

⁴¹⁷ H. O. Horne, *A history of savings banks* (London, 1947), p. 81; A. Fishlow "The trustee savings banks, 1817 – 1861", *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Mar., 1961), pp. 26-40.

⁴¹⁸ For the suspension of cash payments and its influence on Tory policy see B. Hilton, *Corn, cash, commerce: The economic policies of the Tory governments 1815-30* (Oxford, 1977), Part 1 Ch. 2.

⁴¹⁹ See L. Pressnell, *Country banking in the industrial revolution* (Oxford, 1956), esp. Part III, Ch. 6. A discussion of the role of currency availability and the contribution of country paper to the savings banks movement has been under-researched to date, and is indeed absent from the contemporary literature, suggesting it was not

safe deposit suggests the much more important role of friendly and benefit societies in the development of savings banks, and it is here that inquiry should properly begin.⁴²⁰

The origins of Friendly Societies lie obscured in the early modern past.⁴²¹ Cordery attributes their existence and flourishing to the translation of guild fraternities through the cash nexus, the benefit societies brought to London in the 1680s by Huguenots following the Edict of Nantes (which prompted relocation), the 1687 Society of Parisians in London providing a prime example. He also stresses the influence of the Freemasons on the form of friendly societies, their rituals and ceremonies, emphasising their sociability and rule-based self-policing.⁴²² There appears to have been a Scottish influence, with the Incorporation of Carters of Leith dating from 1555 and the General Sea Box at Borrowstounness from 1659. By 1697 Defoe was able in the course of his *Essay on projects*, to advocate the formation of a 'Pension Office' which would institute a system of compulsory insurance whereby all those under 50 would be obliged to contribute so that, in case of sickness or accident or reduction to extreme poverty, they could claim relief from the fund which had been jointly established. For, as Defoe made clear in his celebrated 1704 tract, giving alms was no charity, and would serve only to increase vice and idleness; rather the encouragement of independence was of paramount importance so as to "forever banish beggary and poverty out of the kingdom". Defoe clearly communicated the principle of savings banks: "That all persons in the time of their health and youth, while they are able to work and spare it, should lay up some small inconsiderable part of their gettings as a deposit in safe hands, to lie as a store in bank to relive them, if by age or accident they come to be disabled or incapable to provide for themselves".⁴²³

Moving forward through the Eighteenth Century, friendly societies continued to proliferate, although they faded from the scene a little as the vogue for work houses under the direction of the SPCK took centre stage. However, the principle of independence through self-help, never far from the surface of currents of poor law debate, was to re-emerge after the mid-century as annuity schemes were thrust into public scrutiny by Dr Price and Baron Maseres in 1772. Maseres' scheme,

an issue that the philanthropically-minded founders of savings banks thought relevant yet it must have played a role in the ability of labourers to save and for those savings to be deposited in the funds.

⁴²⁰ For a primary source account of the workings of a friendly society see A. Kussmaul (ed.), *The autobiography of Joseph Mayett of Quainton (1783-1839)* (Cambridge, 1986), esp. pp. 90-98.

⁴²¹ For the history of friendly societies see P. Gosden, *The friendly societies in England, 1815-1875* (Manchester, 1961), S Cordery, *British friendly societies, 1750-1914* (Basingstoke, 2003). For the relation of friendly societies to wider associational culture see P. Clark, *British clubs and societies* (Oxford, 2000).

⁴²² For the background of sociability and 'company' which patterned the development of friendly societies see M. Hailwood, "Sociability, work and labouring identity in seventeenth-century England", *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Mar., 2011), pp. 9-29 and P. Withington, "Company and sociability in early modern England", *Social History*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2007), pp. 291-307.

⁴²³ Cordery, *British friendly societies*, Ch. 1; Horne, *A history of savings banks*, Ch. 1; D. Defoe, "Of friendly societies", in *An essay on projects* (1697), cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

later criticised by Eden as being dependent upon almost super-human feats of self-restraint by the labouring poor in setting aside a minimum of £5 for the purchase of a pension (though in fact the scheme was not aimed at the poor per se, but those just above the poverty line), entitled *A proposal for establishing life annuities in parishes for the benefit of the industrious poor*, was criticised by Richard Price, who had published his *Observations on reversionary payments* in 1771, on the grounds that Maseres had underestimated life expectancy and therefore his table of payments was in need of revision. The two quibbled on, yet nevertheless a bill was introduced by William Dowdeswell to the Commons in 1773 only to be rejected by the Lords on the grounds that it would lead to heavy charges on the poor rates to the detriment of the permanent owners of the land.⁴²⁴ The bill is noteworthy for not only returning the question of working class thrift to the centre of poor law debate, but also underlining the benefit of thrift and how the poor “would thereby become more sober and virtuous in their ordinary course of life, and more industrious in their prosecution of their several callings and employments”, not only as beneficial to themselves but also as tending to increase “the riches and manufactures of this kingdom”.⁴²⁵ When seen in conjunction with Hume’s discerning approach to passive and active habits of industry as outlined in his *Of refinement in the arts*, itself resonant with what Coats has identified as a mid-eighteenth-century turn towards incentives to labour rather than coercive measures, we see an emergent platform for a more sustained role for friendly societies and their ilk amongst the legislative paraphernalia of poor relief.⁴²⁶ The mid-century development of attitudes is redolent of the progressive thinkers of the early Eighteenth Century such as Roger North (1651-1734), who’s *A discourse of the poor* was published posthumously in 1753.⁴²⁷ In it North remarked how “now our people are to be held or lost

⁴²⁴ See D. O. Thomas, “Francis Maseres, Richard Price, and the industrious poor”, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, Vol. 4 (1985), pp. 65-82.

⁴²⁵ Cited in Horne, *A history of savings banks*, p. 7.

⁴²⁶ See A. W. Coats, “Economic thought and poor law policy in the Eighteenth Century”, *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1960), pp. 39-51, esp. pp. 44-45, also A. W. Coats, “Changing attitudes to labour in the mid-Eighteenth Century”, *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1958), pp. 35-51. For the reflection of these changes in the sphere of accumulation and the politics of consumption, see Jonathan White, “Luxury and labour: Ideas of labouring-class consumption in eighteenth-century England”. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick (2001). Interestingly, White’s thesis notes a fading of optimism concerning the consumption of the poor from the 1770s as the interests of capital accumulation and the demands of labourers were increasingly recognised as contradictory; around the time that contributory schemes became more fashionable. Clark has also noted an upsurge in societies and associations in the late Georgian period, which may have influenced proceedings also; P. Clark, *British clubs and societies*, pp. 102-109 and Fig. 4.1 p. 128.

⁴²⁷ See *A discourse of the poor, shewing the pernicious tendency of the laws now in force for their maintenance and settlement: Containing likewise, some considerations relating to national improvement in general* (London, 1753), p. 47. He also advocated the abolition of the poor laws, for “by turning up the people to shift for themselves, by repealing the laws for the poor, and declaring that if they do not provide they must take what follows” the laws would be “so ordered that men shall strive against poverty, they will generally grow industrious and rich; and endeavour to preserve themselves and their means by keeping the laws, which will effectually prevent offences and disorders”. (p. 22). North’s views thus held sympathy of means with those of

by the management of them. They are free agents, and industrious as bees, to find out infinite meandrous ways by themselves, every one according to his mother wit, for the obtaining the materials of his own subsistence and convenience. And where they prosper, or (which is all one) believe they shall prosper and be safe, they will increase and multiply; but, if they have no opinion of future successes, they decay, and, by degrees, are to the place, lost; and the few remains of them will be but such as live, like Irish, upon Herbs and Milk, without thought of improvement.” The difference of later periods lay in the active intervention of reformers to foster the motive force of betterment through positive institutions of saving and self-help instead of mere eulogies to the beneficent effects of high wages.

This platform was consolidated in the early 1780s by a series of schemes to put friendly and contributory societies at the heart of poverty palliation. In 1782 Thomas Gilbert proposed that parochial societies should receive aid from the poor rate so as to encourage the poor to join them, extending this provision in 1787 with suggestions that the contributions of the unemployed to their sick clubs should be paid out of the poor rate so as to enable them to keep up their membership.⁴²⁸ Elsewhere, in 1786 John Acland launched his scheme in a pamphlet entitled *A plan for rendering the poor independent on public contribution*, in which the poor aged 21-30 who were not married or incapacitated would make small compulsory weekly contributions (of 2d. a week for men and 1.5d. for women) to a national club which would guarantee fixed weekly benefits in sickness and old age, a sort of national friendly society.⁴²⁹ Acland’s scheme was heavily criticised by John Howlett for assuming the ability of labourers to spare a contribution from their meagre wages, and also, crucially, because it destroyed the twin motives to “active exertion, and vigilant oeconomy, among the lower classes”, namely “the dread of want” on the one hand, and the “hopes of a comfortable provision against sickness and old age” on the other. It was the compulsory nature of the scheme that Howlett most objected to (a criticism Eden later reiterated as paramount to a tax); instead high wages should

Colquhoun in terms of linking preventive police and the eradication of poverty, demonstrating the endurance of views espousing greater exertions on the part of the poor as a cure for pauperism. North, a lawyer, biographer and musician, was the brother of Dudley North, author of *Discourses upon trade*, and wrote on a number of musical, architectural and political topics, including his celebrated *Lives of the Norths*, also published posthumously. For more on North see M. Chan, “North, Roger (1651–1734)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008), also; F. J. M. Korsten, *Roger North (1651–1734) virtuoso and essayist* (Amsterdam, 1981).

⁴²⁸ See Gosden, *Friendly societies in England*, p. 159.

⁴²⁹ Acland, with the expert aid of Richard Price, published model tables for setting contribution and benefit rates, hoping to provide a secure financial foundation for the societies by ring-fencing funds from the costs of sociability. His scheme, passed by the Commons in 1789 but rejected by the Lords, demonstrated a marked disavowal of the ability of workers to manage the societies’ funds themselves without the aid of elites, and a disbelief in their ability to stave off the temptation of spending accumulated funds, Acland quoting a letter from Devon to punctuate this point, which complained of how the members of a society had dissolved the club and distributed the funds.

be encouraged as “the most powerful incitement to industry”.⁴³⁰ However, whereas Howlett saw the poor laws as a “venerable pile”, Acland saw his compulsory scheme as tending towards their abolition.⁴³¹ Joseph Townsend in his 1786 *Dissertation* saw likewise, also calling for the “good effects” of friendly societies to be extended across the nation under a national network of compulsory societies and that “to drive them into these societies, no man should be entitled to relief from the parochial fund who did not belong to one of these. Thus would sobriety, industry, and economy take place of drunkenness, idleness, and prodigality, and due subordination would be again restored”, with the poor rates being thus “gradually reduced” and phased out.⁴³²

In the 1790s David Davies, taking a line in opposition to Townsend, was to call on friendly societies as useful for the training of the labouring poor towards savings, the more to make the most of their prospective minimum wage and to encourage “in their breasts the hope of advancing themselves to more comfortable circumstances, which is assuredly the best preservative from vice and beggary”.⁴³³ Meanwhile, Pitt in his *Bill for the better support and maintenance of the poor* duly called for the establishment of a parochial fund for the relief of sick, infirm and aged subscribers, extending the entitlement to members of friendly societies as a matter of course. However, the most significant measure was reserved for the reformist and Pittite MP George Rose who, in 1793 secured the passage of his Friendly Societies Act.⁴³⁴ This Act sought to protect the self-rule of friendly societies whilst introducing regulations for their protection from the complexities of assurance scales and the abuses of immoral treasurers who might abscond with their funds. By the implementation of a managing committee chosen by the members and the requirement to register their rules with the clerk of the peace at the quarter sessions, which rules to concern the admittance of new members, the payment of subscriptions, investment of any surplus, etc., the societies would free themselves from irregularities and abuses. By provision also that “habitual drunkenness, or other disorderly conduct” be grounds for exclusion from the society and by holding out a settlement for members, the society would become the preserve of the “sober, honest, and industrious” workman who would

⁴³⁰ F. M. Eden, *The state of the poor, or, an history of the labouring classes in England, from the conquest to the present period : together with parochial reports relative to the administration of work-houses, and houses of industry; the state of friendly societies ; and other public institutions / with a large appendix, containing a comparative and chronological table of the prices of labour, of provisions, and of other commodities* (3 vols., London, 1797), Vol. 1, pp. 603-604.

⁴³¹ J. Howlett, *The insufficiency of the causes to which the increase of the poor, and of the poor's rates have been commonly ascribed* (London, 1788), p. 111, 118.

⁴³² J. Townsend, *A dissertation on the poor laws, by a well-wisher to mankind* (London, 1786), first published 1786), pp. 63-64. For the schemes of Gilbert, Acland and Townsend see Horne, *A history of savings banks* pp. 8-9, and Cordery, *British friendly societies*, pp. 22-23.

⁴³³ D. Davies, *The case of labourers in husbandry stated and considered, in three parts* (London, 1795), pp. 101-102.

⁴³⁴ For Rose see R. Thorne, “Rose, George (1744–1818)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan 2010) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24088>].

find his “consequence in the community will increase in proportion to the stake he has acquired in common with the rest of the members” and consequently he would become “a better man and a better citizen”.⁴³⁵ The implication is that, by exchange of security and independence for prudence and foresight, the labourer would acquire a cache of social capital that would raise him into the ranks of those industrious or deserving poor so beloved of the legislature, and lessen the burden of rates upon the polity.⁴³⁶

We have seen in the discussion so far a marked tension between those who saw friendly societies as a potential means of transferring the cost of relief to the poor by compulsory participation and those who saw in them a way to get the poor to help themselves and thus negate the need for relief. This division broadly maps on to that between those who saw control of the poor as best oriented by appeal to want or by accumulation/ betterment. A deeper reading posits that the more industrious poor would be motivated by betterment and the indolent by want/ distress, yet a mechanism that would bridge the two would provide an ideal solution. Friendly societies, and later by extension the savings banks, contextualised properly within a paradigm of more discriminatory relief provision, would induce the industrious to continue and deepen their good ways, but also enable those who were more indolent to develop good habits and thus join the ranks of the industrious poor. This position was beginning to be marked out by the end of the 1790s.

The Church of England clergyman and economist Robert Acklom Ingram (1763-1809) bemoaned how “an increase of population has probably contributed to augment the number of those, who become chargeable, while the advanced price of subsistence has added to the expense of relieving them”, also decrying how trade fluctuations caused “a great addition of misery”. Yet his principal concern was with the “debasement of character” suffered by the poor.⁴³⁷ Tracing the increase of labourers dependent on daily wages to the decline of small farms and simultaneous increase in manufactures, he was critical of such loss of autonomy as destructive of “a reasonable expectation of raising themselves, or some of their families into a higher sphere” and thus the loss of “a very powerful incentive to diligence and frugality” and concomitantly “all regard for character seems gradually

⁴³⁵ G. Rose, *Observations on the act for the relief and encouragement of friendly societies* (London, 1794), p. 7, 15.

⁴³⁶ The concept of social capital is explored in R. D. Putnam, *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community* (New York, 2000). See also D. Halpern, *Social capital* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁴³⁷ R. A. Ingram, *An inquiry into the present condition of the lower classes, and the means of improving it* (London, 1797), pp. 2, 11-12. Ingram went on to reject Malthusian theory in his *Disquisitions on population in which the principles of the Essay on population by the Rev. T.R. Malthus, are examined and refuted* (London, 1808). That Ingram formulated a connection, prior to the advent of Malthusianism, between self-help and discrimination as the surest way of helping the poor and improving the country is evidence of the trend within poor law discourse towards such a configuration regardless of the type of pessimistic natural law approach associated with Malthus and sometimes posited as *the* causal force behind abolitionist sentiment.

more and more defaced".⁴³⁸ He championed the cause of savings as the cure to this malady, but opposed the regulation of wages in line with the price of foodstuffs or the provision of public relief beyond the level of bare subsistence. For where any prospect of independence had been extirpated the shame attached to poor relief was likewise purged, leaving the only stimulus to industry as necessity, "and when nature is satisfied, the mind then falls into contemptible indolence, or more pernicious sensuality"; "For harsh as the sentiment may appear, so long as their leading character is that of profligacy and idleness, it is for the general interest of society, that their condition should be reduced as nearly as possible to that of a bare subsistence".⁴³⁹ The answer was to provide "proper motives to excite in the common people a desire of accumulation...a desire of independence", to wit "it seems necessary, that the industrious classes should possess a convenient opportunity of securing their savings and employing them to some advantage" as "when it [their money] is no longer in their possession, but actually in a state of accumulation, they will not be willing to recall it, however, pressing their occasions might be; but would rather relieve themselves by extraordinary exertions of economy and industry", never forgetting that "habits of industry are at all times favourable to respectability of character". To this end the churchwardens or overseers would be "impoverished to receive from the lower classes their savings by little and little", and allow some little relief in times of distress. Coupled with a more stringent "attention to their duty" so as to rectify "a want of judgement", by which the poor would have to "conform their deportment to the general approbation of those, through whose interposition they are to expect relief", a "reformation of manners in the lower classes" would be effected and, in the long term present an opportunity for "any fundamental alteration in the poor's laws".⁴⁴⁰ We see here how the provision of saving was deployed as the means for a regeneration of the habits and character of the working classes, so as to correct the baneful effects of manufactures. The principle of "advancing themselves" or, more fundamentally, "to make those industrious, that are not so at present", saw improvement and betterment as the key to effecting a reformation of the poor, but coupled this with an increasing discrimination of relief practices to encourage industriousness.⁴⁴¹ The schema of Townsend was here inverted such that by greater discrimination attendant on practices of self-help the deployment of such practices by the poor so as to lay claim to being industrious or 'deserving' in effect became compulsory, in the process instituting a vector of moral reform that would lay collateral benefit upon wider society.

⁴³⁸ Ingram, *An inquiry*, p. 3.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 73-75, 81.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

In a not dissimilar vein Eden praised Friendly Societies in *The state of the poor* as these “useful associations” induced the poor to be “comparatively cleanly, orderly, and sober, and consequently happy and good members of society”. Echoing Burke, Eden professed that the poor could have no right to relief as “any right, the gratification of which seems to be impracticable, can be said to exist” and that “the compulsion of the law is merely confined to the removal of extreme wants”.⁴⁴² The appeal of Friendly Societies was fundamental to Eden’s understanding of the situation of the poor whereby “The poor should not be deceived: the best relief they can receive must come from themselves. Were the rates once limited, the price of labour would necessarily advance. To expend what labour actually produces, in the most beneficial manner to the labourer, depends entirely on good management and economy”. For, “the true principle of national interference with respect to the poor, and...the only one that is justifiable in the eye either of reason or religion, is, by no means to think of maintaining the poor as a nation, or a public, or even to contribute largely, as is now the case, towards their maintenance; but to enable them to maintain themselves. This principle is clearly recognised and proved to be not only perfectly practicable, but popular also, in the institution of friendly societies”.⁴⁴³ Eden followed up this enthusiastic espousal of the benefits of friendly societies in an 1801 pamphlet, *Observations on Friendly Societies*, in which he declared there to be 648,000 members of 7200 such societies, meaning that 1 in 4 of the population of England and Wales “may be supposed to receive occasional relief from these useful establishments”.⁴⁴⁴ The “active energies” unleashed by friendly societies he took to be of particular benefit in towns, where a possible alternative, the possession of land (or allotments), was less feasible. For as in the country “this spirit and these habits (it is well known) are fostered among the agricultural poor by the acquisition of a cottage, a field or a garden”, so in towns “the active energies...which the possession of land never fails to excite, may be supplied by friendly societies, or similar institutions”.⁴⁴⁵ Membership of friendly societies served to “promote a higher spirit of independence and better habits of industry” and proved that “with very few exceptions, the people, under all circumstances, are, with good management, perfectly competent to provide for their own maintenance”, all sprung from “the prudent foresight of rude peasants and unlettered manufacturers, sensible from their own experience of the imperfection of our poor laws” and thus demonstrative of the impropriety of too much government interference.⁴⁴⁶ Nevertheless, he identified that friendly societies occasioned “collateral mischief” through their socializing functions and, lamenting the “want of places of safe

⁴⁴² Eden, *The state of the poor*, Vol. 1, p. 590, 615, 447, 486.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 587, 599.

⁴⁴⁴ F. M. Eden, *Observations on friendly societies: For the maintenance of the industrious classes, during sickness, infirmity, old age, and other exigencies* (London, 1808), p.8.

⁴⁴⁵ It was such considerations which drew Eden to oppose a general enclosure act on the grounds that it would harm the motive energy of the labouring poor and hence prove “a curse to the country”, *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

custody” instead proposed a National Insurance Office with a reticulation of agents throughout the land, which would meet the needs of the labourers without prejudicing their funds through the “periodical musters of a club”. Eden’s writings point to a national context as considered the most appropriate for reform, in addition show us that aspirational self-help was at the heart of poor law debates at this juncture, but also indicate that serious doubts existed over the propriety and efficacy of friendly societies, and thus that the conditions were ripe for the adoption of savings banks.

Another key component of the contextualising debate over savings banks was the angle provided by Malthus and his seminal *Essay on the principle of population* of 1798, especially the more optimistic position of the second (and subsequent) editions, predicated upon the potential of the preventive check as mediated through ‘prudential restraint’ and thrifty habits to enable an amelioration of the condition of the poor. Although Malthus was doubtful of the efficacy of the savings banks in and for themselves to effect such an amelioration, he recognised them as “extremely useful” for enabling “young labourers to economise their earnings with a view to a provision for marriage” and he was name-checked as one of the “eminent characters” who proffered approbation to the Provident Institution at Bath under the stewardship of the famous philanthropic physician, champion of smallpox inoculation and Poor Law campaigner Dr John Haygarth (1740-1827).⁴⁴⁷ Yet it is the impact of his thought upon poor law debates that helped significantly to create a fertile climate for the expansion of savings banks and their creed of self-help. His policy prescription of abolition of the poor laws enjoyed brief popularity, although was rarely seriously considered as an immediate solution. Rather, measures for the development of prudence and foresight amongst the poor, to engender an ability to support themselves and to eradicate dependence on the rates for all except those in chronic indigence, would hold out the prospect of the diminution of the burden and eventual redundancy of compulsory poor relief. This intellectual context provided a powerful stimulus for the development of savings banks, yet it is important to recognise that it built upon foundations already prevalent within poor law discourse. For instance, as a collateral appendage to his proposed pauper Panopticon penitentiaries, Bentham had advocated the establishment of a “Poor Man’s Bank” for the saving of small sums, and most especially in the form of a “Marriage-Bank institution” for helping couples to save before marriage and for the receiving of contributions and paying the allowances of friendly societies, so as to provide greater security in their dealings. As friendly societies encouraged “the disposition to frugality” it was important to, and the banks would have the effect of, “increasing the amount of the population thus associated”. Saving, “the virtue which stands paramount to charity”, would thus be increased and both the individual and the wider population would benefit, leading to an increase in the overall level of happiness. These pecuniary

⁴⁴⁷ See Horne, *A history of savings banks*, p. 30.

collateral uses would help the poor to hang onto their independence by facilitating financial means of averting indigence and making the most of their income.⁴⁴⁸ The substantial reformer, landowner, later Poor Law commissioner and prominent MP J. C. Curwen moved in the Commons in 1817 for the establishment of a savings fund, paid for out of the wages of labour across the nation – a kind of national insurance fund administered by elected parish and central committees. Curwen himself was doubtful of the efficacy of savings banks, the remedy they held out being “beyond all fair and rational expectation”, yet he also recognised that “to restore independence of mind to the labouring classes is an indispensable ingredient in any plan for bettering their situation”.⁴⁴⁹ It was this restoration that can be taken as the prime motive force behind the savings banks movement, rather than a cure for existing poverty, as the savings banks patriarch Henry Duncan himself conceded before the Commons select committee of 1819.

The origins of the savings banks movement were contentious even at the time, yet there seems to have been independent beginnings in several areas that had sympathy of form and function and were later to accumulate into an irresistible phenomenon. Whereas friendly societies, according to Gorsky, enjoyed higher membership density in urban areas and regions expanding as a result of migration, operating as “fictive kin” to “recreate the ties and dependencies of the agrarian community” (expansion sustained also by the consumer medicine and drinks trades), savings banks were not a product of labourers’ sociability or mutuality but rather a philanthropic endeavour directed by the higher orders to imitate or recreate the beneficial effects of friendly societies as regards the limitation of recourse to relief and the good character of members.⁴⁵⁰ Certainly the friendly societies provided a good model and inspiration for savings banks, with leading lights of the savings banks movement such as Henry Duncan, Dr Haygarth or George Rose, as well as more quotidian champions such as Barber Beaumont all having had extensive experience of friendly societies. Horne’s mapping of the spatial dispersion of savings banks across England and Wales in 1819 is perhaps demonstrative not only of their widespread presence, perhaps weighted more

⁴⁴⁸ J. Bentham, “Outline of a work entitled pauper management improved”, in A. Young (ed.), *Annals of Agriculture and other useful arts*, Vol. XXX (1798), p. 487, 484, 477. Similarly, Colquhoun proposed that Receipt and Pay Offices be established for parochial societies in every parish, paying funds into a National Deposit Bank in London to be deployed for the propping up of poverty above the level of indigence, simultaneously encouraging “provident habits”. P. Colquhoun, *A Treatise on indigence*, pp. 129-134. Elsewhere, Samuel Whitbread in 1807 called in the Commons for the provision of “one great institution, in the nature of a bank, for the use and advantage of the labouring classes alone” in tandem with an “office of the poor” and the ability therewith to purchase annuities, forming just one of several strands of a proposed reformation of the poor laws, aiming to “exalt the character of the labouring classes” and thus to “give the labourer consequence in his own eyes”. S. Whitbread, *Substance of a speech on the poor laws: Delivered in the House of Commons, on Thursday, February 19, 1807: with an appendix* (London, 1807), p. 42, 97.

⁴⁴⁹ Cited in Horne, *A history of savings banks*, p. 34.

⁴⁵⁰ M. Gorsky, “The growth and distribution of English friendly societies in the early Nineteenth Century”, *Economic History Review*, Vol. LI, No. 3 (1998), pp. 489-511, p. 507.

towards urban and manufacturing areas, but also of their deployment by various elites across the country as a tool for managing the lower orders and salving the open sores of rising rates.⁴⁵¹ Early examples of savings banks include the Sunday Penny Bank set up by the Rev. Joseph Smith of Wendover in 1799, that created by the Rev. Thomas Lloyd in Hertford in 1808, (later transmuted into a savings bank proper in 1816), and most especially the efforts of Mrs Priscilla Wakefield of Tottenham.⁴⁵² She was a co-founder of the 1791 charity for the relief of lying-in women and sick persons at Tottenham High Cross and in 1798 started a Female Benefit Club in Tottenham, to which was attached a Loans Fund and a Children's Bank. In the course of such proceedings she noticed, and deplored, the want of the poor for placing a part of their wages "where they would be secure" and inaugurated the Tottenham Benefit Bank on 1st January 1804 to meet this need. Elsewhere, at Bath in 1808, Dr Haygarth became involved in a scheme for securing the savings of servants, inaugurating a bank for savings to meet the demand and using his celebrity to communicate his enthusiasm for the scheme.⁴⁵³ At this juncture the support lent to the movement by the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, under the guidance of Thomas Bernard, should be noted as a causal factor in its rapid expansion after 1810.⁴⁵⁴ Through its reports the society promulgated schemes such as allotments, schools of industry, soup kitchens, benefit clubs and the like which would encourage the formation of habits of industry, sobriety and frugality amongst the labouring poor and contribute to

⁴⁵¹ See Horne, *A history of savings banks*, intersection to pp. 90-91. A comparison with percentages of parishes in each county in which allotment schemes were known in 1833 sees a similar density of concentration of allotments and savings banks in the central South and in the Midlands. This suggests to a certain degree that the two measures were popular and used in the economic heartlands of the country, perhaps explicable by appeal to a greater connectedness of such areas to events and discourse in London rather than in the periphery regions. See Barnett, *Allotments and the problem of rural poverty*, p. 163.

⁴⁵² For such early experiments see Horne, *A history of savings banks*, Ch. 2.

⁴⁵³ See J. Haygarth, *An explanation of the principles and proceedings of the provident institution at Bath, for savings*. By John Haygarth, MD...one of the managers (Bath, 1816). For the decline of servants in husbandry and of practices of employers housing agricultural labourers within their own abodes at the end of the Eighteenth Century, which contributed towards a rise in the proportion of day and waged labour in agriculture, may have impacted upon the number of labourers on relief and can be read as a shift in the terms of agrarian paternalism, see A. Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge, 1981). This shift in established practices of employment was amenable to an ideological transition to self-help, and could be construed as favourable or contributory to a turn towards political economy market practices.

⁴⁵⁴ Bernard (1750-1818), lawyer, philanthropist and governor and treasurer of the London Foundling Hospital, became involved in a great deal of charitable and philanthropic endeavours from the 1790s onwards. In 1796, along with William Wilberforce, Shute Barrington, bishop of Durham, Frances Elizabeth King, and others, he established the influential 'Society for Bettering the Condition and Improving the Comforts of the Poor'. The society's principal aim was to promote good practice in poor relief measures by means of propaganda. The society's Reports collected information respecting the poor, and the best way of relieving their hardship. A central aim of this work was always to enable the poor to better their own condition through applying justly administered assistance, rather than to discipline them or make them objects of dependence. Incentives and examples were preferred to compulsion and control, with Bernard opposed in general to workhouse principles. See R. D. Sheldon, "Bernard, Sir Thomas, second baronet (1750-1818)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2251>, accessed 17 Aug 2012]; J. Baker, *The life of Sir Thomas Bernard* (London, 1819); *The reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor* (London, 1798-1815).

an alleviation of their condition. Certainly, as Horne has noted, the innovations underway in Tottenham were praised by the society and exerted considerable influence on Rose and the foundation of the Southampton Bank for Savings, amongst others.

Yet the indefatigable zeal and proselytising efforts of the celebrated “father of savings banks”, the Scot Henry Duncan (1774-1846), minister of Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire, played a pivotal role in the movement’s success. Duncan had established a friendly society at Ruthwell in 1796 to great success.⁴⁵⁵ Persuaded that friendly societies suffered from inherent defects such as the holding out of unsustainable terms to their members or the mismanagement or dishonesty of those entrusted with the funds, and influenced by the publications of early pioneers such as John Bone in London and Dr Haygarth in Bath, Duncan instituted a savings bank at Ruthwell in 1810. This institution was designed for long-term deposits, with withdrawal made difficult and those members who didn’t pay at least 4s a year into their account subjected to fines, but depositors of 3 or more years standing were offered a good rate of 5% and there were bonuses for regular savers. By 1814 the bank held £922 in deposits and had partially influenced the establishment of the Edinburgh Bank for Savings on a slightly different model, more closely akin to that of a normal bank with the depositors having no say in its management. Encouraged by this foundation, and undaunted by the lengthy argument with the Edinburgh founder J. H. Forbes over the contested parentage of Scottish savings banks, Duncan published his *Essay on the nature and advantages of parish banks, for the savings of the industrious* in 1815, travelling to London in 1817 to support the passage of Rose’s savings banks bill and to give evidence to the 1819 Commons’ committee on the poor laws. In the *Essay* Duncan followed the same line as Eden in declaring that:

The only way, it should seem, by which the higher ranks can give aid to the lower in their temporal concerns, without running the risk of aiding them to their ruin, is to afford every possible encouragement to industry and virtue, - to induce them to provide for their own support and comfort, - to cherish in them the spirit of independence, which is the parent of so many virtues, - and judiciously to reward extraordinary efforts of economy, and extraordinary instances of good conduct.⁴⁵⁶

Duncan was also at pains to spell out the bad effects of a compulsory provision for the poor as providing a spur to “idleness and dissipation” and the complementarity of savings banks to friendly societies, for instance by allowing a provision for the accumulation of a sum to defray the annual

⁴⁵⁵ The soubriquet is from Thomas Courtenay in a House of Commons discussion of his proposed legislation for friendly and parochial benefit societies on March 26th 1819. See *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. XXXIX, p. 1160. For Courtenay, see below.

⁴⁵⁶ See Horne, *A history of savings banks*, p. 46-48; H. Duncan, *Essay on the nature and advantages of parish banks, for the savings of the industrious* (Edinburgh, 1815), p. 1.

membership of a society.⁴⁵⁷ He saw the friendly societies as first and foremost an insurance scheme for future exigencies, whereas the savings banks allowed for the extraction of funds (though not too frivolously!) in times of want if not distress, such as the replacement of a horse, thus helping to stave off recourse to the society, or indeed to the poor rates.⁴⁵⁸ He also understood that the pressures of meeting the demands of society payments at certain inflexible times put a further strain upon the resources of the poor in times of want, and favoured instead that the labourers be able to “consult their own convenience with respect to the amount of their payments”. This allowed for the extension of the principle outlined earlier that compulsory contributions harmed the spirit of betterment and independence and that, the more freedom given to depositors, the more a “powerful stimulus to industry and frugality among the labouring classes would be enacted”. For the main benefit of savings banks he took to be their encouragement of the exercise of a “virtuous self-denial” and exhibition of a “pattern of prudence and manly resolution, which would do honour to the highest station”.⁴⁵⁹ By the encouragement of a “laudable spirit of accumulation” and the “gradual amelioration of the habits of the people” a “virtuous emulation” amongst the labourers (noted also by Malthus and Bentham) would be formed suffice to “ennoble” their “character” towards habits of “sobriety, diligence, and economy”. The establishment of industry and frugality as moral habits would give rise to “many kindred virtues”, not least a spirit of “manly resolution” and “manly pride”. Whereas poor rates “proved oppressive to one part of the community and destructive of morality to the other”, self-help through savings banks, as dependent upon the financial security of trustees, would revive “those feelings of reciprocal affection between the lower and the higher ranks of life”.⁴⁶⁰

By this point the gathering momentum of savings banks had attracted the attention of George Rose, who had “received numerous applications from different parts of the country, to know whether parliament meant to do anything at all”.⁴⁶¹ Himself a founder and trustee of the Southampton Savings Bank, trustee at Bath, as well as the instigator of banks at Portsmouth and Winchester, Rose sought leave in the commons to bring in a bill to “encourage among the common people of all descriptions, a desire of saving from the earnings of their labour and industry, wherewith to secure them from the sudden reverses of misfortune” for at present too many of the labouring poor were found to be “addicted to idleness and dissipation, because they had no means of depositing that

⁴⁵⁷ Duncan, *Essay on the nature and advantages of parish banks*, p. 65.

⁴⁵⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXIX, (March 25th 1819), p. 1160: Duncan had declared before the committee “his opinion of the total incompetency of savings banks alone” and that they should be “united to friendly societies”.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3, 62-64.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-66.

⁴⁶¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXII, (2nd March 1816), p. 843.

portion of their earnings which they thus squandered away...wasted in extravagance and idleness, and the consequence was, that they *did not work the whole of their time*" [my emphasis – this suggests an affinity with the concern of Young that an attitude of security rather than improvement led to idleness, by which was meant the deployment of time in leisure rather than at work].⁴⁶² Rose thus anticipated the formation of a more productive labour force, as well as the diffusion of a great "moral good", a "decent spirit of independence" and the proliferation of "domestic virtues", conducing the poor to "progressively become better men, and better subjects" and the poor rates consequently to "diminish, in proportion as there were fewer persons to claim them". Rose's proposal was met with the "warmest approbation" for "at least there would be no excuse for soliciting parochial relief, when an opportunity existed, of which they might avail themselves of doing without it".⁴⁶³ The Bill was duly brought in, and printed, Rose finishing with a panegyric to the potential of savings banks:

In short, the best way of helping the poor is to teach them to help themselves. This is acknowledged even now by all the right-minded and the well-disposed among them. And the Plan of Savings Banks will enforce and extend the persuasion. It will contribute to improve their moral habits as well as their worldly interests. It will render them independent without rendering them insolent or proud. It will lead them to temperance, and the restraint of all the disorderly passions which a wasteful expenditure of money nourishes...⁴⁶⁴

After a lengthy wrangle over the clause enabling those with savings of under £30 to still be able to claim relief, a provision which would, ironically supposedly lead to the destruction of "every hope of exciting a spirit of independence" causing the poor man to be "entirely disheartened from saving at all", and/ or strike at the heart of the poor laws by allowing relief to those who were not totally destitute, "the only ground of relief" being "absolute pauperism", the bill was passed in July 1817 and Rose died shortly afterwards. The debate over this clause highlights that, for Rose and the supporters of Savings Banks the allure of the banks was principally their sponsorship of independence amongst the labouring classes, as it was "necessary to encourage by every means a desire to do without" relief, and it was "an object of the greatest importance to the interests of the

⁴⁶² For more on Rose and the passing of the Savings Banks Act of 1817 see Horne, *A history of savings banks*, pp. 71-82 and G. Rose, *Observations on banks for savings* (London, 1816) – the proper context for savings banks was one of discriminatory relief, as Rose acknowledged: "Fortuitous aid, given as it is, indiscriminately, to an extent that was inconceivable before the Enquiry in the House of Commons in the last session, is in truth often useless to the receiver; and, in its tendency, certainly mischievous to the community. Such aid can, indeed, never be productive of good, except when it is guided in its application by personal knowledge of its objects, or after a full inquiry into their situations: knowledge and inquiry, which the indolent will not attempt, and the most active cannot always have it in their power, to attain"; savings banks would "infuse into the minds of the lower order, a legitimate spirit of independence", and *this* would become the proper guide to deservingness of relief, not the facticity of poverty (pp. 25-26).

⁴⁶³ See *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXIII, (2nd April, 1816), pp. 841-844.

⁴⁶⁴ G. Rose, *Observations on banks for saving*, p.20.

man himself, as well as to the country” to “create a spirit of independence in the breast of the poor man”, this being put forward as the justification of the clause as a greater good than the evil of legislating for relief to be provided for those who held property such as savings.⁴⁶⁵ Despite such a move enabling the grater encroachment of relief up the social scale, it was held that the formation of character and independence that was thereby promoted would “gradually do away the evils of the system of poor laws” and a moral regeneration of the nation, as well as contributing to greater productivity through the formation of habits of industry and a desire for accumulation.⁴⁶⁶ The facility of saving would also not be compulsory, with savings banks only established unless two-thirds of the parish consented.

The key provision of the act was that it required the trustees to pay the money they received, other than was needed for the transaction of day-to-day business, into the bank of England to the account of the Commissioners for the Reduction of the National Debt. Debentures were to be issued for the sums so deposited on which interest would be allowed at the generous rate of £4. 11s 3d. per cent per annum at a time when the yield on 3% consols was only about £3 15s. per cent. Rose excused such a high rate as worth the price of increased thrift and industry amongst the lower classes, yet the government ran into trouble over the unexpected surge in savings banks foundations – 150 within 12 months after the act passed and £657,000 deposited in the first six months – and had to adjust the rates paid and impose limits on deposits in 1818.⁴⁶⁷ The regularisation of investment of savings banks funds overcame the brewing dissension within philanthropic ranks over the best way to invest, with a subset of banking institutions known as provident institutions, particularly associated in the literature with those establishments at Bath and in the Western Part of the Metropolis, which gave facility for depositors to invest directly in the funds and thus forego the security of an mediating committee of trustees. Where savings banks exponents such as Horace Twiss originally were hesitant over exposing the savings of the poor to too much risk for fear of discouraging saving, arguing that deposits should be guaranteed by trustees, others saw such security as compromising the moral principle of saving and a danger to the prosperity of trustees.⁴⁶⁸ As Haygarth explained, “if savings banks receive money without any limitation, and yet engage to

⁴⁶⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXVI, (16th May 1817), pp. 680-83.

⁴⁶⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXV, (5th Feb. 1817), p. 222.

⁴⁶⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXVII, (17th March 1818), pp. 1156-1157 – parliament was also concerned that the upper classes would exploit the preferential interest rates of the savings banks and subvert the institutions from their philanthropic purpose; legislation was passed in 1824 and 1828 to limit the size of deposits and curb the rate of interest. See Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, p. 53.

⁴⁶⁸ See J. Hume, *An account of the provident institution for savings established in the western part of the metropolis* (London, 1816); H. Twiss, *A tract on savings banks; Addressed to the editors of the principal newspapers, and other periodical publications: To which is added, a short and practical plan, consisting of twelve plain regulations, easily applicable to the circumstances of any district* (London, 1816).

restore the sum deposited, the consequences must be ruinous"; if instead the depositors were converted into proprietors of the stock which their funds purchased then "all difficulties" would be "completely removed", and the gentry would be saved from a potentially ruinous situation if the funds fell. Furthermore, if the upper classes were "merely agents of those classes for whose benefit it [saving] is intended", then habits of saving, once established, would "produce incomparably more benefits, not only to the poor, but to all orders of society in England". The disposition of a poor man invested directly in and for himself in the funds would compel him to feel an interest in the "existing order of things", "strongly attached to the existing constitution of their government" but, moreover, it would intensify the "reformation in the moral habits of the bulk of the people" by making the poor investor even more self-reliant, "stimulating that desire of independence", without the overweening attention of his superiors.⁴⁶⁹ This stringent line of self-help in the form of individual independence above all else grew out of that preference for savings banks in lieu of friendly societies (the position of Malthus), wherein "every man should work for himself...every man should save for himself", and drew criticism of the mutual aid of friendly societies from commentators such as John Davison and Edward Copleston, partly also upon grounds that it placed the security of poor men upon each other's shoulders; hardly a safe bet, it was thought, given the post-war depression.⁴⁷⁰ The logical extension of self-help was that the greater the facility of self-responsibility and self-reliance, the greater the moral reform and inculcation of independence that was wrought: "The individual who, however humble his station, shall have thus accumulated a fund adequate to his exigencies, will feel his consequences increased. He will be raised in the scale of civil society. He will learn to respect himself, and he will be respected by others".⁴⁷¹ Copleston held that "a poor man should not be expected to save for another" and that it was "the principle of the savings banks itself, that is the freest from all objections" for "the mere unrestrained power of withdrawing his deposit invests him with the character of a proprietor, and tends to nurture all those qualities which naturally spring from the possession of property – prudence, frugality, self-respect, dread of mendicancy and dependence".⁴⁷² In contrast to such extremes of autonomy, reformers such as Thomas Courtenay, a member of the 1817 committee, urged the formation of parochial benefit societies, to which all poor

⁴⁶⁹ Haygarth, *An explanation of the principles and proceedings of the provident institution at Bath*, p. 9, 18-19, 24, 96-97, 105-106; J. Bowles, *Reasons for the establishment of provident institutions, called Savings Banks; With a word of caution respecting their formation* (3rd edn., London, 1817), p. 9.

⁴⁷⁰ See J. Davison, *Considerations on the poor laws* (Oxford, 1817), p. 19; E. Copleston, *A second letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel, MP for the University of Oxford, on the causes of the increase of pauperism, and on the poor laws* (Oxford, 1819).

⁴⁷¹ Bowles, *Reasons for the establishment of provident institutions*, p.7.

⁴⁷² Copleston, *A second letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel*, pp. 103-105.

parishioners would be invited to subscribe.⁴⁷³ In Courtenay's bill, these benefit societies would operate as parochial friendly societies, secured out of the rates, to which members would subscribe in case of future want. However, once "such poor person has had the opportunity of providing for himself or herself under the occurrence of such casualty, by contribution to such benefit society, but has wilfully and after due warning, neglected to make such provision, then and in that case it shall not be lawful for such Justice or Justices to make any order of relief in behalf of such poor person".⁴⁷⁴ The extension of the remit of the friendly society to the parochial level effectively transformed it into an instrument for subsidising the rates out of contributions from the poor, negating the spirit of saving, and reduced the autonomous self-help of the poor to the active upkeep of one's membership obligations. Courtenay's bill, although its provisions were included in the 1817 committee report, failed. It aimed to change too much the existing parochial structure. Parochial benefit societies also went too far in taking the matter of self-help out of the hands of the poor – they did not give enough leeway to self-betterment as the motive force of self-help, and consequently negated the moral dimension of positive individual agency. Instead, saving as a means of accumulation and proof of character remained centre stage as the favoured means of reform, as it held out the prospect of abolition of the rates rather than a greater contribution on the part of the poor, which might still be swallowed up by economic distress forcing a heavier burden on the rates.

Following Rose's Act accumulated funds were deposited with the National Debt Office, which would instruct the Bank of England to credit the sum to the 'Fund for the Banks of Saving'.⁴⁷⁵ The facility of paying funds into the Sinking Fund raised opposition to the measure, and a rumour that the government sought to annex the savings of the poor to pay off the national debt was dismissed as ridiculous in the commons. Cobbett, however, was more vociferous in his protests and certainly the anointment of Rose as the parliamentary figurehead of the movement raised serious concerns of hypocrisy given his infamous possession of sinecures and the radical drive towards retrenchment of the public finances.⁴⁷⁶ However, opposition was largely drowned out by the swift expansion of the movement and by the prominence given to savings banks within the debates over the poor laws

⁴⁷³ See *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXIX, (25th March, 1819), pp. 1159-1161; T. P. Courtenay, *A treatise upon the poor laws* (London, 1818); *Copy of a letter to the Rt. Hon. William Sturges Bourne: Chairman of the select committee of the House of Commons appointed for the consideration of the poor laws / from T.P. Courtenay* (London, 1817).

⁴⁷⁴ *A bill [as amended on re-commitment] for the further protection and encouragement of friendly societies, and for preventing frauds and abuses therein; and for authorizing the establishment of parochial benefit societies* (London, 1819), p. 9.

⁴⁷⁵ Horne, *A history of savings banks*, p. 79.

⁴⁷⁶ William Cobbett (1763-1835), a farmer, radical reformer and journalist, wrote influential polemics on a number of political topics over the period in his *Political Register*. For more on Cobbett see R. Ingrams, *The life and adventures of William Cobbett* (London, 2005); I. Dyck, "Cobbett, William (1763–1835)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5734>, accessed 18 Aug 2012].

occasioned by the 1817 committees, a prominence occasioned by complementarity both with other reform schemes within the self-help institutional typology and with the prevailing discourse of poverty. In particular, the growing clamour for national education was thought to be the surest complement to facilities for savings, education infusing “good principles” but saving adding habits of economy, industry and such as would “fortify good principles” and “afford the best safeguard against vice”, and “gradually drying-up the main sources of pauperism”.⁴⁷⁷ Similarly, Rose declared that “the instruction of the poor claims our earliest and most serious attention, as the most probable means of rendering them industrious, and their labour productive”, and saw a need to make poor children “useful to the community, as well as profitable to themselves”, as the “prevention of poverty is more advantageous in every point of view, than the best regulated plans for...relief”.⁴⁷⁸ The parliamentary trajectory of savings banks is suggestive of the trend towards self-help in poor law discourse, with the shift in debates being felt in policy prescriptions. A facility for saving was seen as the crucial component of the reform agenda of the post-Waterloo era, forming the central strut of a legislative programme that aimed to eradicate dependent poverty and abolish allowances, giving a bigger role to the discipline of the market and individual agency as the mechanism of societal reform and prosperity.

The 1817 Commons committee report on the poor laws declared how “from the growth of the systems of savings banks, they are inclined to expect very beneficial results, not only in affording to the industrious poor a secure deposit for their savings, but in familiarising them with a practice, of which the advantage will be daily more apparent”; for, “the encouragement of frugal habits would, in any state of society, be an object of importance; but your committee are strongly impressed with the opinion, that in the present situation of the poor in this country, it is chiefly by a gradual restoration of a feeling of reliance upon their own industry, rather than upon the parochial assessments, that the transition to a more whole system can be effected”. The committee went on to advocate parochial benefit societies, as an evolution of savings banks for they “may furnish facilities for effecting the desired transition, from the present system of relief to one founded upon better principles”. The societies, given security out of the rates, were “calculated to afford greater pecuniary advantages than could result from the unaided contributions of the subscribers”.⁴⁷⁹ Even the rival Lords committee, which explicitly rejected the notion of any fundamental alteration in the

⁴⁷⁷ J. Bowles, *Reasons for the establishment of provident institutions*, p. 10, 13.

⁴⁷⁸ G. Rose, *Observations on the poor laws and on the management of the poor in Great Britain arising from a consideration of the returns, now before Parliament* (2nd edn., London, 1805), pp. 23-24; G. Rose, *Observations on banks for saving* (London, 1816), p.1.

⁴⁷⁹ *House of Commons select committee report on the poor laws* (1817), pp. 12-23.

poor laws, (hoping that a more stringent attention to their execution would enact a diminution of the rates) recognised the good effects to be expected from savings banks:

It is expedient to recommend the adoption of provident or savings banks, as likely to increase the comforts and improve the condition of the poor, and to render them less dependent on parochial relief; which...can never be so satisfactory to the person who is the object of it, or so consistent with those honourable feelings of pride and independence which are implanted in the heart of man, as that resource which is the result of his own industry and the produce of his own exertions.⁴⁸⁰

That the Lords and the Commons committees could agree on the beneficent effects of savings banks, and on the necessity of breaking the tendency of the poor to become dependent upon the poor rates, suggests a ubiquity of interest in reforming the poor laws towards greater independence. This was the principal *raison d'être* of self-help, as it would free the gentry from a debilitating drain on their resources as well as giving greater reign to the market to police the morals and exertions of the poor. The success of savings banks was due to the resonance of these institutions with imaginings of self-help as the route to both ameliorating the condition of the poor and diminishing the burden of the rates whilst simultaneously disassociating the upper classes from culpability for distress. The inculcation of useful habits would raise productivity but the inducing of a character of independence as the reference of relief would enable more permanent effects of subservience to the market, deflate calls for wage regulation and effect a moral reformation of society. The Lords in general disagreed with the systematic undermining of the traditional order of things and so were suspicious of wide-sweeping measures to transform provision for the poor or involve parliament in upturning established practice, and had a history of opposition to measures that were considered as too radical, such as Acland's annuity scheme or Courtenay's plan for parochial benefit societies. Such opposition could be construed as a distinct lack of enthusiasm in the Lords for measures that made the poor too independent or disrupted traditional paternalism, but a middle ground of supplementing the existing Poor laws with positive institutions of self-help that would enable the more stringent operation of the existing laws to diminish pauperism and revive a "disposition to economy" proved an amenable compromise.⁴⁸¹ As suggested above, a programme of allotments, savings banks and education held out the prospect of a change in the habits and character of the poor that would lessen the burden of poverty and eradicate improvident dependency; frequently a combination of these measures was proposed.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ *House of Lords select committee report on the poor laws (1817)*, p. 12.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁸² For example, Major Torrens thought any reduction in the rates "Must necessarily depend upon the extension of knowledge, and the formation of prudential habits amongst the mass of the people. And when we contemplate the probable effects of the schools of Bell and Lancaster, as well as of our numerous banks for

Savings banks were addressed to the labouring poor as they were, appealing especially to those who were “well-disposed to provide for their own maintenance” yet had no “secure depository”.⁴⁸³ The creation of such a worthy body of the poor could be either by showing the poor “how scanty a pittance the parish can afford to a whole family...in comparison with the numberless comforts which they have now the opportunity to provide for themselves”, thus appealing to a desire of self-betterment, or by making it harder for those who did not contribute to such schemes to get relief (as Courtenay and De Salis advocated), or by instilling from early years a disposition towards saving and frugality that would manifest in adulthood as a reliance upon self-help.⁴⁸⁴

Education and Schools of Industry

A further strand in the policy portfolio of self-help outlined by reformers of the Napoleonic period was that of education. This strand comprised two interweaving threads; that of schools of industry and that of what can be described as more academic learning. Schools of industry were contrived mainly to inure the labour force to habits of industry and the discipline of the manufactory whilst a more academic education, comprising greater focus on reading and writing, scripture and arithmetic, was designed to produce socially useful and moral labourers. The difference between these two

the accumulation of small savings, we may anticipate an almost incalculable improvement in the condition of the labouring classes, and look forward with confidence to the period when a prudential check on population shall apportion the supply of labour to the demand, and thereby banish poverty, with its consequences, discontent, and turbulence, and disaffection, from the land”. Although Torrens complained that “the benefit to be expected from our school and bank societies, though certain, is remote” for “these excellent institutions are calculated to prevent the future recurrence of pauperism; not to remove that which already exists”, and suggested “a more extended system of colonization” to combat current distress, his was an infrequent complaint, *A Paper on the Means of Reducing the Poor’s Rates, and of Affording effectual and permanent relief to the labouring classes, presented to the chairman of the committee on the Poor laws* (London, 1817), pp. 515-516, 518-519

⁴⁸³ Haygarth, *An explanation of the principles and proceedings of the provident institution at Bath*, p. 45; Twiss, *A tract on savings banks*, p. 4.

⁴⁸⁴ Haygarth, *An explanation of the principles and proceedings of the provident institution at Bath*, p. 36; See also Jerome Count De Salis, *A proposal for improving the system of friendly societies, or, of poor assurance offices; and, by increasing their funds, rendering, in process of time, on the principle of accumulation, all parochial taxation for the relief of the poor unnecessary, by Jerome Count de Salis, of the Holy Roman Empire* (London, 1814). De Salis proposed that “all persons earning their livelihood by manual labour...should be induced to subscribe to these [parochial level union of existing societies] friendly societies”, whose funds would be topped-up and secured by contributions and subscriptions from “opulent inhabitants”. These new societies would form “a mutual compact between the rich and poor inhabitants of a parish, whereby the labouring poor, on the condition that their funds be better managed, and accumulate more speedily, give up the direction of the funds of the societies of which they are members, and by subscriptions of the learned and opulent, and their advice, the labouring classes derive, in return, a greater advantage from their more improved management”, p. 21.

educational platforms describes a tension within debates over the education of the poor as to how far their education was considered appropriate or whether it bred dissatisfaction. It should be stressed that the numbers of children involved in schooling were always a minority. As Humphries, Kirby and others have stressed, child labour was an integral section of the labour market and an important element of familial self-help in its own right, with the apprenticing out of pauper children a vital source of industrial labour.⁴⁸⁵

The charitable education of the poor is a tradition stretching back before the introduction of the Tudor Poor laws, yet it was only in the Seventeenth Century that the issue became a major plank of poor law policy and was suggested as a means of effecting systemic reform both of the Poor laws and of the poor themselves, in particular the 1690s saw a slew of poor law reformers link the training of the poor in habits of industry as the surest means of aggrandising the nation.⁴⁸⁶ Much of the late seventeenth-century discussion over putting the poor to work in schools of industry, organised like manufactories and with the stated aim of inculcating habits of industry so as to help reform morals, is mirrored in the events and personalities of the reform and evangelical revival movements of the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, not least a concern to reform

⁴⁸⁵ The poor law returns of 1803 (stipulated under Rose's Act: 43rd Geo. III) described how 188,794 children outside of the workhouse aged 5-14 received out-relief whereas those who received the benefit of a school of industry or education was 20, 336. Furthermore, out of over £5 million raised for the poor rates in 1803, only one hundredth was spent on materials for the poor to work on and only one sixtieth of the expense of maintaining and/or relieving the poor was earned back in this way. These findings prompted greater interest in the cost-efficiency of relief. See J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour and the British industrial revolution* (Cambridge, 2010); P. Kirby, *Child labour in Britain, 1750-1870* (London, 2003). Whilst Kirby views child labour as not being widespread in Britain Humphries argues that the period 1790-1850 saw "an upsurge in child labour" and that "child labour was endemic in the early industrial economy, entrenched in both traditional and modern sectors and widespread geographically", and formed an important method of balancing the books for low-income families. The opposition to child labour and bad working conditions in manufactories that became visible with the campaigns of Jonas Hanway in the Eighteenth Century and the campaign for the "ten hour bill" and the support of Richard Oastler (1789-1861) in the Nineteenth, and the Factory Acts of 1802 and 1819, may be seen to parallel the extension of interest in education and in ensuring that the children of the poor were bred up to be socially useful and independent, rather than spoiled for life by early exposure to the harsh conditions and limited skill set of the cotton mill. Further acts in 1833, 1844, 1847, 1850, 1856, 1878 and 1891 set out a liberal agenda of health and safety at work and for the protection of women and children in employment that to a certain degree mirrored the development of Victorian attitudes to femininity. See U. R. Q. Henriques, *The early factory acts and their enforcement* (London, 1971); J. Innes, "Origins of the Factory Acts: The health and morals of apprentices Act 1802", in N. Landau (ed.), *Law, crime and English society 1660-1830* (Cambridge, 2002), and; C. J. Holmes, *Ideology and state intervention in nineteenth-century Britain: The case of the Factory Acts, 1833-1880* (Kingston-upon-Thames, 2002) and R. B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English society, 1650-1850: The emergence of separate spheres?* (London, 1998). For the contribution of apprentices see M. B. Rose, "Social policy and business; parish apprentices and the early factory system, 1750-1834", *Business History*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1989), pp. 5-32.

⁴⁸⁶ For reasons of space a discussion of the development of schooling in seventeenth-century England, and especially of John Locke's scheme for schools of industry has had to be omitted. See D. Filtness, "Schools of industry and habits of industriousness: Making childhood pay in the early Nineteenth Century", paper given at the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past 2011 Conference - *Child Labour in the Past: Children as economic contributors and consumers* (Cambridge, Oct., 2011).

manners and force the poor to contribute more to their upkeep.⁴⁸⁷ These earlier reformers were to provide inspiration and direction for those who sought renewed reform as the heyday of charitable foundations waned and political and economic crises reared their heads in the later Eighteenth Century.⁴⁸⁸ The interest of such campaigners as John Bellers and Thomas Firmin to make the poor

⁴⁸⁷ As evidenced by the activities of the Proclamation Society, inaugurated following George III's 1787 proclamation versus immorality, and the Society for the Suppression of Vice from 1802. Joanna Innes has declared how the revival of the reformation of manners movement in the late Eighteenth Century saw by the mid-1780s "not a county in England that had not seen some local activity designed to repress vice and immorality in some of their more workaday forms of blasphemy, intemperance, idleness, vagrancy, and crime". See J. Innes, "Politics and morals: The reformation of manners movement in later eighteenth-century England", in E. Hellmuth (ed.), *The transformation of political culture: England and Germany in the late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), p. 68. The Proclamation Society, as Joanna Innes has documented, was of particular influence amongst the magistracy and was aimed at inspiring or admonishing men higher up the social scale into virtuous conduct, and with pressuring lesser officialdom into enforcing higher standards. The Society for the Suppression of Vice was more similar to the 1690s societies for the reformation of manners in that it was a prosecution society, whose members brought private prosecutions against offenders, inspired by a slew of tracts which articulated middle class anxiety over the impact of industrialisation or Jacobin sentiments on the conduct of the lower classes, such as John Bowles' *Reflections on the moral and political state of society at the close of the Eighteenth Century* (1800) or Hannah More's *Thoughts on the importance of the manners of the great to general society* (1788). Many smaller and more particular organisations were also active, reasonably successful and conveyed much influence, such as the Society for promoting the external observance of the Lord's Day, and for the suppression of public lewdness (from 1810), or the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity (founded in 1818 with the stated goal of instilling greater labour discipline), culminating in legislation such as the Vagrancy Act of 1822 which sought to redefine the boundaries of public space and acceptable activities therein and was a product of a "rise in behavioural expectations among the opinion-forming classes". Reformers such as Colquhoun were operating from within this intellectual milieu and hence saw the moral reformation of the lower classes as a priority for social order and happiness. See M. J. D. Roberts, "The society for the suppression of vice and its early critics, 1802-1812", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1983), pp. 159-176; M. J. D. Roberts, "Making Victorian morals? The society for the suppression of vice and its critics, 1802-86", *Historical Studies*, Vol. 21 (1981) pp. 157-173; See also T. B. Isaacs, "Moral crime, moral reform, and the state in eighteenth-century England: A study of piety and politics", (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Rochester, 1979); M. J. D. Roberts, "Public and private in early nineteenth-century London: The vagrant Act of 1822 and its enforcement", *Social History*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 273-294, p. 280. See also S. Magarey, "The invention of juvenile delinquency in early nineteenth-century England", *Labour History*, Vol., 34 (May, 1978), pp. 11-27.

For the earlier reformation of manners movement see R. B. Shoemaker, "Reforming the city: The reformation of manners campaign in London, 1690-1738", in Davison et al, *Stilling the grumbling hive*; D. Bahlman, *The moral revolution of 1688* (New Haven, 1968), and; A. G. Craig, "The movement for the reformation of manners 1688-1715", (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1980). For an interesting critique of the earlier movement linking it to 'country' critiques of corruption see D. Hayton, "Moral reform and country politics in the late seventeenth-century House of Commons", *Past and Present*, Vol. 128, No. 1 (1990), pp. 48-89.

⁴⁸⁸ Reformers of the 1690s such as John Locke, the Quaker cloth merchant and political economist John Bellers and Thomas Firmin sought to put the poor to work in large-scale schools of industry wherein the poor would not only be put to work but trained up in habits of industriousness so as to be made not only economically productive but also morally and socially reformed as willing and dedicated labourers, possessed of productive skills. See J. Bellers, *Proposals for a college of industry* (1695), *Essays about the poor, manufactures, trade, plantations, & immorality* (1699) and *An essay for employing the poor to profit* (1723). The *Proposals* influenced not only the Quaker Workhouse at Clerkenwell but also the Bristol Corporation of the Poor's workhouse. Bellers was also an influential member of the London Corporation of the Poor (re-established in 1698). The philanthropist Firmin advocated employing the poor in workhouses and training their children up to vocational pursuits suited to their station in life, so as to ensure future industry and employment; see his *Some proposals for the employing of the poor* (1678). Bellers' tract was consulted by the early socialist Robert Owen, among others, who reprinted 1000 copies in 1817. Firmin's tract was reprinted, with others, in 1787. Locke's was

economically useful and reformed citizens was tied up with the same nexus of concerns (and many of the same personnel) as the reformation of manners movement of the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries, which proved heavily influential in governing circles as magistrates and gentry conspired to prosecute profanity and licentiousness and proselytise moral reform.

The 'Reformation of manners Society', although heavily influenced by Pietism, lost momentum amid funding issues and allegations of corruption in the town corporations to which its principal members were affiliated, noticeably Bristol, appreciably declining after 1725 and suffering a death blow by the backlash accompanying the 1736 Gin Act. Yet the collaborative model that it followed was taken up by other organisations that sought to connect localities under central direction in the interests of returning the populace to some former state of virtuous deference and independence underlined by Christian piety and agrarian physicality. As the Board of Trade lost interest in workhouses in 1703 (the central government was not to revisit the workhouse issue until its 1751 parliamentary enquiry), direction in social reform in the first half of the Eighteenth Century came under the aegis of voluntary organisations. Under the influence of the reformation of manners movement, and affiliated bodies such as the Society for promoting the Gospel and, most significantly, the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, charity schools and schools of industry sprung up around the British Isles (the SPCK returns report 1329 schools in 1723, whereas by comparison a 1777 parliamentary enquiry could identify 1916 workhouses). The SPCK was founded in 1699 with the aim of making "religious instruction the backbone of education in all sorts and conditions of schools", consistent with a focus on children induced by the failure of the reformation of manners movement to eradicate the vice and intemperance of the poor using the rigours of the criminal law (i.e. private prosecutions), which had only served to drive profanity and debauchery underground and out of reach.⁴⁸⁹ As Hitchcock has outlined, the SPCK played a crucial role in social policy in this period, leading localised and parochial reforms through its network of corresponding members (over 450 by

republished in 1790 and formed an integral part of the report of the select committee on the poor laws of 1817 – see J. Tully, *An approach to political philosophy: Locke in contexts* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 237-238. For more on Bellers see T. Hitchcock, "Bellers, John (1654–1725)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004). For Firmin, see P. Dixon, "Firmin, Thomas (1632–1697)", *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011). Owen's model society at New Lanark in the 1810s and early 1820s included plans for early education, from which stemmed an infant school movement, whose schools for younger children were supplementary too, and not designed to replace, the monitorial schools. See P. and H. Silver, *The education of the poor: The history of a national school 1824-1974* (London, 1974), p. 15. See also Harrison, J. F. C. "'The steam engine of the new moral world': Owenism and education, 1817- 1829", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. VI (1967), pp. 76-88.

⁴⁸⁹ M. G. Jones, *The charity school movement: A study of eighteenth-century puritanism in action* (Cambridge, 1938), p. 36, 41. For the transition from workhouse to schools of industry in London see S. MacFarlane, "Social policy and the poor in the later Seventeenth Century", in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay (eds.), *London, 1500-1700: The making of the metropolis* (London, 1986). MacFarlane includes the daily routine for children in the London workhouse, reflecting the concern to instil "honest labour and industry", pp. 263-264.

1700), sending out advice, teaching materials and masters for schools, and promulgating the cause through widespread publication such as the oft-referenced *Account of several workhouses* in 1725 which highlighted the Artleborough working charity school in Northamptonshire as an example to follow.⁴⁹⁰ Joanna Innes has decried how far the school of industry movement has been under-researched, and in this she is quite correct.⁴⁹¹ Yet if the SPCK played the leading role then we can hitch the fortunes of the school of industry to the workhouse, which came to the fore of the SPCK's programme of social reform following the discreditation of charity schools following Mandeville's damning *Essay on charity and charity schools* (2nd edn. 1723). This tract criticised the encouragement given to children to rise above their station and the role they supposedly played in satisfying the parish elite's lust for power, the latter charge also being levelled against workhouses by writers such as Defoe in his *Parochial tyranny* of 1727. Mandeville aimed to demonstrate the futility of ameliorating the condition of the poor, especially through high wages or education, which he blamed for the contemporary difficulties in securing labour pliancy; he was rebuffed by commentators such as the Rev Dr Isaac Watts (1674-1748) whose *An essay towards the encouragement of charity schools* (1728) flatly rejected the notion that charity schools were to blame for the rising cost of labour and who praised the schools as seminaries for useful learning that could be put to work in mechanics and manufactures, the true foundation of the riches of the nation.⁴⁹²

The increasing role of hospitals following the establishment of the Westminster Hospital in 1720, and the Foundling Hospital in the 1740s, and the prioritisation of workhouses following the SPCK-sponsored Workhouse Test Act of 1723, which aimed to cut the costs of outdoor relief following the encroachment of poor relief up the social scale, saw provision for the training and education of children subsumed within broader institutions seeking the reformation of the poor around the moral vector of work, as typified by the working charity school of the Grey Coat Hospital in St Margaret's Westminster. With rising costs and following the political fallout of the 1736 Mortmain Act, which led to questions over the benefit of having much land under the control of charitable institutions, the efficacy of workhouses came under increased scrutiny 1730s-1770s, with the 1770s view crystallising around a conception of the workhouse as an engine of oppression and site of tyranny.

⁴⁹⁰ T. Hitchcock, "The SPCK and the parochial workhouse movement", in Davison et al (eds.), *Stilling the grumbling hive: The response to social and economic problems in England, 1689-1750* (New York, 1992).

⁴⁹¹ J. Innes, "The state and the poor: Eighteenth-century England in European perspective", in J. Brewer and E. Hellmuth (eds.), *Rethinking Leviathan: The eighteenth-century state in Britain and Germany* (Oxford, 1999), p. 234 FN 16.

⁴⁹² For the disagreement between Mandeville and Watts see D. A. Baugh, "Poverty, Protestantism and political economy: English attitudes towards the poor, 1660-1800", in S. B. Baxter (ed.), *England's rise to greatness, 1660-1763* (London, 1983), pp. 77-82.

Coupled with the falling off of mid-century charitable humanitarianism, which, as Donna Andrew describes it, had directed philanthropy towards social utility and the public good, the (primarily vocational) education of children took a back seat to issues of welfare as evidenced by the philanthropist Jonas Hanway's campaigns for the better regulation of parish children, and the concomitant development of "baby farms" in the countryside surrounding the metropolis.⁴⁹³ Centre-stage was taken by discussions over the appropriate size for administrative units of the poor laws, trending away from parochialism and towards larger areas such as counties or unions. William Hay introduced a bill in 1735 proposing new corporations of the poor in each county to fund workhouses, hospitals for children and the impotent, houses of correction ,etc. The bill was rejected only to be reintroduced by Hay again in 1747 and again rebuffed. The author and magistrate Henry Fielding (1707-1754), in his 1753 pamphlet *A proposal for making an effectual provision for the poor* recommended the erection of a vast county workhouse in which the poor—5000 of them—would be decently housed, learn a trade which they would be paid wages for practising, and be instructed in their religious duty to society – but nothing came of it. From the 1760s onwards the reformist MP Thomas Gilbert waged his campaign for unions of parishes and union workhouses for the impotent poor, which reached fructification in his act of 1782.⁴⁹⁴ At mid-century, debates over the poor laws had moved away from ideology and moral correction and towards concern over what Roger North, in his 1753 *Discourse of the poor* called "the immense charge" of poor relief taxation. Bemoaning the burden of poor relief, its depopulating effects and encouragement of dependency, and how houses of correction were "of little or no use", he advocated the abolition of mandatory relief, that the poor should be made to "shift for themselves" and instead look towards discriminatory charity as the

⁴⁹³ See D. Andrew, *Philanthropy and police: London charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1989).

⁴⁹⁴ Thomas Gilbert (1720-1798), land agent and poor law reformer, had submitted bills for the unionisation of parishes to facilitate greater workhouse use in 1765 and 1768 and had published *Observations upon the orders and resolutions of the House of Commons with respect to the poor* (1775), followed by *A bill intended to be offered to parliament for the better relief and employment of the poor in England* (1775) to drum up support for his attempted reforms. He returned to the fray in 1781 with another unsuccessful bill, and subsequently divided his measures into three and re-submitted them to parliament in 1782. Two of the bills, providing for the relief and employment of the poor and houses of correction, were passed but a third on rogues and vagabonds did not. These two acts (collectively known as Gilbert's Act) provided for the creation of parish unions, and for workhouses to shelter the aged, sick, and orphans only. Guardians were to find work for the able-bodied and otherwise to cause such person or persons to be properly maintained, lodged and provided for, until employment could be found. In 1786 he published a second edition of his *A plan of police; with objections stated and answered*, first published in 1781. In 1787 he produced *A collection of pamphlets concerning the poor*, which included one by Thomas Firmin from 1678 and other older works. In the same year he also published *Heads of a bill for the better relief and employment of the poor and for the improvement of police*. Gilbert's final effort for poor law reform came with a bill in 1788 that only had a first reading, though it prompted considerable comment. This measure combined the matter that had been separated in 1782, and it would have made parish unions mandatory, requiring quarter sessions to appoint commissioners to unite parishes, but evidently it never reached the committee stage. For more on Gilbert see Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, Ch. 1, also; S. Shave, (2008) "The welfare of the vulnerable in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: Gilbert's Act of 1782", *History in Focus*, Vol. 14 (2008).

mechanism for helping men to “strive against poverty” with “thought of improvement”.⁴⁹⁵ Thomas Alcock, in his *Remarks on two bills for the better maintenance of the poor*, was similarly critical of the “burdensome poor” and advocated that “the relief of the poor should in this country...be voluntary, not forced, a matter of charity; not a Tax”, but he opposed any scaling up of the administrative unit responsible to the county level, instead calling for a median level just superior to the parish for “every parish...should pay only in proportion to the charge they bring”; any general assessment “would be very unequal and unjust”.⁴⁹⁶ Under such circumstances expensive workhouses and institutionalised care proved unpopular, despite the tension over scale. And thus the school of industry rescinded from view, only to make a dramatic re-appearance due to the drive and determination of the evangelical revival of the late Eighteenth Century, as well as the pragmatic wish to cut the once-again perceived spiralling costs of outdoor relief and solve some of the structural difficulties of poverty by training rising generations to aid themselves. As Joanna Innes has pointed out, “the early and mid-eighteenth century fashion for residential workhouses was succeeded, in the later Eighteenth Century, by a fashion for non-residential (and therefore cheaper), schools of industry”.⁴⁹⁷

After mid-century the charity school movement also seems to have faded somewhat, although estimates of the numbers of schools and students enrolled are both infrequent and unreliable. Whilst Lord Brougham’s commission ‘To inquire concerning charities for the education of the poor’ estimates over five hundred endowed grammar schools in England and Wales at the end of the Seventeenth Century (and 128 added over the course of the Eighteenth), and over 1100 endowed elementary schools and over 1000 unattached charities left for elementary education over the Eighteenth Century, voluntary schools are ignored. Similarly, the 1816 select committee to ‘Inquire into the education of the lower orders’ could only roughly approximate. Jonas Hanway commented in 1766 how the nation “abounds” with charity schools whilst the ‘Society of patrons of the anniversary of charity schools’, witnessed 12,000 attendees at its annual gathering of all London charity schoolchildren in 1782.⁴⁹⁸ Nevertheless, by the 1780s the charity school movement appears to have lost momentum, the reformer Thomas Bernard complaining in 1809 that the SPCK had “thought fit...to lessen the number of children taught...that the rest may be entirely supported” and

⁴⁹⁵ R. North, *Discourse of the poor*, p. 7, 22.

⁴⁹⁶ T. Alcock, *Remarks on two bills for the better maintenance of the poor* (London, 1753), pp. 28-29.

⁴⁹⁷ J. Innes, *The State and the poor*, p. 234.

⁴⁹⁸ See M. G. Jones, *The charity school movement: A study of eighteenth-century puritanism in action* (London, 1964; first published 1938) p. 60; Jonas Hanway was writing in *An earnest appeal for mercy to the children of the poor* (1766), cited in Jones p. 26.

declaring endowed charity schools to be “in general...insufficient”.⁴⁹⁹ In tandem with a renewed interest in uniformity and scale represented by Gilbert’s promptings in parliament, and with the development of annuities and friendly societies under Maseres, Price and Acland, the 1780s saw an efflorescence of interest in the education of the poor as a means of improvement and reformation, beginning with Robert Raikes’ campaign for the extension and systematisation of Sunday Schools from 1782.

The Sunday School movement “transformed a local and particular device for the instruction of the children of the poor into a system of schools” and was a “revival and a continuation of the earlier day charity school movement” which “inspired the Anglican Church to take a lead in the provision of catechetical schools for the children of the poor, when the social and economic conditions at the end of the century called for fresh effort”.⁵⁰⁰ Raikes, writing in his paper *The Gloucester Journal*, and later on in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, saw a need to provide education and guidance for the newly swelled ranks of the urban proletariat and in particular those “multitudes of children...in the shape of wolves and tygers” that prowled the streets on Sunday and outside of working hours, profaning the Sabbath and disturbing the rest of respectful Christians. Raikes saw these children, “in temper and disposition and manners” scarcely “said to differ from the brute creation” as the means of effecting “the reformation of society”, a goal “only practicable by establishing notions of duty and discipline at an early age”.⁵⁰¹ Raikes’ methodology was to visit the houses of the poor and to “enquire how the children behave, make the wicked and disobedient kneel down and beg pardon of their parents, point out to them how greatly it is within their own power to improve their situation and increase their Happiness and Comforts, by such Behaviour. The deserving I reward with books, and some articles of clothes, as a pair of shoes, etc.” The ensuing positive response from the children and parents was remarkable, with the children coming “with great regularity” and demonstrating an urgent willingness to learn, the collateral and intended effect of which was that “quietness, decency and order replaced noise, prophaneness and vice”.⁵⁰² John Wesley commented how he found “these schools springing up wherever I go”, in pleasing complementarity to the Methodist’s own enjoinders to religious education.⁵⁰³ In 1785 the Sunday School Society was set up to systematise and

⁴⁹⁹ T. Bernard, *Of the education of the poor; Being the first part of a digest of the reports of the society for bettering the condition of the poor: And containing a selection of those articles which have a reference to education* (London, 1809), pp. 11-12.

⁵⁰⁰ Jones, *The charity school movement*, pp. 142-143.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

⁵⁰³ J. Wesley, *Journals*, July 18, 1784, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 148. John Wesley was a very influential evangelical and the founder of Methodism in England. For more on Methodism and its influence on the evangelical revival see A. Armstrong, *The Church of England, Methodists and society 1700-1850* (London, 1973), also; T. B. Shepherd, *Methodism and the literature of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1940).

coordinate the schools, receiving over £1000 in subscriptions within six months and opening five new schools in London, whilst in 1787 Raikes confidently declared there to be 250,000 children attending the schools. However, in the 1790s the shadow of revolutionary France disrupted the movement, the Bishop of Rochester decrying how “Schools of Jacobinical religion and Jacobinical politics abound in this country in the shape of charity schools and Sunday Schools”. Sadly, “Jacobinism split the Sunday school movement just as Jacobitism had split the early charity school movement”.⁵⁰⁴ Yet the work of Raikes and his female counterpart Sarah Trimmer – who had opened celebrated schools at Brentford and Windsor and penned the widely-read *The oeconomy of charity* (1787) exhorting young ladies of the upper classes to visit the schools and exercise a civilising influence upon the children – had the effect of forcing “the idea of education, free and universal, into prominence, and kept it there”.⁵⁰⁵ Furthermore, whereas “the limitation of the early charity school movement was due in no small degree to the indifference, and, at times, the hostility of the poor to instruction”, the success of Sunday schools was due to the “desire of the poor for learning, combined with the creation of a means which enabled them to obtain it without the diminution of the earnings” of a six-day working week. In these schools “learning and discipline marched side by side”, a template that would also serve well for the schools of industry, the direction that the impetus towards education took in the 1790s.⁵⁰⁶ However, the impression that the Sunday schools made was not just of the social utility of religious instruction, it was also that the poor showed a desire to improve themselves given the proper means and encouragement by their betters, and this template was to resonate in the minds of those reformers who deplored the encroaching and baleful influence of allowances and dependent poverty.

The recurrent crises of the Napoleonic period, as seen through the lens of a shifting landscape of accelerating urbanisation and industrialisation, focused attention on the means of reducing the social and economic burden of the poor; this attention cohered around the most politically acceptable means of achieving this goal, namely for the poor to contribute to their own upkeep as much as possible. Towards this end there was one principal area in which agreement was almost universal: the need to condition youth to work. As the poor-law chronicler Thomas Ruggles stated in 1789: “Industry, early industry, keeps the rising age from present mischief, and fashions the future man to a life of honesty; and depend on it, the religious principle, together with every respected moral virtue, may be reared on the basis of habitual industry”.⁵⁰⁷ Thus it was that the distresses of this latter period saw a revival of schools of industry, yet with a more modern agenda – not the

⁵⁰⁴ Jones, *The charity school movement*, pp. 152-153.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151, 154.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149-150.

⁵⁰⁷ T. Ruggles, “On the police and situation of the poor, *Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. 12 (1789), p. 429.

mercantilist concern with productivity *per se*, but the concern to fashion an industrious and tractable population as an end in itself. The means to this end was the formation of habits of industry, not merely so as to obtain maximum output, but so as to induce a good character in the labouring poor, so that they might prove themselves industrious, self-reliant and useful citizens. As habits of industry were seen as crucial to engaging the poor as economically useful and responsible members of a rapidly-changing society, so the greater provision of education was detailed as a potential solution to the social ill of an ignorant and dependent tranche of the populace sliding deeper into poverty.

The revival of the school of industry movement grew out of the Sunday school movement to a certain extent, Sarah Trimmer seeing the “only cure for the evils of the age” in the combination of the disciplines of religion and labour. They were aimed at those children who did not already work and were therefore not exposed to the discipline of labour, or at those children who were currently engaged in manufactories in appalling conditions and at close quarters with the subversive morality and profaneness of labouring adults. Trimmer was doubtful of the economic and educational value of early employment in manufactories, and critical of the influence on health and morals therein. Instead she advocated the deflection of such child labour into industrial schools where “labour was mixt with learning”.⁵⁰⁸ These schools, where children would spin flax and wool, put heads on pins, “close” boots and shoes, knit stockings or learn domestic service, were calculated by “enthusiasts” as economically beneficial to the nation, with the work of 100,000 children, remunerated at one half-penny a day for a 300 day year producing work to the value of £625,000 profit.⁵⁰⁹ Elsewhere, the evangelicals Hannah and Martha More, incited by Wilberforce, set up in the summer of 1789 an industry school in Cheddar as part of a project to reform the people of the Mendip villages. The object was to “train up the lower classes to habits of industry and virtue”, and reading, as an unnecessary distraction from this end, was forbidden. The poor in the Mendips “crowded” to the school and more than a dozen further schools were set up by the sisters in the next ten years, with competitions for good behaviour, friendly society, school feasts, etc. making “village life one of active cooperation” and going a distance towards reversing the terrible reputation that Cheddar and its environs enjoyed.⁵¹⁰

Perhaps the most important player in the revival of the schools of industry movement was the society for bettering the condition and increasing the comforts of the poor, a philanthropic collective inaugurated in 1796 under the influence of the treasurer of the Foundling Hospital, Thomas Bernard. Bernard corresponded with branches and schools around the country, compiling several reports on

⁵⁰⁸ Jones, *The charity school movement*, pp. 155-156.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

the progress of the movement. The central ethos of the society was set out by Bernard in his *Of the education of the poor* (1809): “whatever encourages and promotes habits of industry, prudence, foresight, virtue, and cleanliness among the poor, is beneficial to them and to the country; - whatever removes or diminishes the incitement to any of these qualities, is detrimental to the state, and pernicious to the individual”.⁵¹¹ Bernard made the improvement and training of youth central to a holistic attempt to reform the lower echelons of society, declaring how:

Of Education it may be truly said, that it is the only earthly blessing, capable of being universally diffused and enjoyed, with an exemption from all inconvenient consequences. I speak of that genuine and well directed education, which is calculated to fit persons to act a strenuous and useful part, in their allotted station in life; - of that education, which teaches and demonstrates the advantages of early and steady habits of attention and industry, and forms in the heart, stable and permanent principles of conduct.⁵¹²

Upon entering such an institution (often conditional upon recommendation by subscribers, much as soup kitchens had been) the pauper children were told that “if you are industrious, you will be useful to yourself, - to your friends, - to the community at large: - you will escape the seduction of bad company; - you will avoid many temptations, to which the idle and unoccupied are necessarily subjected”. The beneficial consequences of the schools is exclaimed proudly in their reports, the Industry school at Fincham for instance,

provides for their education, and prepares them for their course through life, by early habits of order, cleanliness, and application, - the three most essential articles of acquirement – to parents it is of no small importance; in that it fits their children to get their own bread, while young; and by the profits of their work, supplies, at present, almost all the expense of their food and clothing, at an age when they are too young to go into service – what are its advantages to the public, will be obvious to those, who are

⁵¹¹ Bernard, *Of the education of the poor*, p. 58; See also T. Bernard, *Information for cottagers, collected from the reports of the society for bettering the condition and increasing the comforts of the poor. And published by order of the society* (London, 1800) – this tract encouraged “domestic economy” along the lines of the old adage that “Industry will make a man a purse, and frugality will find him strings for it”. Other tracts held similar ambitions: see William D. Salisbury, *Oeconomic institution, to promote the knowledge, collection, manufacture, and use of articles, the growth of this country: and other objects calculated to give employment to the poor* (London, 1816) – this tract aimed to establish an institution for the teaching of “rural economy”, replete with a “Professor of Rural Economy”, so as to “instruct the poor in the knowledge of various useful plants, and to explain the properties, uses and manufacture of them”, p. 13. Bernard went on: “It must be by the education of youth, by the moral and religious habits of mature age, by the improvement of the cottager’s means of life, by the increase of his resources, and of his habits of industry and foresight, - by these means, and by these only, that the condition of the poor can ever be essentially and permanently improved, - the prosperity of the country augmented, - and the parochial burthens eventually diminished. Without these means, workhouses, and alms-houses, public edifices, and hospitals, may be erected with increasing and unwearied diligence throughout the land, and yet never keep pace with the progress of indigence and misery”, *Ibid.*, p. 59. The juxtaposition of Bernard’s quote here with that of Young on pages 175-176 of his *A six month tour through the north of England* given above highlights the point I made then about improvement overcoming secure stability as the motive force of reform.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

aware, how much we all suffer by the pilfering and profligate habits of our little parochial pensioners; and how large a portion of our parish funds (sufficient, perhaps, to give education and employment to all the poor in England), is annually expended in breeding up and nourishing in idleness, those who, in mature and advanced age, are destined to form the helpless and noxious part of the community;

whilst the Birmingham school witnessed how “they who had once been the pest and dread of housekeepers and manufacturers, are now sought with avidity, as orderly and useful servants, and have every opportunity afforded them of enjoying a comfortable and permanent subsistence”, whilst simultaneously shaving £400 from the city’s poor law bill.⁵¹³ Like Colquhoun, Bernard sought to guard against the “pernicious effects of corrupt and luxurious habits” that accompanied the “increasing streams of wealth” pouring into the country, and that “while the religious education of the great mass of the people is duly and successfully attended to, and they are prepared in their turn to reap and enjoy the benefits of active industry and useful economy, we need never despair of our country” and that “the only effectual and unfailing remedy for the moral evils of civil society, - is a general system of religious and virtuous education”.⁵¹⁴ Bernard was here linking education to the reform, police and indeed safety of the nation. By giving to the poor habits of industry and skills to sell in the labour market the schools of industry were forestalling dependent poverty and encouraging a disposition of self-help, this disposition being “a character to preserve, - with the means of supporting yourself by your own industry, - and with instruction and habits of life”.⁵¹⁵ Education of this nature, appropriate to one’s station in life, was thus seen as conducive to curing poverty by preventive means and alleviating indigence by enabling a contribution towards one keep – as Acland described it, the learning of “those little arts, whereby, in case of lameness or other accident, they might in a more advanced period of life be enabled to earn their livelihood”.⁵¹⁶

The schools of industry as a practical scheme emerged from poor law discourse detailing their potential invaluable role in meeting the difficulties presented by the changing landscape of Georgian Britain. Thus we see Prime Minister Pitt extolling the fiscal utility of schools of industry, advocating their compulsory adoption in his abortive poor law bill of 1796, for “Experience has already shown how much could be done by the industry of children, and the advantage of early employing them in such branches of manufactures as they are capable of executing. How much also would such a design contribute to the easing of the poor rates!” In 1786 Acland had proclaimed that “all idleness in children is just so much vice in the bud, which will never be sure to shoot forth in due season; and that it is a matter of serious concern to a state to bring up children in early habits of industry”, whilst

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 204, 212.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., p. 67, 96.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p. 294-305.

⁵¹⁶ J. Acland, *A plan for rendering the poor independent on public contribution* (London, 1786), p. 52.

elsewhere Bentham envisaged the industry of children being made to contribute to their own upkeep in a national reticulation of pauper penitentiaries organised around the principles of his Panopticon architecture.⁵¹⁷ Working from an observation similar to that of the reformist M.P. George Rose, who bemoaned in 1805 how “much useful labour is lost to the public, by the want of proper means of exciting the industry of the poor” and how “such habits [of industry] only can enable them to be useful to themselves, and to the community”, Bentham adopted a strictly coercive schema that saw the poor as a population to be institutionally housed and controlled so as to realise maximal efficiency and productivity, each contributing as much as one can to the general welfare and utility of society, and thereby acting virtuously.⁵¹⁸ For Bentham, once children have been separated from their parents, “If you have gone thus far, you have passed the Rubicon; you may even clap them up in an inspection house, and then you make of them what you please”.⁵¹⁹ Rumford saw children as the crucial site of reformation for the extirpation of beggary in Munich, similarly the continental reformer von Voght made the installation of habits of industry whilst young a priority.⁵²⁰ In his scheme, the poor were obliged to send all children aged 6-16 to school, “in which they shall work two thirds of the time, and the remainder of it be instructed in reading, writing, casting accounts, religion, and church-music”. Hence:

To no family any relief should be allowed for a child past six years; but that this child, being sent to school, should receive, not only the payment of his work, but also an allowance, in the compound ration of his attendance at school, his behaviour, and his application to work; which amounted to an average of twelve or eighteen pence a week, exclusive of other premiums...by this measure the number of children, far from being a burden, became a great convenience...By these means we as effectually excluded those

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

⁵¹⁸ Rose, *Observations on the poor laws*, p. 26, 25. In the same tract Rose also noted Locke’s plan for schools of industry and suggested that such projected reforms could have few rivals of “higher importance” for the “deliberation of parliament”; pp. 31-32. That Rose advanced educational plans, schools of industry along Lockean lines and savings banks and that all of these measures were detailed in the 1817 Commons committee’s report on the poor laws is surely not a coincidence, suggesting that Rose exerted posthumous influence on proceedings through his friend and mentee Sturges Bourne.

⁵¹⁹ See J. Bentham, *Management of the poor*, (London, 1796) pp. 106-112.

⁵²⁰ Casper Freiher von Voght (1752-1839), was a German merchant and social reformer from Hamburg, who succeeded in reforming the city’s welfare system. From 1785 he dedicated himself to strengthening agricultural and horticultural projects and built in Flottbek close to the gates of Hamburg a model agricultural community. He detailed his reforms in the tract in question here, *An account of the poor in Hamburg between the years 1788 and 1794* (London, 1796), which stressed that “unthinking pity” had “rashly stopped that natural course of things, by which want tends to labour, labour to comfort, the knowledge of comfort to industry, and to all those virtues, by which the toiling multitude so incalculably adds to the strength and happiness of a country”, and that all that should be attempted was to “give the poor a fair chance to work for themselves” (pp. 9-10). The “fundamental principle” of the plan was that “it is literally true, that where no man can perish for want, many will be idle”, a maxim that displayed the same denial of aspirational economy as had Rumford’s strategy (p. 51). Voght displayed the same concern with diminishing as much as possible the burden of the poor and for abolishing beggary as Rumford, and for forcing the poor to earn their keep, yet he preferred out-relief (and the self-discipline it instilled) in terms of providing materials for the poor to work up rather than labour in workhouses.

parents who did not wish to send their children to school, as we had excluded those that did not choose to work; and children became accustomed to look from their infancy upon the means of subsistence, as the recompense of labour, or at least of exertion.

In addition to day schools for unemployed children there were evening and Sunday schools and also a facility for the day care of infants so as to free the parents to work. If the parents proved to be bad or drunken the children were removed and lodged in the houses of the “better sort of poor”.⁵²¹ In such a way the “most abandoned and profligate children”, by “gentle means and perseverance got at last the better of...the vices that grow in children who are trained up to begging”.⁵²² As seen above, both Malthus and Whitbread advocated the education of the poor, whilst John Mason Good saw the implanting of “habits of industry, and principles of honesty, and general morality, into the minds of the young” as crucial to any improvement in the condition of the poor, declaring further that “habits are much sooner generated from inclination than coercion: and that man will be much more industrious, and more virtuous who is himself personally interested in his own labour”. This aspirational psychology was to be trained early, with children as young as 6-7 to be encouraged to group together “to purchase a distinct share for every company in some neighbouring tontine”. The effect of daily useful industry on the young would be the habitude “of industry, and virtue”, it being ever remembered “that the most effectual method to prevent any pauper from becoming dependent on his parish, in any period of life, is to implant within him, when young, the greatest possible number of means of obtaining future support”.⁵²³

The constant re-iteration of the need to instil habits of industry in the children of paupers so as to make them socially responsible adults not only served as a potential salvation for those who sought the moral reform of society, but also met the desire of those who wished to reduce the burden of the rates and retrench poor law expenditure. Education was thought to improve the quality of the pauper population, to undermine dependent poverty and to lead to the development of moral character and the moral reformation of society. This would also pave the way to an eventual abolition of the poor laws, a path that Malthus popularised. This approach underlined the burgeoning emphasis on more formal education in this period, with Andrew Bell (1753-1832) and Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838) both heading up national educational societies amid multiplying calls for the universal education of children.⁵²⁴ The societies initiated by Lancaster and Bell, the

⁵²¹ Von Voght, *An account of the poor*, p. 28, 29, 27.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵²³ J. Mason Good, *Dissertation on the best means of maintaining and employing the poor* (London, 1798), p. 126, 133, 139, 146.

⁵²⁴ For more on Bell and Lancaster see G. F. Bartle, “Lancaster, Joseph (1778–1838)” and, J. Blackie, “Bell, Andrew (1753–1832)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1995>, accessed 30 July 2012].

nonconformist British Society and the Church of England's National Society respectively, were responsible for the massive extension of parochial schooling in the early Nineteenth Century, spurred on by the imperative of ensuring religious instruction in the minds of the young and the fear that each other would win such hearts and minds first. Lancaster was the initial motive force, becoming a schoolmaster in 1798 and in 1801 setting up a "free school" in Southwark offering free education to all. Before long the numbers of children at Lancaster's school were overwhelming and to avoid paying assistants he adopted the method whereby the older boys, the monitors (led by a monitor-general), taught the younger children under the general supervision of the master. What was forced on him by necessity was turned into an advantage and Lancaster set about proclaiming the effectiveness and cheapness of this monitorial plan, wherein reading, writing and arithmetic were taught to the children of the lower classes "at about half the usual price", facilitating an extension of such education through a system of subscription-funded free schools. In addition to his monitorial methodology Lancaster also developed a system of teaching wholly based on reading, with texts usually printed large on a wall for reasons of economy. This system of group learning, comparative to "applying to a school the organization of a regiment, and its evolutions, under the word of command", negated idleness in the schoolroom and led to huge economies in the costs of teaching, as only one schoolmaster need be employed.⁵²⁵ Lancaster published his findings in his *Improvements in education as it respects the industrious classes of the community* (1803, 2nd edn. 1806), which proved hugely popular and attracted many visitors to the Southwark school from influential social circles in London and even attracted royal support from George III in 1805. However, as a Quaker and nonconformist Lancaster's schools were open to children from all denominations and no sectarian instruction was given. Such an approach attracted the ire of Sarah Trimmer, who visited the school at Southwark several times in 1805 and attacked Lancaster's schools as inimical to the interests of the established church. She also criticised the rigorous system of emulation and rewards that Lancaster promoted to encourage learning and discipline in the school, asserting that such methods gave the children ideas above their stations in life and were subversive of social order, and also levelled the charge that Lancaster had plagiarised the methods of Bell, whose own similar monitorial system developed in a school in Madras in India had been described in his pamphlet *An experiment in education made at the male asylum at Madras, suggesting a system by which a family may teach itself under the superintendence of the master or parent* (1797), which had attracted less attention nationally. Lancaster's system absorbed Bell's use of sand, suspended cards, and syllabic reading but differed in the techniques of teaching and in the role of monitors. Bell responded to the sponsorship of Trimmer by re-publishing his pamphlet in a much-enlarged edition in 1805 and then

⁵²⁵ H. Brougham, "Education of the poor", in *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 17 (Nov., 1810), re-printed in D. Gladstone (ed.), *Poverty and social welfare* (4 vols., London, 1996), Vol. 3: "Education 1810-1899", p. 20.

again as *The Madras School, or, Elements of tuition* (1808), which contained his “Sketch of a national institution for training the children of the poor”, in response to Whitbread’s advocacy of a Lancastrian national education system in his proposed poor law reforms of 1807. The ardour of Trimmer and the vanity of Bell and Lancaster led to a schism within the education movement along denominational and political lines, with conservatives such as Robert Southey supporting Bell and Whigs such as Henry Brougham supporting Lancaster.⁵²⁶ Lancaster and his supporters inaugurated the “Royal Lancastrian Society” in 1808 under the leadership of the “Royal Lancastrian Institution for the Education of the Poor of Every Religious Persuasion” from 1810, aiming to set-up a national system of schools based on Lancaster’s system, before Lancaster was removed from office in 1814 following financial scandal and the society became the “British and Foreign School Society”. Not to be outdone, the Anglican riposte to these developments was the formation in 1811 of the ‘National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church’, adopting Bell’s system, at least initially. Although the British Society “made the earlier start, the greater resources and parochial organisation which buttressed the National Society soon gave it the dominant position”. According to the National Society’s reports it grew from 40 schools with 8000 students in 1811 to 1000 schools with 155,000 children in 1817 to 1500 schools with over 200,000 children in 1819. By 1829 numbers had swelled yet further, with 360,000 students enrolled.⁵²⁷

Lancaster set out in 1806 how his system of schools was not intended to infringe upon the established charity or parochial schools “but to provide for a class of children with which they are unconnected, and which they do not provide for at all”, namely the children of the urban very-poor who could contribute nothing to the costs of their education. In this respect the Church of England “was responding in 1811 to the successful new initiative sponsored mainly by nonconformists in an entirely new social situation”. Yet this situation did not merely encompass recipients of this free education it also referred to the social and political upheavals concomitant of the French wars and of industrialisation, for the “education movement sponsored mainly by the churches at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century was built on a sense of urgency in the face of social and political danger”.⁵²⁸ The Rev J. T. Allen summarised such fears in 1819 when he described how “in a large and crowded manufactory, it was impossible for the master to exercise the same patriarchal influence and authority over the moral character and conduct of those who were in his employ”, resulting in

⁵²⁶ Finally, in October 1811, Robert Southey wrote a long article in the *Quarterly Review* setting out the facts and the history of Bell’s system. This was then published in book form as *The origin, nature and object of the new system of education* (1812).

⁵²⁷ Silver, *The education of the poor*, p. 13.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12, 11, 8.

the “general corruption of manners”.⁵²⁹ There was therefore a need to buttress and/or replace the traditional workings of paternalist relations with intermediate institutions that would encourage the inculcation of a self-reinforcing reformatory police amongst the lower classes, this police revolving around the conception of character. It is in this way that schooling should be seen in tandem with the campaign to build new churches that gathered momentum in the post-war period under the leadership of men such as Joshua Watson and John Bowdler, witnessing the inception of the Church Building Society and the Church Building Act of 1818, as well as with the moral worth imputed by savings banks, allotments, etc.⁵³⁰ The aim of such campaigns as church building or religious education was the moral police and pacification of the poor under the direction of renewed religiosity, especially that of the Anglican Church. The National Society was created with “the sole object in view being to communicate to the poor generally, by the means of a summary mode of education, lately brought into practice, such knowledge and habits, as are sufficient to guide them through life, in their proper stations, especially to teach the doctrines of religion, according to the principles of the Established Church, and to train them to the performance of their religious duties by early discipline”.⁵³¹ The education movement aimed at reforming the behaviour of the poor without raising aspirations beyond their proper stations, the goal being to instil a desire for respectable independence and reputation based on moral conduct, such a disposition being reflective of good character. By such means the poor would be “rescued from vice and error” and made “good Christians, and profitable members of the community”, whilst the monitorial system would “render them pliant and obedient to discipline”. This, in accordance with “the anxiety which their parents shew to have them instructed” enabled the infusion of many minds with “good knowledge, and forming...good habits”, the hope being that this “may become universal”.⁵³² The movement for national free education aimed to meet the needs of those who were not yet reached by the charity schools, dame schools, Sunday schools or endowed grammar schools; to make education universally available. The movement thus fitted perfectly with the on-going renovation of paternalism in which institutions of self-help allowed the poor to develop, or not, independence and agency. Schools of industry were aimed more at training the poor to habits of industry and to making them economically productive in the process, training them to their level in society and facilitating the availability of necessary labour. Free schools were seen as more subversive of the social order and attracted more criticism in this respect from “the bigoted and persecuting classes of

⁵²⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵³⁰ For philanthropists such as Allen, Watson and Bowdler and their contributions to social reform and organised philanthropy see M. J. D. Roberts, *Making English morals: Voluntary association and moral reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge, 2004), Chs. 1-3.

⁵³¹ Silver, *The education of the poor*, pp. 8-9.

⁵³² Ibid., pp. 11-12.

society”, Henry Brougham taking considerable pains to negate the perennial arguments first levelled by Mandeville against educating the poor, namely that such activity breeds dissatisfaction with one’s station in life.⁵³³ Indeed, Brougham, a prominent Whig and founding member of the *Edinburgh Review*, was a keen advocate of education, writing a stringent defence of Lancaster in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1810, opposing Bell most especially for his relative failure “in the article of economy” and declaring that “that there is no good whatever to be expected from any endeavours to keep alive the opposition to Mr Lancaster”.⁵³⁴ Brougham, as well as becoming a vice-president to the British Society in 1814, did much to put education on the parliamentary agenda, obtaining a committee in 1816 to “enquire into the education of the lower orders of the metropolis”, the committee revealing not only a desperate need for education but also instancing the misuse of charitable funds. Its remit was extended to the whole of England and Wales in 1818, when Brougham brought in a bill to appoint a commission to investigate all charities in England and Wales. This initiative led to the appointment of the first paid charity commissioners to ensure that charitable bequests were correctly and efficiently applied. In 1820 Brougham brought in a bill to establish a national system of parochial schools but was defeated after a long and determined struggle in the commons. There still existed great unease at the prospect of universal education and at encouraging the poor to look beyond their station, despite Brougham pressing his claims that education notwithstanding the poor would continue to labour for their subsistence and indeed also for new wants, and that a little learning encouraged “greater deference” to “laws and instructions”.⁵³⁵ The notion of a parliamentary-sponsored system of national education, despite the ardent desires of commentators such as Curwen, who saw such a system as “the foundation on which is to be built any system for bettering the condition of the people of England” by “increasing...habits of virtue and probity” as “whatever can lead men to curb their passions and teach them to oppose the future to the present, must be attended with the most important results to their happiness”, was, in addition to inspiring widespread distrust (the memory of Paine’s popular influence still rankled), too much of an interventionist platform for parliament to endorse; the eighteenth-century fashion for permissive legislation being considered preferable and more in keeping with those liberties established in 1688.⁵³⁶ Even Lancaster and Bell argued strongly

⁵³³ Brougham, *Education of the poor*, p. 6. For more on Brougham see M. Lobban, “Brougham, Henry Peter, first Baron Brougham and Vaux (1778–1868)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3581>, accessed 31 July 2012].

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵³⁶ *The speech of J. C. Curwen, MP, in the House of Commons, on the 28th May, 1816, On a motion for a committee for taking into consideration The state of the poor laws* (London, 1816), p. 22. It was this speech by Curwen that induced the formation of the select committee and led eventually to the Sturges Bourne reforms of 1819. Curwen re-iterated his views in a speech in parliament in February 1817, printed in *The Pamphleteer as Speech of J. C. Curwen, Esq., in the House of Commons, February 21st 1817, on a motion for a committee to take into consideration the poor laws*, Vol. X (London, 1817), pp. 49-71.

against the idea of compulsory schooling on such grounds, and state finance was not involved in the building of schools until 1833, and even then to a limited extent.⁵³⁷

Yet education of some kind (especially religious instruction) was a crucial element of poor law reform of this period. Although there were dissenting voices, most reformers included an element of education within their plans.⁵³⁸ This was because it presented an opportunity to re-set the board in the perennial game of cat and mouse with the poor, to disseminate a new subjectivity of poverty wherein it was, as Curwen put it, “an imperious duty, binding on every mortal, to exert his utmost endeavours for the support of himself and those he has contributed to bring into the world...no claim can honestly be set-up for relief till every effort has been made and failed”.⁵³⁹ Similarly, the poet and reviewer Robert Southey (1774-1843) saw “a system of national education” as “the greatest boon which could be conferred upon Britain” and declared it as “the first thing necessary” for “lay but this foundation, and the superstructure of prosperity and happiness which may be erected will rest upon a rock”.⁵⁴⁰ Elsewhere the Noetic, Professor of Poetry at Oxford and later Bishop of Llandaff Edward Copleston viewed parish schools as “the first in importance, in practicability, and in efficacy” for improving the condition of the poor. For Copleston it was “the moral amelioration, not the productive industry of the children from which the public benefit is to be derived”. Education would set in motion a mechanism of reformation, for “a spirit of industry, of self-respect, of moral decency must be promoted by such discipline”. Furthermore, indoctrination at an early age would see to it that “the mere habit of looking to the possession of certain decencies and comforts as necessary, which are not literally necessary, cannot but create...that prudential check upon marriage which...is absolutely essential to the well-being of society”.⁵⁴¹ Calls for parochial schools were frequently heard; the 1817 Poor laws Committee described how “...the institution of parochial or district schools for education, proposed some years since as the basis of an amended system, are now so generally established and supported by voluntary subscriptions, that

⁵³⁷ Silver, *The education of the poor*, p. 16.

⁵³⁸ Eden held little faith in schools as they were dependent upon the zeal of their founders and tended to become wasteful and inefficient once these admirable persons had passed on. Elsewhere George Glover, vicar of Gomer, called national schools “the next great panacea” and maintained that they “can never be trusted as a remedy for the evils that we are now deploring” because “ignorance has not been the cause of our pressure”, the solution to which lay in state retrenchment, for “everything he [the labourer] requires for his subsistence costs him more than double it would do, if the burthen of taxation were removed”. Glover represents an extreme form of market and natural law driven laissez faire, deploring almost all measures of intervention to help the poor. See “Observations on the present state of pauperism in England, particularly as it affects the morals and characters of the labouring poor; in a letter to T. W. Coke, Esq. MP, one of the committee of the poor laws” (London, 1817), in *The Pamphleteer*, No. XX (1817), pp. 372-394, p. 378, 386.

⁵³⁹ Curwen, *Speech...on the 28th May 1816*, p. 23.

⁵⁴⁰ R. Southey, “On the means of improving the people” (1817), in *Essays moral and political* (2 vols., London, 1832), Vol. 2, p. 146, 149.

⁵⁴¹ Copleston, *A second letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel*, p. 102.

they appear to afford the readiest means by which education and industry may be most advantageously united...The Committee would therefore recommend most earnestly a more faithful execution of the existing law by the establishment of schools for the above purposes; and they believe such institutions would be all the more beneficial, if the children were lodged where they would be employed and maintained".⁵⁴² The 1818 2nd report from the [Commons] select committee on the education of the lower orders raised a rallying cry for extending the provision of schools for "Education, even its humblest form, tends to raise the standards of morals, and to *improve the characters* of those who enjoy it; to excite and diffuse a spirit of useful exertions, to increase the energies of the mind, and to bring them to bear with more effect on all the objects of human pursuit, to meliorate the condition of individuals and of society, and to promote the general happiness of life" [my emphasis].⁵⁴³ Copleston, Curwen and those involved in the movement for education understood that it was the processes of socialization and the internalisation of dispositions towards self-respect, independence and self-betterment that formed the real beneficial usefulness of education rather than what earlier supporters of schools of industry such as Bentham or Rumford had seen as the main gain: the instilling of habits of industry, offsetting of costs and the raising of productivity. The later educational reformers associated their schemes more with *character* than with industry, with mental habits rather than physical know-how, hoping in this way to prevent poverty and enable the diminution of the poor rates. Thomas Chalmers, for instance, commented how "one thing is abundantly obvious, that the act of becoming a mendicant is one of unmixed degradation, and the self-respect inspired by education stands directly and diametrically opposed to it".⁵⁴⁴ In part this can be construed as stemming from a change in the context of poor law debates, in that Malthusian sentiment came to the fore; yet to label this movement towards the positive learning of self-help as abolitionist prioritises the stated end to an exaggerated and distorting degree. It was not abolition that was the main concern of such reformers, rather it was the concern to re-align the system of

⁵⁴² *House of Commons select committee report on the poor laws* (1817), p. 15.

⁵⁴³ *1818 Second report from the select committee on the education of the lower orders*, p. 40.

⁵⁴⁴ See T. Chalmers, *Tracts on pauperism; The sufficiency of the parochial system / Thomas Chalmers. Reply to Dr Chalmers' objections to an improvement of the legal provisions for the poor in Scotland; William P. Alison; with a new introduction by David Gladstone* (London, 1995, originally published 1833 as a reprint of articles originally published in the *Edinburgh Review* 1817-1818), p. 334, Chalmers comment here is from 1833. See also T. Chalmers, *Statement in regard to the pauperism of Glasgow, from the experience of the last eight years* (London, 1823). See also Chalmers' article in the *Edinburgh Review* in March, 1817 on the *Minutes of evidence taken before the committee appointed by the House of Commons, to inquire into the state of mendicity and vagrancy in the metropolis and its neighbourhood*. For an interpretation of Chalmers' writings on poor relief which emphasised that "his often clinical approach to poverty and its relief must be seen in the light of his growing conviction that the most important thing was to safeguard the eternal welfare of men's souls" and how Chalmers turned to poor relief as a means of ensuring that the distractions of poverty to minister and pauper would not interfere in the broader project of "bringing the Good news to the poor", see M. T. Furgol, "Chalmers and poor relief: An incidental sideline?" in A. C. Cheyne (ed.), *The practical and the pious: Essays on Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)* (Edinburgh, 1985).

welfare around a more dynamic role for individual agency within a shifting social and economic landscape: to translate paternalism into a macroeconomic institutional form, to instil uniformity of practice, and in the process to effect retrenchment on the rates and a moral rejuvenation of the populace. This was the position on education that Malthus came to adopt: a better understanding of their own position and how to improve it through self-help was the most and indeed only effectual way of helping the labouring poor, a stance that lay behind the drive to national education.⁵⁴⁵

Here we see the emphasis shifting from habits of industry, to promoting the right way of conducting oneself as a member of society rather than as the more narrowly-defined economically productive worker. To work was no longer enough, one should save, budget, demonstrate prudence and frugality, refrain from marriage until it was financially viable and, in the case of applying for relief, prove oneself of worthy character and of having made every conceivable effort to help oneself first. It was such a sensibility that informed the government's legislative enactments of the period 1816-1819, that sought to promote a re-calibration of the provision of relief around self-help, setting out the institutional toolkit for the poor to make use of, and removing the certainty of provision and dependence on the rates whilst also shoring-up the traditional social hierarchy and poor-law system. Legal sanction and encouragement was given to friendly societies and savings banks whilst promoting in parallel select vestries' greater discretion in judging individual appeals for support. Thomas Acland in 1786 declared how "I have always looked upon the poor as children of the state", and indeed one can trace a homologous relationship in the discourse between the position of children within the poor law system and that of the poor within society; both being in need of early training and the realisation of self-sufficiency and social responsibility.⁵⁴⁶ Where the early eighteenth-century reformers viewed poverty as curable in an aggregate sense due to religious revival and moral reform boosting productivity, those of the early Nineteenth Century saw it as curable from the point of view of the individual taking responsibility for their own budget and employment, such responsibility being described as virtuous and, in spite of Smithian conceptions of the unknowing actions of the invisible hand, as acting for the common good accordingly. Thus we see William Sabatier in his 1797 *Treatise on poverty* bemoaning that "when a man is forced to thank, and as it were, to bend the knee for his daily bread, he feels like a slave, and is too apt to act the part

⁵⁴⁵ As espoused by William Ellis in the *Westminster Review* in 1824: "free-schools ought to be erected in such abundance, that every child in England may have an opportunity of learning to read and write" as these were the "keys to knowledge", not just religious but also "knowledge of the laws which regulate wages. Their happiness is inseparably connected with a knowledge of these laws", which would nip discontent and luddism in the bud; W. Ellis, "Charitable institutions", in *Westminster Review*, Vol. 2 (July, 1824), in D. Gladstone (ed.), *Poverty and social welfare*, Vol. 3: *Education 1810-1899* (London, 1996), pp. 305-306. For the influence of machinery on the evolution of thinking about poverty and political economy see M. Berg, *The machinery question and the making of political economy, 1815-1848* (Cambridge, 1982).

⁵⁴⁶ Acland, *A plan for rendering the poor independent on public contribution*, p. 39.

of one".⁵⁴⁷ The juxtaposition of Locke's school of industry schema between the two chronological landscapes in which the government presented it to the public (i.e. 1697 and 1817) describes a continuity of purpose and of form when dealing with the poor, but the deployment of such an institutional toolkit only serves to highlight the topographical transformation that a century of economic, political and intellectual change had wrought upon that relief.

Character and Discrimination

It has been shown how, from within the established policy toolbox of poverty amelioration measures were put forward to encourage self-help and to end dependent poverty, to reduce the burden of the rates and to effect a moral reformation of the poor. From make-work schemes on the land came gardens and allotments, from friendly societies and annuity schemes developed savings banks and plans for parochial benefit societies and from charity schools came Sunday schools and then schools of industry, free schools and the movement for national education. In each of these instances an existing mode of relief was adopted and adapted to further express self-help and couple individual agency to societal improvement. Such relief schemes were complementary and came to be advanced together as an interrelated platform for relieving and reforming the poor out of self-help, enjoining the poor to learn habits of industry and economy, to work and save, which behavioural shift would see the rate burden reduced, criminal and delinquent behaviour pre-empted and the lower orders secured more closely to the higher classes. Since the 1780s pressure had been accumulating to put self-help more firmly at the centre of relief practice, to encourage cost-effectiveness and to ensure that the poor contributed as best they could to their upkeep as a matter of justice and good policy. From 1795 and especially after 1815 self-help became associated with forming moral character and acting as a preventative measure, aiming to build independence and forestalling poverty – as Curwen understood it, "much of the distress so long deplored has arisen from the sad mistake of providing for poverty instead of preventing it".⁵⁴⁸ Hence the appeal of savings banks was two-fold in that they encouraged habits of industry and application through the accumulation of property and self-betterment, *and* because they encouraged frugality and a consequentialist disposition. The full illocutionary force of savings banks was thus not merely that

⁵⁴⁷ W. Sabatier, *A treatise on poverty: Its consequences, and the remedy* (London, 1797), p. 72.

⁵⁴⁸ J. C. Curwen, *Sketch of a plan by J.C. Curwen, Esq. M.P. for bettering the condition of the labouring classes of the community, and for equalizing, and reducing the amount of the present parochial assessments* (London, 1817), p. 17 FN. Curwen here is perhaps alluding to prior efforts to internalise or minimise the costs of relief rather than to deal proactively with the underlying problem, a divergence in attitudes that speaks to the analogous one between internalising or circumventing the costs of distress.

they took pressure off the rates, but also that they provided a mechanism for the formation and testing of character.

The role of a language of “character” in the development of poor law discourse forms another largely unwritten chapter in the historiography. Usually picked up later in the Victorian period, associated with Samuel Smiles’ famous exhortations towards self-help, the prominence of a language of character can actually be traced back to the consolidation and coherence of self-help schemes in opposition towards dependent or criminalising poverty from the outset of the Nineteenth Century.⁵⁴⁹ The language of character was politically neutral but potentially *inclusive*, looking to salve the rupture of paternalist class relations and bind the orders of society together in national improvement. An analysis of the idea of character is complicated, as Collini has shown, by the binary nature of the term. On the one hand it is a descriptive term, referring to “an individual’s settled dispositions” and, on the other, an evaluative term for strongly developed moral qualities. The Victorians assigned a “very large causal role” to “character in the purely descriptive sense”; a role substantially developed within poor law debates at the beginning of the century.⁵⁵⁰ This was consistent with an idea of national character as derived from the peculiar situation of a country, both climatically and politically – hence the continual causal linking of English strengths and virtues with the political institutions and freedoms inherited from the Seventeenth Century.⁵⁵¹ Character was associated with habituation, with a disposition towards duty and independence and can therefore be construed as the product of habits of industry, etc. and the desired end of self-help. For instance, where savings banks would “encourage a habit of frugality”, and aim “to give to the poor the means of providing for themselves”, the broader goal was to create “a new feeling, a spirit of activity and energy” such that the poor “would consider themselves as belonging to a respectable condition in life, and as having a character to maintain”.⁵⁵² Curwen saw “moral character” as formed by “long-acquired habits” and, reminiscent of Colquhoun, praised his own scheme of a National Benefit Society as preventing crime, not only by an increased capability of public surveillance but also because of the change it would wreak “in the habits and general character” of the poor, who would no longer be compelled to “resort to illegal stratagems for subsistence, at the expense of

⁵⁴⁹ See S. Smiles, *Self-Help; with illustrations of character and conduct* (London, 1859). Smiles extolled a view that “the spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength. Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates”, p. 13. The continuities with the type of views developed here in the context of poor relief are plain to see yet have been underreported to date.

⁵⁵⁰ S. Collini, *Public moralists: Political thought and intellectual life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 95-97.

⁵⁵¹ See P. Mandler, *The English national character: The history of an idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (London, 2006), Chs. 1 and 2.

⁵⁵² C. Turnor, *Thoughts on the present state of the poor; with hints for the improvement of their condition: In a letter addressed to the Archdeacon of Lincoln* (London, 1818), p. 12.

character".⁵⁵³ A crucial component of character was the disposition of the labourer towards society and his subjectivity in this respect. Where dependency on the rates had operated to undermine the motive force of self-betterment, labourers became demoralised and sunk in despondency:

Where a system is established which forces every labourer to become a pauper from the hour of his birth to the day of his death, it is useless to expect from him industry, frugality or good behaviour in any form. Of what avail to him would be a good character? He cannot sink lower in wretchedness; and this abuse of the law prevents his indulging a hope of ever rising in the world...the idle and the hard-working must be equally supported at the parish pay.⁵⁵⁴

However, self-help proffered a preservation and reformation of character based on a "spirit of independence" and taking advantage of that "moral elasticity in the character of this people" that made reform possible.⁵⁵⁵ Character was seen as the product of "education and habit", i.e. malleable and not wholly innate, and thus an appropriate institutional structure would enable a reformation of character and the improvement of society.⁵⁵⁶ In languages of character we see the confluence of a psychology of self-betterment with a more fluid conception of the social system where one's standing (if not one's place) in society could be altered, dependant on one's character. The deployment of statistics and budgets and the emergent conception of indigence as a changeable condition in contradistinction to poverty had paved the way for the greater role of individual agency (and self-help) in deciding one's fate. Where the poor (i.e. those on or in danger of being on relief) were seen as "merely the aggregate of individuals who from time to time may have lost their station as component members of society", individuals could be portrayed as vectors rather than as social co-ordinates, and character made the determinant of the magnitude of motive force.⁵⁵⁷ In short, the influence of natural law understandings of poverty enjoyed a mutually enriching partnership with the movement for self-help (grown from the psychology of self-betterment) that altered social

⁵⁵³ J. C. Curwen, *Hints on the economy of feeding stock and bettering the condition of the poor* (London, 1808), p. 355); *Sketch of a plan*, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁵⁴ Anon., *A letter to the magistrates of the south and west of England, on the expediency and facility of correcting certain abuses of the poor laws, by one of their number* (London, 1828), p.7.

⁵⁵⁵ Copleston, *A second letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel*, p. 89.

⁵⁵⁶ J. B. Sumner, *A treatise on the records of the creation, and on the moral attributes of the creator: with particular reference to the Jewish history* (2 vols., London, 1816), Vol. 1, p. 44. Dror Wahrman has explored how a new conception of the self emerged at the end of the Eighteenth Century, which saw a "New Regime of Identity" insist on the unique, ingrained, enduring inner self. This emergence can be construed as encompassing the development of self-help and character, of portraying the poor as redeemable individuals. See D. Wahrman, *The making of the modern self: Identity and culture in eighteenth-century England* (London, 2004). See also his *Imagining the middle class: The political representation of class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁵⁵⁷ Copleston, *A second letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel*, p. 99.

understandings and enabled a language of character to emerge in approbation of socially useful behaviours.⁵⁵⁸

The language of character also lent itself to that theological understanding of political economy, labelled 'Christian Political Economy', which saw poverty as a test of moral probity and as the instrument of maximising the quantity of virtue and happiness in the world, thus fulfilling the divine plan.⁵⁵⁹ Christian Political Economy developed in tandem with classical economics and was particularly suited to the discussions of independent poverty associated with character. The association of character with self-help was given a tremendous impetus by Bishop Sumner's reading of Malthus, as extolled in his popular and influential tract *A treatise on the records of the creation* (1816), which portrayed human life as "a state of discipline, in which the various faculties of mankind are to be exerted, and their moral character formed, tried and confirmed" , in which everyone "must form his own character, his own moral excellence" by expanding the frequency and role of "real practical virtue" which "does in fact consist in an habitual subjection of the mind to the conclusions of reason", or the deployment of behaviours consistent with independence, as this was in the labourer's own interest.⁵⁶⁰ Yet Sumner's reading of character was drawn from existing discussion of character as formed by circumstance and habit, associated with critiques of dependency. Sumner saw character as "formed by circumstances", inclusive of habits, and that the only "true secret of assisting the poor is to make them agents in bettering their own condition, and to supply them, not with a temporary stimulus, but with a permanent energy", i.e. to reform their character.⁵⁶¹ This was consistent with principles laid out in poor law debates dating back to the last quarter of the Eighteenth Century, and shows that understandings of self-help may have been placed in harsher relief by Christian Political Economy but certainly did not originate therein. What, however, was new was an emphasis on the moral quality of character in deciding status and dependency. Such a position was developed further by the enormously popular Scottish evangelical Thomas Chalmers, who emphasised the development of personal character through education and

⁵⁵⁸ The psychology of self-betterment is reflected in humanitarian concerns for prison reform predicated on an idea of "sympathy" with the criminal as a fellow, redeemable, human and can even be detected in changes of architectural form. See R. McGowen "A powerful sympathy: Terror, the prison, and humanitarian reform in early nineteenth-century Britain", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Jul., 1986), pp. 312-334; J. Summerson, *The architecture of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1986), Ch. 5; A. Green, "The polite threshold in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain", *Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 41 (2010), pp. 1-9. For the history of the prison and prison reform see J. Innes, "Prisons for the poor: English bridewells, 1555-1800", in F. Snyder and D. Hay (eds.), *Labour, law and crime: An historical perspective* (London, 1987), pp. 42-122, also; M. Ignatieff, *A just measure of pain: The penitentiary in the industrial revolution, 1750-1850* (London, 1978).

⁵⁵⁹ See B. Hilton, *The age of atonement: The influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford, 1988); A. M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798-1833* (Cambridge, 1991); G. R. Searle, *Morality and the market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), Ch. 2.

⁵⁶⁰ Sumner, *A treatise on the records of the creation*, Vol. 1, p. 27, 237-238.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 410 FN, 338.

discretionary localised charity as the correct mode of relief but held that “character determines circumstances rather than vice versa”, in contrast to Robert Owen who held that man had his character made for him, not by him.⁵⁶² The philosopher John Stuart Mill went a long way towards resolving this tension with his emphasis on the “unintentional teaching of institutions and social relations”, yet in the earlier period Chalmers’ view was the dominant understanding – what was therefore needed was to develop character in order to alter circumstances and promote reformation.⁵⁶³ Where character was seen as shaped by mental context and socialization to a certain degree, it was also held that personal will played a role, and hence that it was possible to morally differentiate between characters in the same circumstances based on their actions, i.e. if someone saved or not given the opportunity.⁵⁶⁴ Hence, whilst poverty might create a context conducive towards criminal behaviour, it did not necessarily follow that all the poor were criminal. Character at this juncture included “the assumption that the possession of settled dispositions indicated a certain habit of restraining one’s impulses”, consequently a “positive connotation was placed on the habit of restraint itself”.⁵⁶⁵ Yet this disposition towards restraint was *the* crucial component of self-help, underlying savings, frugality, industriousness, prudence and self-betterment. Thus the disposition towards independence and frugal self-sacrifice that was synonymous with good character was given further approval by the assignation of the term “manly”, in contrast to feminine dependency. Hence Curwen was able to speak of “manly independence”, Barber Beaumont of “manly resolution” and Charles Thorp of friendly societies “encouraging the manly spirit of independence...and raising the moral character of the people” whilst denigrating the pauper’s “unmanly, selfish, base compliance with the vilest propensities of his nature”.⁵⁶⁶ The language of “manliness” was to develop alongside that of character in later Victorian discourse, yet both had a common seeding ground in poor law

⁵⁶² See Collini, *Public moralists*, p. 91. For more on Chalmers see B. Hilton, “Chalmers as Political Economist”, in Cheyne (ed.), *The practical and the pious*; S. J. Brown, “Chalmers, Thomas (1780–1847)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Oct., 2007) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5033>, accessed 16 Aug 2012].

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99; J. S. Mill, leading article in the *Morning Chronicle* 2nd Dec., 1846, cited in Mandler, *The English national character*, p. 50.

⁵⁶⁴ The standard reading of character was thus a compatibilist reading, taking elements of determinism and voluntarism to produce a relative picture of the individual. That this was the case is highlighted by the uniqueness of Robert Owen’s (1771-1858) viewpoint, which was a necessitarian conception of character as completely dependent upon circumstances. Hence his view that his new model societies might effect an overhaul of the character of the poor, building towards a millenarian vision of societal reformation. See R. Owen, “A new view of society; or, Essays on the principle of the formation of the human character, and the application of the principle to practice” (1813-16) and “Development of the plan for the relief of the poor” (1817), in G. Claeys (ed.), *Selected works of Robert Owen* (4 vols., London, 1993), *Vol. 1: Early writings*.

⁵⁶⁵ Collini, *Public moralists*, pp. 96-97.

⁵⁶⁶ Curwen, *Hints on the economy of feeding stock*, p. 347; J. T. Barber Beaumont, *An essay on provident or parish banks for the security and improvement of the savings of tradesmen, artificers, servants, etc., until required for their future wants, etc.* (London, 1816), p. 37; C. Thorp, *Economy, a duty of natural and revealed religion, with thoughts on friendly societies and savings banks. A sermon preached at the anniversary meeting of the Gateshead friendly society January 5th 1818* (London, 1818), p. 24, 13.

discourse, helping to describe and to shape attitudes to the poor.⁵⁶⁷ The crucial role for such language in forming poor law discourse can be further uncovered by considering the work of Quentin Skinner. A Skinnerian reading of the deployment of languages of character in Poor law debates encompasses the concept of “rhetorical redescription”, reflecting “an underlying attempt to modify existing social perceptions and beliefs”, or those thought to exist, in which the sensibility of a ‘community’ is altered and one social philosophy is substituted for another, “both of which may have seemed rationally defensible at different times” (e.g. allowances).⁵⁶⁸ The changes associated with such deployments of terms “will not strictly speaking be changes in concepts at all” but “will be transformations in the applications of the terms by which our concepts are expressed”. Hence the “rise within a given society of new forms of social behaviour will generally be reflected in the development of corresponding vocabularies in which the behaviour in question will then be described and appraised”, as occurred with potato allotments and savings banks. The polysemy of certain terms, or a change in meaning or deployment which alters meaning highlights the role of certain words “in upholding complete social philosophies” and points to how “our social vocabulary and our social fabric mutually prop each other up”. For Skinner, alterations in language can have a causal influence on the shaping of social life and political processes, with evaluative concepts acting as “engines of social change” – hence the contribution of emergent languages of character, manliness and self-help, and the re-deployment of vocabularies of virtue and duty both described and induced changes in attitudes towards, understandings of and practices for poor relief.⁵⁶⁹

The language of character grew in and out of the deployment of vocabularies of virtue and duty in relation to self-help, ascribing to positive behaviours of saving, frugality, economy and industry a set of values demarcated as useful to the common good and resonant with the civic republican tradition

⁵⁶⁷ For the subsequent development of ‘manliness’ see J. A. Mangan and J. Walvin (eds.), *Manliness and morality: Middle class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1987).

⁵⁶⁸ By “rhetorical redescription” is meant “when an action or state of affairs is described by means of an evaluative term that would not normally be used in the given circumstances”, e.g. the terms ‘character’ or ‘manly’ in relation to poor relief and of ‘duty’ to frugal or prudential self-restraint. Q. Skinner, *Visions of politics, Vol. 1: Regarding method* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 182. See also Vol. 2, *Renaissance virtues*, Ch. 10 and Vol. 3, *Hobbes and civil science*, Ch. 14.

⁵⁶⁹ See Skinner, *Visions of politics*, Vol. 1, pp. 178-182, 186, 165, 173. For a relation of such analysis to Bentham’s schemes, distinguishing between “alluring” and coercing, see Q. Skinner, “States and the freedom of citizens”, in Q. Skinner and B. Straith (eds.), *States and citizens: History, theory, prospects* (Cambridge, 2003). For exegetical considerations of Skinner’s methodology see K. Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: History, politics, rhetoric* (Cambridge, 2003), esp. Ch. 3; J. Tully, “The pen is a mighty sword: Quentin Skinner’s analysis of politics”, in J. Tully (ed.), *Meaning and context: Quentin Skinner and his critics* (Oxford, 1988), as well as Skinner’s defence of his position in “Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas” in the same volume, Ch. 2. For a criticism of the idea of “influence” see Q. Skinner, “The limits of historical explanations”, *Philosophy*, Vol. 41, No. 157 (Jul., 1966), pp. 199-215.

of active virtue in the public interest.⁵⁷⁰ As Collini has noted, “In both the language of virtue and the language of character there is a similar emphasis on the moral vigour of the citizens as the prime requirements for the health of the body politic”, the difference lying in that “striving, self-reliant, adaptable behaviour endorsed by the imperatives of character” being “inherently tied to movement and progress, to a future which must be regarded as to some extent open-ended”, rather than directed at combatting corruption as the older civic republican language of virtue was.⁵⁷¹ As Collini has recognised, character enjoyed an “intimate dependence on a prior notion of duty”.⁵⁷² Self-help was legitimated by the deployment of a language of virtue, whereby the deployment of self-sufficient modes of behaviour, when seen with a communal lens, becomes a positive act in the public good. A common deployment of such terms was in the description of habits of frugality or economy as duties, or industriousness as virtuous conduct. The exact linkage of terms was not fixed, but the sentiment of approbation for behaviours tending towards independence or a diminution of the rates was consistent. Hence “prudence and economy will be found to rank in the highest class of moral duties” and the single man should “take care at least not to impoverish other men, not to drain the public treasury, not to draw nourishment from the general store”.⁵⁷³ Similarly, “virtuous self-denial” and other such “virtuous conduct” enabled the labourer to acquire “a more elevated way of thinking, and of acting” such that he “insensibly becomes superior in mental attainments, as well as in outward circumstances, to the thoughtless herd with whom he is surrounded”, whilst industry and frugality were also “the foundation of many kindred virtues”.⁵⁷⁴ The ascription of a vocabulary of duty and virtue to self-help allowed the portrayal of behaviours of industriousness, frugality, economy and prudence as favourable to the common good, not in the sense of the moral economic agrarian locale but in the macroeconomic sense of a virtuous and reformed labouring class powering economic growth. The operation of the terminology was similar in scope to that of the invisible hand except that the self-conscious choice of virtuous independence or fulfilling one’s duty of frugality could be described as an active contribution to the public good and thus worthy of

⁵⁷⁰ For the civic republican tradition see J. G. A. Pocock, “Virtues, rights, and manners: A model for historians of political thought” in J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, commerce, and history* (Cambridge, 1985); “Cambridge paradigms and Scotch philosophers: A study of the relations between the civic humanist and civil jurisprudential interpretation of eighteenth-century social thought” in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and virtue: The shaping of political economy in the Scottish enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983).

⁵⁷¹ S. Collini, “The idea of ‘character’ in Victorian political thought”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 35 (1985), pp. 29-50, p. 42.

⁵⁷² Collini, *Public moralists*, p. 100.

⁵⁷³ Thorp, *Economy, a duty*, p. 7, 12.

⁵⁷⁴ Beaumont, *An essay on provident or parish banks*, pp. 37-38. Sumner especially coloured his account with such vocabulary: “let everyone in his station do his duty, and there will be little room for murmuring against the condition of the human race...the right performance of these duties is the trial of man’s virtue; and if they are faithfully performed, public welfare is his immediate reward”, Sumner, *A treatise on the records of the creation*, p. 361.

commendation within a civic virtue framework. Hence the poor had a “duty of providing for themselves” and; “everyone, who in the time of youth and vigour, treasures up all he can spare to provide for the season of age and infirmity, has performed the utmost duty that society in that respect can require of him”; that “virtue” to “provide for the misfortunes of age”.⁵⁷⁵ The virtuous behaviour of frugality and prudential restraint were active and voluntary considerations for the good of the public, not just the individual concerned and were therefore worthily denoted as “virtue”. Such usage was also derived from the utilitarian considerations of men such as Bentham, further explored by James Ebenezer Bicheno (1785-1851). Bicheno’s explorations of benevolence in relation to the poor laws led him to consider the issue from the angle of compulsory relief acting as a “substitute for virtue” and that as soon as the maintenance of the poor was abandoned and “virtuous benevolence” (i.e. charity) returned to, “the sooner we shall return to the path of public virtue and happiness”.⁵⁷⁶ On the part of the poor being returned to virtue, it was imperative that they acted for the public good voluntarily, for “to produce any good, it must be a voluntary restraint enforced by self-government, and not a compulsory one by the law”. For Bicheno, it was only a heightened discrimination in the provision of relief to correct “a want of competition of moral qualities” and a “disregard to character” amongst the poor that would suffice, but this could only be achieved by all classes absorbing “a correcter [sic] knowledge of our duties” through “the application of the more general principles of political science, which are the result, not of emergencies, but of policy, utility, interest, and morality combined”.⁵⁷⁷ His deployment of virtue and duty to construct character was echoed throughout the debates of the moment, with such vocabulary re-inscribing the message of self-help with additional resonance.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁵ Various, *Sermons preached before friendly and charitable societies in the country: and written chiefly with the view of illustrating the principles delivered by Mr Malthus, in his essay on population, by a clergyman of the established Church* (London, 1820), p. 121; J. Bone, *The principles and regulations of tranquillity: An institution commenced in the metropolis, for encouraging and enabling industrious and prudent individuals, in the various classes of the community, to provide for themselves...And thus effecting the gradual abolition of the poor’s rate, whilst it increases the comfort of the poor* (London, 1806), p. xviii, xxii.

⁵⁷⁶ J. E. Bicheno, *An inquiry into the poor laws: Chiefly with a view to examine them as a scheme of national benevolence, and to elucidate their political economy* (London, 1824), p. 158, 161-162. Bicheno’s 1824 *Inquiry* was actually the 2nd edition of *An inquiry into the nature of benevolence: Chiefly with a view to elucidate the principles of the poor laws, and to show their immoral tendency* (London, 1817), and proceeded from the same initial premise of investigating the nature of benevolence, an eighteenth-century concept of philosophical weight which incorporated an “analysis of moral actions in terms of their motivation by certain feelings or emotions”. See T. A. Roberts, *The concept of benevolence: Aspects of eighteenth-century moral philosophy* (London, 1973), p. 108.

⁵⁷⁷ Bicheno, *An inquiry into the poor laws*, p. 119, 4, 10, 72, 75.

⁵⁷⁸ The degree of consent over the correctness of self-help as a platform for the reform and amelioration of the poor is demonstrated by the high degree of corroboration between the Tory *Quarterly Review* and Whig *Edinburgh Review* on the issue. The author of the *Quarterly* article (probably a joint effort by John Rickman and Robert Southey), for instance, thought that the “good management of the poor can only result from a thorough knowledge of the character, and especially of the faults, of the individuals who apply for relief”, the

The reform agenda of 1817

Self-help modes of relief came to cohere around a legislative programme centred on the 1817 poor law committees' reports, which may be construed as a high-water mark for autonomous self-help motivated by self-betterment as a self-conscious policy of poverty amelioration.⁵⁷⁹ Embedded in poor law discourse and constructed using the national macroeconomic context of political economy, which gave impetus to uniformity in poor law debates, and the quantified discussions of household budgets and frugality of the 1790s, which foregrounded the responsibility of individual agency for solvency, a conceptual platform was constructed of individual self-reliance within a shifting macroeconomic context. This context of population migration and inter-sectoral economic transference undermined the traditional bounds of paternalist provision, and made obsolete the discipline of the agrarian structure of landlord and magistrate. Self-help proffered a solution to the bewildering social changes instigated by nascent industrialisation and accelerating urbanisation. By anchoring self-help in positive institutions managed by the higher classes a method was presented of retaining the leadership and social responsibility of moral economic paternalism within an altered and altering social and political economic structure. Paternalism was translated into a new guise, the old ways of dependency broken down and replaced by a fluid system of institutional checks and balances that corralled and policed the poor into serving the national good. Commentators such as

cure for which was to develop the "character and conduct of the poor" by "requiring of them to prove themselves meritorious before they can claim any relief beyond the bare necessities of human existence". In this way the "blank days of idleness" would be overcome by "rendering a good character valuable, and discountenancing bad characters", in the process of which; "the labouring classes in England will become moral, respectable, and happy; and in course of time recover the honourable repugnance to parish support, which so wonderfully withstood the baleful influence of the poor laws for almost two centuries, but which has yielded considerably during the last thirty years, and is now giving way with alarming acceleration...this enormous evil can only be remedied by a strict and determined reference to character, by laying upon the man who applies for relief the *onus probandi* that he has honestly endeavoured to maintain himself and his family, that there has been no idleness on his part, no wastefulness, no profligacy; but that he has, as far as in him lay, discharged his duty". The present mode, where "relief is made imperative upon proof of poverty instead of merit", should be discountenanced and discontinued, replaced by the question "not what his present wants may be, but what have been his endeavours to maintain himself and his family". By self-reliance the poor would learn that "they must suffer misery when they have brought it upon themselves, or have not exerted themselves to avoid it [my emphasis]" and henceforth every man would "do his duty and endeavour to be a worthy member of that community in which he is placed". See the *Quarterly Review* (Jan., 1818), pp. 259-308, and the *Edinburgh Review* (Feb., 1818) pp. 261-302. For the development of these Reviews and the huge influence that they wielded on political thought and on the normalization of political economy in public life and political debate see B. Fontana, *Rethinking the politics of commercial society: The Edinburgh Review 1802-1832* (Cambridge, 1985), esp. Ch. 3, and; J. Shattock, *Politics and reviewers: The 'Edinburgh' and The 'Quarterly' in the early Victorian Age* (Leicester, 1989).

⁵⁷⁹ Instigated by a motion from Curwen in the Commons in 1816, the Commons committee was appointed in February 1817. The report is thought to be largely the work of T. Frankland Lewis. On May 9th Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister, recommended that the House of Lords undertake a similar inquiry, and a committee was duly appointed with Lord Hardwicke as Chairman. For the parliamentary progress of the committees and their reports see Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, Ch. 2, and Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, Ch. 6.

John Davison, Edgerton Brydges, Thomas Bicheno, Edward Copleston and the writers of the 1817 Commons committee *Report on the poor laws* presented a multifaceted programme of self-help, a range of policy instruments that parishes could pick and choose from to suit their circumstances and reform their poor in the same way. The principle of relief was made uniform and focused on self-help; a disposition and exertions towards self-help became the criterion of deservingness when distress occurred, as well as the means of negating the need for relief. In this way the necessary corollary of self-help was a more stringent attitude towards a discriminatory provision of relief, and this is reflected in the legislative platform advanced at this time.

The 1817 Commons committee report provides a manifesto for the legislative enactments of the period, and the members of the committee were in themselves some of the foremost exponents of self-help. Curwen, Courtenay and Brydges, members of the committee, all advanced schemes presenting self-help measures (encompassing allotments/gardens, facilities for saving and education or a mixture thereof) as the means of reforming the populace, lessening the rates and driving economic growth. However, the chairman and driving force of the committee was the Canningite politician and poor-law reformer William Sturges Bourne (1769-1845), whose sponsorship of a series of bills in the period 1817-1819 was “the most ambitious attempt to reform the poor laws undertaken between 1601 and 1834”. The resulting successful acts, the Parish Vestries Act (1818) and the Act to Amend the Laws for the Relief of the Poor (1819) (often called the Select Vestries Act), were responsible for “transforming the administration of poor relief and parish government”, and structured parochial government until the Parochial Councils Act 1894.⁵⁸⁰ These acts are sometimes treated out of context in the historiography, presented merely as laying the groundwork for 1834 and of little consequence in themselves due to the relatively low uptake on their permissive reforms.⁵⁸¹ However, recent research has rehabilitated the impact of these acts on relief practice somewhat, and the conceptual impact of the report and interventions on poor law debates has been underestimated.⁵⁸² David Eastwood, however, has stressed the way in which “the reforms of 1817-

⁵⁸⁰ See D. Eastwood, “Bourne, William Sturges (1769–1845)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3012>, accessed 16 Aug 2012]. These acts enabled, principally, the letting of small portions of land to industrious individuals, the appointment of salaried assistant overseers, the establishment of select vestries (comprised of senior landowners/ ratepayers, streamlining the decision-making process), regular minute-keeping in vestry meetings and transformed the local franchise, awarding ratepayers one vote for the first £50 of rateable value and an additional vote for each further £25 of rateable value, up to a maximum of six votes.

⁵⁸¹ See S. and B. Webb, *English poor law history: Part I. The old poor law*, pp. 151-152, cited in Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, p. 75.

⁵⁸² S. Shave, “The impact of Sturges-Bourne’s Acts (1818 and 1819) in rural southern England”. Paper presented at *Rural History 2010*. (Sep., 2010, University of Sussex – published form forthcoming); S. Shave, “The impact of Sturges Bourne’s poor law reforms in rural England”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (June, 2013), pp. 399-429. By 1822, according to the select committee on the poor rate returns, there were 2145 select vestries and 1979 assistant overseers and, with poor rate expenditure falling, “faith in the capacity of

19 reconfigured the debate on the Poor laws, thereby creating scope for serious discussion of alternative strategies of poor law reform".⁵⁸³ It is only by looking at these acts within the context of on-going poverty debates and the series of bills that were designed as a coherent programme of relief (attempting to put into practice the measures endorsed by the committee) that the full implications of the acts can be understood.⁵⁸⁴ The initial discussions in parliament as these acts passed focused on how "any effectual relief" could be provided "while the labouring classes were suffered to look to the public as a means of future support" and was directed at allowances, which had "driven" the "honest and industrious labourer...into a state of degradation". The Parish Vestries Act also made "provision to authorize parishes to discriminate in the relief they afforded, and to regulate its amount and nature by the character and habits of those to whom it was granted", which disposition formed the backbone of the suggested renovated system of relief.⁵⁸⁵

It is clear from the Commons report of 1817, "the baldest and most dogmatic summary of the abolitionist case" and a doctrinaire "triumph of the natural law doctrine" which nevertheless concluded that abolition was impracticable, that a resurgent discrimination in relief provision would form the central pivot of a reform of the poor laws predicated upon an avowed antipathy to allowances and dependent poverty.⁵⁸⁶ The committee declared that "in the present situation of the poor in this country, it is chiefly by a gradual restoration of a feeling of reliance upon their own

parochial institutions to regenerate themselves and reconstruct policy did not seem altogether misplaced", see D. Eastwood, "Rethinking the debates on the poor laws in early Nineteenth Century England, *Utilitas*, Vol. 6 (1994), pp. 97-116, p. 109. Thomas Sokoll has noted a possible peak in applications for relief in the form of pauper letters in 1818-1819, coinciding with the post-war depression but also possibly because of a change in tenor of poor relief practice towards greater discrimination and a corresponding wish to demonstrate deservingness through personal testimony. The sustained upturn in letters across the period 1823-1829 and 1831-4 could perhaps suggest an altered rationale of relief but the fact that these figures reflect the survival of letters (the 1819 Vestry Act ordered the proper keeping of parish records, perhaps ensuring higher pauper letter survival rates thereafter) and not necessarily the original chronological proportions, casts some doubt on this. See T. Sokoll (ed.), *Essex pauper letters 1731-1837* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 18-24.

⁵⁸³ They did this by "refocusing attention on the parish as a forum for poor law reform and on the ratepayers as the principal determinants of poor law policy". The underlying assumption was that "ratepayers' fiscal liabilities and political competence were mutually self-regulating" for "the statistical map of rising expenditure came to be seen not as a function of ratepayers' decisions but rather as an imposition upon them". By contrast, the 1834 reforms represented a "crucial conjunction...between a new programme for poor law reform and a new political imperative for a legislative programme of reform", for "the political transformation of 1830-32 made a general reform of the poor laws feasible in a way that was politically unthinkable between 1817 and 1819". See Eastwood, *Rethinking the debates on the poor laws*, pp. 107-108, 112, 110.

⁵⁸⁴ It does need to be stressed that the distinct Malthusian tint to the 1817 Commons' report was not to the liking of all the committee members, Courtenay preferring a "mild combination of palliatives" in preference to any abandonment of the poor laws, even in the future. See T. P. Courtenay, *Copy of a letter to the Right Hon. William Sturges Bourne, chairman of the select committee of the House of Commons appointed for the consideration of the poor laws* (London, 1817), cited in Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁸⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXVIII, May 25th 1818, p. 916; May 7th 1818, p. 575; Vol. XXXVII, March 12th 1818, pp. 1056-1057.

⁵⁸⁶ Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, p. 78, Poynter, *Society and pauperism*, p. 245.

industry, rather than upon the parochial assessments, that the transition to a more whole system can be effected”, and proclaimed an intention to establish “every possible means of affording special encouragement and facility to meritorious industry, for rescuing itself from an habitual reliance on parochial relief”, for dependence conducted the “moral deterioration” of the people and “the insecurity and danger of the state itself”.⁵⁸⁷ It was of the utmost importance “for the sake of the paupers themselves” to “impel” them,

by the hope of bettering the condition on the one hand, and the fear of want on the other, so to exert and conduct themselves, as by frugality, temperance, and industry, and by the practice of those virtues on which human happiness has been made to depend, to ensure to themselves that condition of existence in which life alone can be otherwise than a miserable burthen; the temptations to idleness, to improvidence, and want of forethought, are under any circumstances so numerous and enticing, that nothing less than the dread of the evils, which are their natural consequence, appears to be sufficiently strong in any degree to control them;

Consequently it was necessary to employ “such careful and just discrimination in selecting the properest [sic] objects of relief, as would contribute materially to put an end to numberless evils arising from the lax administration of the poor laws”.⁵⁸⁸ This discrimination was to be based on character, and a sure proof of character was a disposition towards self-help. Hence institutions such as savings banks would not only induce less recourse to the rates through the accumulation of funds, but also ensure that labourers acquired that character of independence which would make them deserving of relief should it prove necessary. It was to protect this character that those with savings were still allowed relief. The rationale of more discriminatory relief provision founded on an assessment of character has been found by Samantha Shave to be central to how select vestries conducted their business for “unlike open vestries...select vestries frequently remonstrated with individuals thought able to have prevented their own poverty, especially those whose unemployment was believed to be their own fault”. Under the 1819 Act “the morals of the poor came under greater scrutiny” – in Fareham in Hampshire a list of relief recipients was even given to all of the landlords of the public houses, presumably as relief was seen as mutually exclusive with drinking for leisure! Character, discrimination and due deference were all drawn together in a new rationale of poor relief under select vestries, yet this rationale runs right through the 1817 Commons report.⁵⁸⁹

There is a complicity between the savings banks act and the poor law acts of 1818 and 1819, with Rose and Sturges Bourne having had an intimate friendship (they both served as Secretaries of the

⁵⁸⁷ *House of Commons select committee report on the poor laws* (1817), p. 12.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁸⁹ See S. Shave, “The impact of Sturges Bourne’s poor law reforms in rural England”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (June, 2013), pp. 399-429, pp. 417-18.

Treasury) and Rose even claiming that Sturges Bourne “had been brought into parliament by me” and was the only man excepting his son who was connected to him in politics after the death of Pitt. Furthermore, Sturges Bourne and Courtenay aided Rose in preparing the savings banks bill, demonstrating an earlier commitment to self-help by key members of the 1817 committee.⁵⁹⁰ Such a link has not been noticed in the historiography to date and suggests that the proper dimensionality of the committee’s reforms should give a greater role to self-help as an ideological spur, rather than ascribe to the committee an overzealous and all-encompassing adherence to natural law dogma. Such dogma formed the discursive bedrock of the programme of reform, but the regime of practices therein is not necessarily coterminous.⁵⁹¹

To enable greater discrimination the committee prescribed a system of select vestries, as:

In such a body, acquainted as they must be with the situation, character and habits of the applicants, might well be vested that discretion which is so much wanted to discriminate between the claims of the idle and the industrious; and their decisions may, it is hoped, supersede the necessity of those appeals to magistrates, which have been so numerous as to preclude frequently that attention being given to each particular case, which it might otherwise have received.⁵⁹²

The committee was here criticising the current system for enabling the misguided benevolence of magistrates, unfamiliar with the particular circumstances and character of an applicant for relief, to override parochial control of their own rates. By handing control back to those who paid the bill, and increasing the influence in parochial decisions in proportion to the amount of the bill that one paid, it was hoped to effect a self-interested economy in the decision-making process of relief and hence to force the poor into methods of self-help. Furthermore, the problems inherent to such a widened geography of relief as offered by the JPs would be only exacerbated by any national fund for relief, as there would be “an impossibility of devising any adequate means to check the demands upon such a fund”.⁵⁹³ Instead, in deference to the Scottish system of localised discriminatory relief (as championed by Thomas Chalmers), it was only by a uniform system of localised control that economy in the rates could be secured and the character of the labouring poor elevated. The dual mechanism of self-help and discrimination thus held out the prospect of a moral reformation and of the eventual abolition of the rates, providing that a more stringent relief stance would force the

⁵⁹⁰ The full team was comprised of Rose, Courtenay, Sturges Bourne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Attorney General, the Solicitor General, Wilberforce and Josh Newport.

⁵⁹¹ See L. R. Harcourt (ed.), *The diaries and correspondence of the Right Hon. George Rose, containing original letters of the most distinguished statesman of his day* (London, 1860), p. 265, 159; *Journal of the House of Commons*, Vol. 71 (London, 1816), 5th February 1816.

⁵⁹² The assistant overseer was likewise “to make himself fully acquainted with the character and circumstances of each applicant” and assist the vestry in deciding on relief accordingly – see *House of Commons select committee report on the poor laws* (1817), p. 21-23.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

poor into habits of industry and enable a rise in national productivity, augmented by the recycling of a reduced expenditure on the rates into the wages fund as “the money thus restored to its natural channel cannot fail to assist in increasing the natural demand for labour”. Only by “abandoning gradually the impossible condition, that all who require it shall be provided with work” and by withholding “general and indiscriminate relief” from the able-bodied could a long-term solution to poverty be effected wherein “where prudent habits are established” the poor will “avail themselves of a high rate of wages, to better their condition, rather than greatly increase their numbers” for it was “the supply of labour...which they alone have the power to regulate”, which was putting pressure on the poor.⁵⁹⁴ The coupling of discrimination to self-help would place membership of an institution such as a savings bank or, most especially, the projected parochial benefit fund, as “the surest criterion of the industry and providence of each parishioner”, and compel the adoption of those habits of industry, frugality and prudence which would enable an amelioration of their condition.⁵⁹⁵

It is possible here to tease out two complementary threads of analysis: on the one hand a Malthusian systemic view of the poor laws looking towards tighter regulation of population as inducing an improved standard of living and eventual abolition of the rates, and on the other hand a correction of dependent poverty through the operation of self-help as the determinant of discriminatory relief. The former strand looms large in the analysis, underpinning the theoretical justifications of the committee’s provisions, yet the latter strand forms a bridge to concurrent practice and has been under-represented in analysis of poor law discourse. The Commons report was a product of ideology and a dredging of the public sphere for suggested remedies to poverty, seeking to “prove a hypothetical case”, in contrast to the Lords Committee which was based much more upon research into practical examples, experience and first-hand accounts.⁵⁹⁶ As such, its advocacy of parochial farms, schools of industry, loans, parochial benefit societies, savings banks, etc. should be seen not just as complementary to a Malthusian conception of natural law and abolition but also in relation to the pragmatic process of effecting a reformation of the poor and a diminution of the rates in the immediate timeframe, drawing upon the established typology of modes of relief but packaging them anew as determinants of character.⁵⁹⁷ Self-help was thus a means and an end.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁹⁶ See Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁹⁷ Such a concern also underlay the committee’s projected scheme to reform the laws of settlement and to fix the earning of a settlement after three years of continual residence without recourse to the rates, and without more than sixty days of absence in one year. Such a change, attempted in the Settlement of the Poor Bill (1819), would “be most beneficial” to the “labouring class of the community” as it would not only enable the mobility of labour but also “insure their being maintained, where they had maintained themselves, where they

This stance is illustrated by that clause in the Parish Vestries Bill, later dropped, “by which the parish officers are empowered to take away children from their parents when unable to support them, and to place them in schools established for the purpose”. This clause was returned to the discussion by Sturges Bourne in his Poor Rates Misapplication Bill, with the express aim that, by replacing child allowances it would “spare many parishes half the applications that were now made” but also engender an end to that dependency caused by rates-in-aid-of-wages and also ensure that “the poor would be educated in principles of morality and religion, and apprenticed out to trades; by which they would be made useful members of society, instead of their growing up in sloth and ignorance, as was at present too frequently the case”.⁵⁹⁸ The bill also provided that “no relief, should, for the future, be given to any able-bodied labourer in employment – a provision which...would point out the necessity of granting him more adequate wages”.⁵⁹⁹ Sturges Bourne was here attempting to force the issue of re-establishing a living wage for the poor by ending subsidisation from the rates. Interestingly, the opposition to this bill, whilst having an important dimension of humanitarian concern for the parents thus separated from their children, tended, led by Curwen, to focus on Malthusian concerns for the encouragement to improvident marriages that it offered as “it removes from the people the care of themselves, thereby destroying that necessary forethought and economy which mixes up the future with the present” as “whatever lessens the influence of the present by combining it with the future, has a powerful influence on the moral conduct of mankind”. Curwen’s opposition was constructed upon a call for sufficient wages to enable self-help, for “to destroy pauperism, the people must be enabled to live;- an augmentation of wages and an exemption from taxation are the only measures which can restore the labouring population to that independency of character from which they have so lamentably receded...The first remedy is to give them a fair competency. From this will result independence of character and consequent content and happiness”. The goal of ending dependency on the rates and decoupling wages from allowances was shared (Curwen, it should be remembered, was also on the committee) but the means advocated differed.⁶⁰⁰ The bill was killed by opposition from Lord Liverpool, who declared it

would be more likely, if meritorious persons, to experience in case of need the kindness of real benevolence. It is hoped that it might operate as an inducement to active and faithful service on the one hand, and on the other, to prevent such service being interrupted by an interested consideration for parochial funds”. *House of Commons select committee report on the poor laws* (1817), p. 28.

⁵⁹⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XL, (May 17th 1819), pp. 465-473.

⁵⁹⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXIX, (March 25th 1819), p. 1158.

⁶⁰⁰ Curwen, the progenitor of the committee in 1816, made a *volte-face* and opposed its re-instatement in 1819 on the grounds that the government itself “ought at once to meet the question fairly” and embark on a programme of retrenchment as it was “excessive taxation”, “the depreciation of money” and “the great rise in the price of the necessaries of life” that had caused the present malaise. The committee was re-instated, with

nonsensical to spend a vast amount of money on establishing schools solely for the purpose of enabling a diminution of the rates.⁶⁰¹ Instead, the development of character through self-help was the proffered solution; as it would engender a reluctance to go to the parish, the labourers would strive more towards independence through industry, frugality and economy, employing dietary substitutes such as potatoes or working longer hours. For those who still could not make ends meet, workhouses would ensure that relief was not given for nothing, especially “to avoid the greater evils of granting pensions to out-lying parishioners” who were not under the watchful eye of the overseer, and in parishes where employment was scarce parliament could grant a loan for the undertaking of public works.⁶⁰² Where formerly the “economy of makeshifts” had been made use of to augment earnings and keep oneself and one’s family from going on the parish, now modalities of self-help would ensure the same.⁶⁰³ The missing mechanism was a disposition towards independence, which disposition could only be realised through the creation and maintenance of character, either by education and/ or the owning of property, such as savings or a cow. The poor were co-opted into the movement, made the subject of appeals and the object of activity in the public sphere, as Joseph Mayett noted:

At this time [1820] there was a great many tracks [tracts] came out and their contents were chiefly to persuade people to be satisfied in their situation and not to murmur at the dispensations of providence for we had not so much punishment as our sins deserved – and in fact there was but little else to be heard from the pulpit or the press and those kind of books were often put into my hands in a dictatorial way in order to

Castlereagh defending the government on the grounds that an issue such as the poor laws was of such magnitude that it should not be left to the designs of a partisan administration – *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXIX, (Feb 9th 1819), pp. 400-415.

⁶⁰¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XL (1819), p. 1514.

⁶⁰² *House of Commons select committee report on the poor laws* (1817), p. 20; The Poor Employment Act (1817) appointed a number of commissioners who were empowered to make loans (money was drawn from the Consolidated Fund or from the issue of Exchequer Bills), initially for a period of three years, to any person or persons, within certain limitations, who could show that the loan would be used to create employment. The commissioners were authorised to make advances up to a total of £1.75 million. Subsequent acts extended the powers of the commissioners and authorized additional loans. Such loans fitted into the wider background of public expenditure by votes of supply (which contributed £32 million 1793-1817 towards a wide range of social and economic projects). This act, similar in form, aim and ambition to the Church Building Act of 1818, was of important consequence, according to M. W. Flinn, as it acknowledged the obligation of government to combat unemployment (albeit on a local, permissive, level – although it can be seen to meet the original demands of the Elizabethan Poor laws) and initiated the regular practice of making government loans for public works. See M. W. Flinn, “The Poor Employment Act of 1817”, *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1961), pp. 82-92. See also *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. XXXVI, (May 14th), pp. 569-574; (May 21st) pp. 818-819; (June 10th), pp. 928-932.

⁶⁰³ For the term “economy of makeshifts”, a term encompassing the various ways and means by which the poor made ends meet, see O. H. Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974); S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.), *The poor in England 1700-1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003). See also J. Innes, “The mixed economy of welfare, 1683–1803”, in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, self-interest and welfare in the English past* (London, 1996).

convince me of my errors...which drove me almost into despair for I could see their design.⁶⁰⁴

Thus the discriminatory relief predicated upon character was a central component of poverty discourse from the 1810s, centred on self-help. This had developed from the promulgation of self-help schemes as a means of limiting expenditure on poor relief and of reforming the poor, but the Sturges Bourne enactments aimed to place self-help and character at the heart of the system of relief. This direction of reform was echoed by poor law commentators outside of parliament too. The author of *A letter, addressed to C. C. Curwen, Esq. MP on the poor laws* (1817), thought that “every person, having the means, ought to contribute towards the supply of their wants when reduced to distress” and that “much injury is done to the morals of the people, by the ease with which parochial relief is now obtained”, consequently, those on relief should be made to “work in some manner” but also “the obtaining of relief when in distress, must depend upon the character of the applicant” and the “injurious effect on the lower orders...can only be counteracted by some plan restraining the claims for relief from a public fund, to those whose conduct and sufferings render them, in the opinion of their neighbours, deserving objects”.⁶⁰⁵ The poor law commentator W. M. Clarkson bemoaned the “absurdity of giving relief indiscriminately” and castigated the poor for using claims of the want of work as “a cloak for idleness”, whilst simultaneously suggesting schools of industry, savings banks and a National Poor Office to balance the rates with expenditure.⁶⁰⁶ Mrs Marcet, whilst advancing the cause of savings banks, friendly societies and educational establishments, also considered it a solemn “duty to ascertain whether the object whom we relieve is in real want” and called for social elites to “proportion our charity not only to his [the applicant’s] distress, but also to his merits. We ought to do much more for an industrious family, whom unforeseen or unavoidable accidents have reduced to poverty, than for one who has brought on distress through want of a well-regulated conduct”.⁶⁰⁷ Elsewhere, the Noetic theologian John Davison (1777-1834) in his *Considerations on the poor laws* (1817), set out his position that “in prospective legislation, the more severe the rule is made, and the more rigorously the line is drawn, to the exclusion of undue claims...the better is the legislative arrangement; better, both for the security of the public interest so guarded, and also for the more clear and precise statement of the course of duty prescribed to the individual”.⁶⁰⁸ The poor laws had made the poor’s “habits...their

⁶⁰⁴ A. Kussmaul (ed.), *The autobiography of Joseph Mayett of Quainton (1783-1839)* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 70.

⁶⁰⁵ Anon., *A letter addressed to C. C. Curwen, Esq. MP on the poor laws, containing a safe, easy and economical substitute for the present system* (London, 1817), p. 7, 16-17, 27, 18.

⁶⁰⁶ W. M. Clarkson, *An inquiry into the cause of the increase of pauperism and poor rates; With a remedy for the same, and a proposition for equalizing the rates throughout England and Wales* (London, 1815), p. 3, 11.

⁶⁰⁷ J. H. Marcet, *Conversations on political economy: In which the elements of that science are familiarly explained* (London, 1816), p. 168.

⁶⁰⁸ J. Davison, *Considerations on the poor laws* (Oxford, 1817), p. 6.

own worst evil”, and it was only by re-setting such habits with the breaking of dependency on the rates that reformation could be achieved. For Davison the “necessities of the poor...plainly make their duties”, and these duties “make their character...it is equally vain to try to separate their character, if it is to be good for anything, from the just apprehension and plain fulfilment of their especial and personal part of duty in life”. The poor held a duty of self-reliance, this being the mechanism of character development, which in turn formed the proper criterion for relief. Davison described how a parochial benefit fund should be made the “test for the subscribers’ certificate for relief under disability” whilst “every man should work for himself...every man should save for himself”. Furthermore, the rich held a reciprocal “obligation of duty” to “take their proper share in the duties of parochial affairs”, and most especially to “put the common villager, or labourer, in the way of understanding the little resources which he has in his possession, and turning them to account...by a closer intercourse with his capacities, capable of direction, and with his feelings, capable of being trained”.⁶⁰⁹ Davison elaborated a vision of responsible paternalism aimed at precipitating such a reformation in the character and habits of the poor, a shift away from indiscriminate relief or the “very hazardous system of workhouses” towards a more discerning and interested mode of paternalism shaped around facilitating self-help and directing “the able labourer to trust to his own resources, in his frugality, and assiduity, and recommendations of character for his support, and to restore him to the independence of being intrusted with his own affairs”. Davison advocated the strengthening of relief for the infirm and the gradual abolition of automatic relief, which caused dependency, for the able-bodied over ten years. Such abolition, effecting the “direct transition from parochial dependence to independent exertion” was possible if self-help schemes were advanced to enable labourers to be self-sufficient in times of scarcity, this being beneficial from the point of view of national productivity also for “to supersede the personal motive is to throw away so much force of labour”.⁶¹⁰ For manufacturing workers, this would be by savings, as provident institutions “give a machinery for the economical habit to work with”, and in the case of agricultural labourers, by cultivating smallholdings and other sources of income. Some provision for the indigent would be supplied by the rich making voluntary donations to a fund to assist the poor. Davison’s reform scheme made any relief dependent upon “some test of their [labourer’s] previous economy” and railed against indiscriminatory allowances, for

The first aspect of a fixed legal provision of maintenance, in the contingency of want, independent of personal character, or any other pledge of antecedent economy, exertion, prudence, or merit of any kind, is a most pressing invitation to all who like bread better than labour, and living at ease more than on the practice of self-denial, to

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 71, 13, 19, 51, 105.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., p. 47, 99, 113, 62.

remit much of their pains, especially the pains of contrivance and frugality in the husbandry of their affairs, to the readier and less irksome plan of living at the cost of others on the wide open common of parish subsistence...to think of it as a sure resource against their heedlessness, indiscretion, and mistakes; to play with their duties, which they may discard at will.⁶¹¹

Furthermore,

The foundation of all moral feeling and moral conduct is in a responsibility, in a man's own person, in the consequences of his conduct. A sense and perception of this responsibility is the spring of the practical principles of virtue. It enters into our highest duties. The Poor laws shake this foundation. They tell a man, he shall not be responsible for his want of exertion, forethought, sobriety. They deal with him as if no such responsibility existed. By cancelling the natural penalties of a great deal of his vice, they darken and perplex his own notions of the demerit of it.⁶¹²

By "continual discretion" and the "guiding care and influence of men of weight, character and public spirit" based around facilities of self-help, the labourer would be enabled to become independent of poor relief and a "domestic, manly, and independent character" would be afforded to him, with the poor no longer a "cumbrous, diseased excrescence...upon the healthier part of the public body".⁶¹³ Davison thus corroborated the fundamental mechanism of the committee's recommendations, yet his tract also highlights two other important aspects of the mature self-help movement, namely an updated form of paternalism and a stress upon virtue and duty as the constituents of character.

'New Paternalism'

The "new paternalism" enshrined in a greater application of discrimination and active involvement of the upper classes in promoting self-help took the traditional moral economy form of paternalism as that set of relations within which market relations were embedded and aimed to transfer the locus of operations away from issues such as price or wage rate or the protection of the localised common good and towards setting up and supporting a framework of positive institutions for facilitating self-help, as the organising principle of a new approach to the problem of poverty.⁶¹⁴ The types of activities that were now being advanced as virtuously promoting the public good were those of instituting schools or savings banks, visiting schools or workhouses to ensure accountability, being on the board of a charitable initiative or taking parochial office, enabling frugal habits through potato cultivation in allotments or gardens and instilling greater industriousness amongst the poor

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p. 112, 24, 65.

⁶¹² Ibid., p. 67.

⁶¹³ Ibid., p. 120, 112-113, 121, 19.

⁶¹⁴ Wilberforce and other evangelicals also called for the upper classes to take more responsibility for the poor in their district and to assume leadership of moral reform. See Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, p. 23. Calls for greater involvement by elites in social life and active leadership in civic affairs feature frequently in the Poor Law literature of the period, especially in the form presented here.

through a principle of accumulation. Hence Bone (incidentally, a leading member of the London Corresponding Society and London Reforming Society) aimed to “direct” the “liberal efforts of the affluent” towards “exciting a spirit of independence and virtue amongst the poor” whilst Thorp decried how “little hope of benefit from any plans of usefulness, or of improvement in our eternal economy, can be entertained, unless persons of station, property and intelligence will do their duty to the public, by an active, zealous and sedulous attention to the business of the country...we want their presence and cooperation”.⁶¹⁵ Although calls for elites to adhere to their social duties towards the poor and to manage their localities better were not new at this juncture, an emphasis on upper class involvement stands out from the savings banks literature, encouraging men of character, standing and worth to actively promote and enable such institutions in their locality. Hence Beaumont remarked: “The only way...by which the higher ranks can give aid to the lower in their temporal concerns, without running the risk of aiding them to their ruin, is by affording every possible encouragement to industry and virtue, - by inducing them to provide for their own support and comfort, - by cherishing in them that spirit of independence, which is the parent of so many virtues, - and by judiciously rewarding extraordinary efforts of economy, and extraordinary instances of good conduct”. The best way to do this was to “be the Interest Bankers for the poor in their respective neighbourhoods...in that way they do more for the good of working people, than by any other act of general kindness”.⁶¹⁶ Elsewhere, Bowles called for the “superior orders...by considerations of self-interest, as well as by motives of humanity, to encourage institutions, the tendency of which is to render the latter [inferior orders] industrious, frugal, and temperate”.⁶¹⁷ Dr Haygarth went further in exhorting the most sensible or kind-hearted inhabitants of a district to “use all their influence” to solicit “their ignorant and improvident neighbours and acquaintances, so as to persuade them to preserve themselves and their offspring from the wretchedness of want”, whilst the “active services” and “zealous exertions of all will be wanted, and should be called forth into action” to institute “regulations to enable poor people to provide the means of self-support”.⁶¹⁸ Copleston, whilst acknowledging that raising wages was a “more manly line of action” on the part of the upper classes, nevertheless recognised that it was in the “active superintendence” of savings banks that “the benevolence of country gentlemen may most effectually be employed – certainly not in lending a ready ear to the complaint of paupers, and in signing a hasty order for relief out of the property of others”.⁶¹⁹ We see from the lists of trustees and committee members of such

⁶¹⁵ Bone, *Principles and regulations of Tranquillity*, pp. iii-iv; Thorp, *Economy, a duty*, p. 32 (Appendix: Letter to Re. John Collinson, rector of Gateshead).

⁶¹⁶ Beaumont, *An essay on provident or parish banks*, pp. 37-38, 41.

⁶¹⁷ Bowles, *Reasons for the establishment of provident institutions*, p. 11.

⁶¹⁸ Haygarth, *An explanation of the principles and proceedings of the provident institution at Bath*, p. 35.

⁶¹⁹ Copleston, *A second letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel* p. 108.

institutions that the gentry, clergy and local notables were well represented but also that merchants and army officers were too, suggesting that savings banks and their ilk held out the prospect of enabling paternalism further down the social scale (such middle class paternalism was integral to the civil society, associational culture and voluntarism of the Victorian period) and aiming to suture the wounds in the social fabric inflicted by manufacturing; to bind the orders of society closer together.⁶²⁰ This updated form of paternalism was more suited to a post-revolutionary emergent industrial economy, facilitating self-help whilst distancing the upper classes from direct responsibility for the labouring poor. This was not a transliteration but a translation of paternalism into the new arena of self-help, an arena more conducive to the macroeconomic canvas of political economy and to the post-revolutionary political distancing of government from distress. Urban elites, separated spatially and socially from their labourers, sought to structure social mediation so as to compel moral reform without assuming the kind of involvement in the lives of the poor that had traditionally been the route to social synergy. By enabling self-help and making this the criterion of character and relief they could play a minimal role and simultaneously restore to the poor their independence and encourage the labourer to “feel his consequence increased...he will learn to respect himself, and he will be respected by others”.⁶²¹

The idea that saving (and like activities) was a positive good both as a means (to achieve character) and as an end (as a facility for avoiding future poverty), underpinned the emergent ideology of self-help by appealing to a psychology of self-betterment that, it was hoped, would overcome the “privileged idleness” of dependency and leisure preference; in this self-help was buttressed by its contingency to deservingness and thus to the established provision of relief.⁶²² The installation of futurity in the affairs of the poor was to be achieved by a subjectivity of self-responsibility, self-restraint and individual character, reinforced by a language of virtue and that utilitarian consideration for the common good that morally underpinned political economy. The individual was re-contextualised as a member of society, not just of a parochial community, and hence the sphere of his duties was widened to encompass this broader schema and character (as a uniform system) deployed as the measure of his commensurate worth, with utilitarianism supplying a justificatory morality. The broader common good held a stronger moral authority, hence the attribute of

⁶²⁰ For lists of trustees see the appendices of the various savings banks tracts analysed here, as well as those catalogued in: Sir Francis Burdett (main author), *Annals of banks for savings: Containing an account of their rise and progress, reports and essays on their national importance, their constitution, &c., particulars of the earliest institutions, full instructions for their formation, and every detail connected with their management under the late act of parliament: together with reports and communications from more than sixty institutions in Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1818).

⁶²¹ Bowles, *Reasons for the establishment of provident institutions*, p. 7.

⁶²² *Quarterly Review* (Jan., 1818), p. 267.

character carried with it greater approbation and greater censure. This transitioning from communal institutions such as the friendly society or common to specifically self-help institutions such as savings banks or allotments was emphatically *not* about removing notions of morality and fairness from the economic equation, but rather a means of giving a larger operative sphere for morality. The consistency of languages of virtue and character belies the stringent moral role of self-help in a broad sense. It was not what was fair to the poor *per se* in a paternalist sense that mattered but what was fair to society in a utilitarian sense. This formation of the discourse of self-help underlay the legislative enactments of 1816-1819, yet it also lived on into the 1820s, patterning later plans for the further salving of poverty and shaping the discursive background to the Poor Law Reform Act of 1834.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

The 1834 Poor Law reforms

The groundwork to 1834 was substantially laid in 1819. The difference lay in a greater emphasis on discrimination and on discipline as the tool of discrimination. The intervention of positive institutions of self-help faded in comparison to calls for greater industry and frugality and stress on policing the boundaries of relief provision, forming a discursive terrain hospitable to the Benthamite principle of less eligibility and the professional uniformity of Poor Law Guardians and Unions. The move in 1834 towards in-relief and workhouse discipline should be construed as an embracing of Benthamite machinery and administrative efficiency and cost-effectiveness rather than of the principles informing Bentham's own proposals. Bentham had sought to ameliorate the condition of the poor as a means of overcoming the inherent destabilising effect of a right to subsistence that he saw as grounded in a utilitarian conception of society. The 1834 reformers, by contrast, sought to utilise Bentham's bureaucratic apparatus so as to enforce an understanding of poverty as resulting from the decay of character. The centralising forces of Bentham's plans were revived, but the unifying and edifying spirit with which they had been imbued by their author was stripped away. The divergent strands of institutional discipline laid out earlier were thus recombined, yet their resultant progeny had endured an upbringing besmirched by the spectre of revolution and scarcity and offered little of the solace, optimism and unity offered by its forebears.

As Peter Mandler has asserted, "all the crucial elements of the New poor law were in intellectual currency in country gentry circles before 1820...the 1834 diagnosis of the poor-law was available in 1817, and so was the prescription – the workhouse system – which followed logically from that diagnosis. What was not available in 1817 was the political will and means necessary to implement a new poor law". Furthermore, it was this "political paralysis" that "accounts for the short-lived vogue for poor-law abolition that historians have detected in and around 1817". The difference between 1817 and 1832 Mandler discerns as the agricultural crisis and Swing Riots of 1830-1831 that swept the country, coupled with "the political crisis which unseated the Tory government" and "created a space for innovatory policies", driven forward by the "stimulus" of a "rising industrial middle class on the heels of the Great [Parliamentary] Reform Act" of 1832.⁶²³ The principal innovations of 1834 lay in the centralising tendencies of the legislation and the doctrinal adhesion to the principle of less eligibility, to which the revived workhouse test was appended as the mechanism of police. Yet underneath such administrative contrivances lay consistency in the underlying principles of positive

⁶²³ P. Mandler, "The making of the new poor law *Redivivus*", *Past and Present*, Vol. 117 (Nov., 1987), pp. 131-157, p. 146, 148-149, 145.

self-help as the foundation of the new approach to poverty, with a poor man of character held to be deserving and, moreover, as extremely unlikely to need or claim assistance. Such consistency is to be expected from the royal commission on the poor laws of 1832 which “truly was a rerun of the 1817 committee”, and even included Sturges Bourne.⁶²⁴ The findings presented here largely corroborate those of Mandler, with the important distinction that whereas the 1817 reforms saw permissive self-help within the ideological context of an aspirational psychology as the means of overcoming poverty, by 1834 the context had shifted to one of more punitive and aggressive measures for combatting distress and perceived idleness.

Mandler has portrayed divergent strands in the historiography pertaining to the 1834 reforms; on the one hand there is a championing of the influential role of Benthamite Utilitarianism on the royal commission of 1832 through men such as Nassau Senior and Edwin Chadwick and the dethroning of the country gentlemen in the localities by Boards of Guardians, which cohered in a dramatic shift in poor law theory and practice and ushered in classical liberalism.⁶²⁵ On the other hand, the new poor law is seen to represent a resurgent paternalism and the Boards of Guardians “actually represented a shift of power from the rural middle classes to the large landowners”.⁶²⁶ Between these strands lies the position of historians such as Steve Hindle or Mark Blaug who emphasise the localised, negotiable nature of poor relief.⁶²⁷ For the purpose of the present discussion, operating at the level of discourse, a different middle path can be traced that reconciles the two strands to a certain degree: that of practices of self-help which sought the discretion of local, parochial elites but that looked to the new understandings of utilitarian political economy. This position is closer to Mandler’s own stance of emphasising “a new ethos prevalent *among the landed gentry* in the first decades of the Nineteenth Century” [my emphasis], a “modernized gentry ethos” that superseded ‘country’ ideology.⁶²⁸ Mandler has developed his thesis, analysing how the science of political economy was blended with natural theology by the Noetics at Oriel College, Oxford, and directed towards the “tory ends” of the “preservation of social stability and hierarchy, the defence of established institutions in Church and State” and the influence of this movement on the 1832 royal commission. The Noetics emphasised the “power of virtue” to effect economic growth and Mandler highlights their influence upon liberal

⁶²⁴ Ibid., p. 149

⁶²⁵ See S. and B. Webb, *English poor law history, part 2: The last hundred years* (London, 1929) and P. Dunkley, *The crisis of the old poor law in England, 1795-1834* (New York, 1982).

⁶²⁶ See A. Brundage, *The making of the new poor law* (London, 1978); A. Digby, *The poor law in nineteenth-century England and Wales* (London, 1982); For the discussion of this divergence see Mandler, *The making of the new poor law redivivus*, pp. 131-132.

⁶²⁷ See M. Blaug, “The myth of the old poor law and the making of the new”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 23 (1963), pp. 151-184; M. Blaug, “The poor law report re-examined”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 24 (1964), pp. 229-245; S. Hindle, *On the parish?: The micro-politics of poor relief in rural England, c.1550-1750* (Oxford, 2009). For a powerful critique of Blaug see K. Williams, *From pauperism to poverty* (London, 1981).

⁶²⁸ Mandler, *The making of the new poor law redivivus*, p. 132.

Toryism and the 1834 new poor law. Although Noetics such as Copleston and Davison moved the cause of self-help forward, Mandler overlooks the debt owed to them by independent developments within Poor Law discourse directed towards greater self-help.⁶²⁹

Mandler notes in conclusion how “above all, the new poor law represented a redefinition of individual responsibility” as “the burden of responsibility for the pauper’s maintenance had been shifted from the community to the pauper’s own family”. However, “the responsibility of the governor had also been redefined. Social cohesion and economic growth were now seen as functions of a ‘natural order’ minutely specified and divinely ordained. Governors had a positive responsibility not to tamper with it.”⁶³⁰ Yet what Mandler overlooks is that this tampering extended to the positive need to ensure that the tampering already effected by the poor laws was mitigated as far as possible by positive institutions of self-help, particularly in the face of the emergent platform of trade unionism and Chartism, which also offered self-help of a sort. Indeed, the poor law discourse of self-help should be seen as contributing to the emergence of class consciousness and of languages of class for it called for the labouring poor to become self-conscious of their role and duties in society and to act accordingly. Moreover, the certainty of detection proffered by greater vestry discrimination held a parallel with calls for greater certainty and proportion in criminal law, directed at reforming social ills and policing the underclass. In these issues of class and police Colquhoun held a pivotal position, with his analysis of productive and non-productive classes informing nascent trade unionism and working class radicalism whilst his simultaneous appeals for props to stave off indigence helped to create the political role for self-help that at once lifted the working classes and empowered them whilst it checked collective action as unmanly.⁶³¹

Nevertheless, by 1834 there appeared to be a need for greater discipline in the affairs of the poor as the optimistic hope of the early century that the increased application of labour and industriousness would enable an expanding national product to alleviate distress faded. The allure of self-betterment and appeal to an aspirational psychology was eroded by class consciousness and the growing realisation that self-help and the distant hope of improvement could only do so much. The decrease in per capita relief expenditure that the committee on poor rate returns had uncovered in

⁶²⁹ P. Mandler, “Tories and paupers: Christian Political Economy and the making of the new poor law”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Mar., 1990), pp. 81-103, pp. 86-88.

⁶³⁰ Mandler, *The making of the new poor law redivivus*, p. 157.

⁶³¹ See P. Colquhoun, *A treatise on the wealth, power, and resources of the British Empire* (1815). See also A. Briggs, “The language of ‘class’ in early nineteenth-century England”, in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.) *Essays in labour history* (London, 1960). For the implications of such developments see A. Briggs, *Chartism* (Stroud, 1998) and A. Briggs, *The age of improvement, 1783-1867* (London, 1967). Interestingly, the *Edinburgh Review* for February 1818 praised savings banks as enabling workers, through the accumulation of funds, to potentially with-hold their labour and hence improve their bargaining position with their employer, offering the prospect of higher wages over the longer term, p. 299.

May 1825, from 13s in 1813 to 9s in 1825, was abruptly halted by the financial crisis of 1825-26 and the ensuing depression, which saw relief expenditure in Lancashire (as one of the hardest hit counties) rise by 47% over the previous year; by 1826 a select committee had been formed to explore the viability of mass emigration as a means of alleviating distress.⁶³² In addition, by 1834 the influence of Thomas Chalmers and the evangelicals and Christian Political Economists who saw the world as a state of moral trial rather than as training (as Malthus had) was growing in government circles as Liberal Toryism came to the fore. These developments corroborated and helped to bring to prominence the theme of greater discipline as a test of deservingness. The 1817 committee and 1819 reforms offered an optimistic picture of self-help and betterment, displaying ambiguity over the workhouse and hope for savings banks. Yet by 1834 savings banks were largely being used by industrious, not indigent labourers and the proclamation of the *Edinburgh Review* in February 1818 that savings banks “presuppose such a character” of virtuous industriousness rather than create it seemed to ring true, especially as legislation of 1828 (annual limits on deposits of £30 with a total ceiling of £150, plus a reduction in interest from 4.5% to 3.75%) had been designed to limit the size of deposits, which it was thought demonstrated the improper use of savings banks by those higher up the social scale with capital to spare.⁶³³ Whereas in 1818 the *Quarterly Review* was able to declare savings banks as “a true sinking fund for the extinction of pauperism” by exploiting the self-betterment of the poor, in 1826 a petition of the poor to parliament for relief was “roughly told that they ought to have deposited their earnings in savings banks” and by 1834 the workhouse test said nothing of betterment, addressing itself to the fear of falling in the social scale and of declining standards of living; hence it internalised deservingness and spared the overseers the kind of discerning discrimination that had characterised the application of self-help to relief practices.⁶³⁴ The emphasis from the later 1820s on more stringent discipline in the affairs of the poor arose from the perceived failure of positive self-help to motivate the poor away from dependency. The roundsman system was “coming in for increased criticism as further stripping the labourers of all initiative and respect”, noted the 1824 Commons select committee on labourers’ wages, whilst the later application of the labour rate incentivised farmers to offer employment, constrained at the market rate of pay, but was criticised for unfairly charging non-employers with the labour bill, much as

⁶³² The committee on labourers’ wages in 1824 had brought unexpected reports of increased employment in many rural districts, and gave some cause for optimism despite its conclusion that “a surplus population” was encouraged by the rates-in-aid. For subsequent developments see M. Daunton, *Progress and poverty: An economic and social history of Britain, 1700-1850* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 456-457; Cowherd, *Political economists and the English poor laws*, pp. 154-160.

⁶³³ See A. Fishlow, “The trustee savings banks, 1817-1861”, *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Mar., 1961), pp. 26-40, p. 30-31.

⁶³⁴ *Quarterly Review* (Jan., 1818), p. 300; W. Lewins, *A history of banks for savings* (London, 1866), cited in *Ibid.*, p. 26.

allowances had been criticised.⁶³⁵ An increase in discipline, it was widely felt, was needed to restore independence and character to the labourer and to *compel* the actions that self-help had encouraged. By operating from compulsion and deterrence rather than betterment the 1834 reforms championed the deterrent side of the self-help/ discrimination equation, painting self-help anew as a more negative configuration for avoiding the workhouse. Building from the deterrent labour tests that had viewed any kind of work (including stone-breaking and road-building) as preferable to relief without industry, the deterrent workhouse test revived the 1723 Workhouse Act but in this arrangement the test was more of a means of enforcing self-responsibility than of mere discouragement of applications for relief.⁶³⁶ This is demonstrated by an analysis of the poor law reformers of Nottinghamshire from 1819, who J. D. Marshall has credited with an influential role in shaping the poor law policy of 1834, especially as one of their number, George Nicholls (appointed overseer by the chairman of the quarter sessions the Rev. J. T. Becher in 1821), was a poor law commissioner in 1832.⁶³⁷

Becher's "Anti-Pauper System", which aimed to combine a workhouse operating under the "deterrent principle of less eligibility" with the "classification of the inmates of workhouses, standardized accounting and centralized union administration, the provision of cottages for the 'guiltless poor', small gardens for the industrious, employment for the able-bodied, medical dispensaries for home patients, workhouse hospitals, savings banks, friendly and endowment societies, penny clubs, free schools and libraries", set the tone for reform in the area.⁶³⁸ However, Nicholls, in his *Eight letters on the management of the poor* (1822), the Rev. Robert Lowe and others, whilst noting the importance of savings banks, etc. for reforming character, advocated in earnest an

⁶³⁵ See A. Brundage, *The English poor laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 56-57; see also Rev. J. Bosworth, *Practical means of reducing the poor's rate, encouraging virtue, and increasing the comforts of the aged, afflicted and deserving poor; as well as of repressing able-bodied pauperism, by a proper application of the existing laws respecting select vestries, and incorporated houses of industry*, (London, 1824), pp. 2-3.

⁶³⁶ An outdoor labour test on the less eligibility principle was advanced by the Rev. Thomas Whately of Cookham in Berkshire, who offered hard work at a lower wage than was paid for any other labour in the parish. Such labour tests were also in operation in parishes in London, Bristol, Nottingham, Norwich and elsewhere. See Brundage, *The English poor laws*, pp. 55-56.

⁶³⁷ See J. D. Marshall, "The Nottinghamshire reformers and their contribution to the new poor law", *Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1961), pp. 382-396.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 387. For the reception of Becher's system and its endorsement by James Bosworth, see *Gentleman's Magazine* (June, 1829), pp. 528-530. See also J. Bosworth, *The necessity of the Antipauper system, shown by an example of the oppression and misery produced by the allowance system, which paralyses the beneficial operation of friendly societies, savings banks, select vestries, well-managed workhouses, and every other means of ameliorating the condition of the poor; addressed to the select committee of the House of Commons on the poor laws* (London, 1829). For changing attitudes to and forms of parish housing for the poor, and tension of form between parochial housing and a centralised parochial poor house, and how 1834 reversed current trends, instead favouring centralised accommodation in the workhouse, see J. Broad, "The parish poor house in the long Eighteenth Century", in J. McEwan and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Accommodating poverty: The housing and living arrangements of the English poor, c. 1600-1850* (London, 2011).

expanded role for deterrence and less eligibility over and above these constructive “frills” – Becher instead saw equal roles for both. Becher sought to place the “idle, the improvident, the profligate” into the workhouse (like that at Southwell, Nottinghamshire), where they would be “subjected to a system of secluded restraint and salutary discipline” which would prove “so repugnant to their dissolute habits, that they very soon apply for their discharge, and devise means of self-support, which nothing short of compulsion could urge them to explore”.⁶³⁹ The poor must be made to subsist upon their “average annual earnings” and not look to the parish during “an occasional suspension of employ”; when dealing with such “wilful pauperism” “discipline and punish are convertible terms” and “corrective discipline” should be interposed where, after careful consideration of the “character and conduct” of the applicant, it was thought necessary to redeem his “manly spirit”.⁶⁴⁰ Nicholls was inspired to act by reading the 1817 Commons committee’s report on the poor laws and his approach was even more extreme than Becher’s in its adherence to deterrence; as he wrote in a letter to the *Nottingham Journal* on 18th August 1821, he wished to “see the Poor House looked to with a kind of dread by our labouring classes, and the reproach for being an inmate of it extend downwards from the father to the son”, elaborating in another letter of 13th October 1821 that the “labouring classes must be forced into self-reliance”.⁶⁴¹ Nicholls’ ally Lowe, overseer of the neighbouring parish of Bingham, was even more forthright in his views and had introduced the principle of less eligibility to the district in 1818. Lowe thought that order could only be restored by “forcing able-bodied paupers to provide for themselves through the terror of a well-disciplined workhouse”.⁶⁴² Such sentiments were not confined to Nottinghamshire: the Rev. J. Bosworth saw the addition of the “strict discipline and salutary labour” of the deterrent workhouse as integral to restoring the poor’s “responsibility as moral agents”.⁶⁴³ In these “powerful moral machines”, “virtue is encouraged, vice is restrained, and the natural result is, that the oppressive burden of the poor’s rate is removed”. For Bosworth, “to render select vestries effective means for reducing the poor’s rate, the coercive power and wholesome discipline of a workhouse must be

⁶³⁹ Rev. J. T. Becher, *The Anti-Pauper system; Exemplifying the positive, and practical good, realized by the relievers and the relieved, under the frugal, beneficial, and lawful, administration of the poor laws, prevailing at Southwell, and in the neighbouring district; with plans of the Southwell workhouse, and of the Thurgarton workhouse; and with institutions for book-keeping* (London, 1828), p. 15.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22, 33, 43.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 388, 392; Nicholls moved to Southwell in 1819 and soon after began a campaign of letter-writing to local newspapers hoping to initiate reform of Poor Law practice in the area, attracting Becher’s attention. Nicholls’ attempts were successful and noticeable and he was called to give evidence to the 1824 House of Commons select committee on labourers’ wages. His public profile rose as accordingly and he enjoyed “high visibility” in the public sphere as a result, contributing to his appointment as a poor law commissioner in 1832. See Brundage, *The English poor laws*, p. 55. See pp. 52-55 for the Nottinghamshire reformers.

⁶⁴² Brundage, *The English poor laws*, p. 54.

⁶⁴³ Bosworth, *Practical means of reducing the poor’s rate*, p. 44, 37-38.

added".⁶⁴⁴ Workhouses were not a uniform response to the problems of the 1820s, in fact they were explicitly rejected by C. D. Brereton as "unconstitutional, unchristian, and impolitic", yet an emphasis on effective discipline as the necessary corollary of a system of relief centred on self-help was widespread and growing in influence through the 1820s – even Brereton looked to the "discretionary law of relief" and the "restoration of the parish court" within the context of revived agriculture as the means of combatting pauperism, which "deserves no pity...because it is voluntary".⁶⁴⁵ Brereton was also vehemently opposed to the interference of magistrates in parochial affairs and supported a bill brought in by Michael Nolan in 1822 which sought a greater role for discretion in relief praxis, Brereton noting how the management of the poor should be "parochial, friendly, and ecclesiastical".⁶⁴⁶

Ideology and Governmentality

The internal development within poor law discourse of self-help and, latterly, of its linkage with increased discipline and deterrence, corroborates an interpretation of the 1834 poor law reforms as stemming primarily from ideological opposition to the relief afforded under the poor laws rather than from any empirically valid finding that rates-in-aid were fostering the spread of poverty. This ideological reading of the reforms, championed by Mark Blaug, Samantha Williams, Thomas Nutt,

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 45, 47, 21. Support for the discriminatory role of select vestries was not universal, see Anon., *Considerations on select vestries; Shewing, from the oppressions and corrupt practices now prevailing in the different parishes where they exist, the necessity of their abolition, and the expediency of restoring, to the parishioners at large, A legitimate interference and control in the management of parochial business...By one of the non-select* (London, 1828).

⁶⁴⁵ C. D. Brereton, *An inquiry into the workhouse system and the law of maintenance in agricultural districts* (London, 1822) p. 55, 74; *A practical inquiry into the numbers, means of employment, and wages, of agricultural labourers*, (London, 1824) p. 96; *Observations on the administration of the poor laws in agricultural districts* (London, 1824) p.9.

⁶⁴⁶ Brereton, *Observations*, p. 118. Michael Nolan (?1765-1827), lawyer and MP, had made a name for himself in his *Treatise of the laws for the relief and settlement of the poor* (1805), a digest of existing legislation aimed at aiding in the administration of the poor laws. The bill proposed to strengthen the Act of 1819, chiefly by enhancing the power of vestries and extending the scope of inquiry into whether a claimant was idle or deserving to all his family, and he wished to empower authorities to hire out the unemployed poor to work; all of this would necessitate keeping detailed lists of the impotent and able-bodied poor and their circumstances. Incidentally, he advocated a 'well-regulated system of colonization' to deal with overpopulation. He maintained that his object was not to oppress the poor but to 'promote their comfort ... preserve their true spirit of independence ... cherish their domestic virtues [and] chase away every lure to laziness and dissipation'. This bill extended the principle of discrimination to churchwardens and overseers where there was no select vestry, and also extended the regard to character to the pauper's whole family and made the overturning of a refusal of relief conditional upon approval by at least three JPs, with able-bodied paupers compellable to join the militia. The bill was set aside at the report stage 27th June 1823. See D. R. Fisher and T. Jenkins, "NOLAN, Michael (?1765-1827), of 23 Bedford Square, Mdx." in D. R. Fisher (ed.), *The history of parliament: The House of Commons 1820-1832* (Cambridge, 2009), online edn. Accessible at <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/nolan-michael-1765-1827>; Bicheno also supported this bill; See *An inquiry into the poor laws*, pp. viii-ix.

etc., (the methodology of Blaug's approach has been criticised by Karel Williams) finds that the strictures of the 1834 Poor Law Reform Act were drawn mainly from an ideological reading of the times, "a myth of the poor law" constructed to legitimate legislative intervention, rather than from the tracking of exogenous changes in the socio-economic landscape of poor relief.⁶⁴⁷ By this is meant, following Freeden and Norval, that the ideological reading of poverty congenic to the 1834 reforms was based around a grouping of "de-contested political concepts", namely that dependency had demoralised the poor, that the means existed for the poor to help themselves, that such efforts were worthy of approbation and that poverty was a changeable condition dependent upon independent agency rather than socioeconomic conditions. In this reading the poor were not a definite social grouping of discrete persons within a community so much as that portion of the socioeconomic whole that existed at the bottom of the pyramid, with movement into and out of this category enabled by the attainment or abandonment of character. The processes of de-contestation took place during the earlier periods of distress and positive self-help associated with savings banks, in contradistinction to the later negative conception of self-help founded on discipline. The reality of poor law commentators was usually constructed from accounts set loose in the public sphere, debates in parliament and local experience. As Sherman has traced, the construction of this reality underwent a change during our period, with a turn towards abstraction.⁶⁴⁸ However, this shift, encompassing the deployment of statistics, returns and quantitative modelling of the poor, was not necessarily a turn towards greater accuracy in the representation of what was actually happening in the country economically, which remained relatively poorly understood. Nevertheless, the increasing sophistication of political economic analysis brought about by the classic economic writings of Malthus, David Ricardo, J. R. McCulloch etc., in the post-war era, for instance an

⁶⁴⁷ T. Nutt, "Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 poor law commission report: The myth of the old poor law and the making of the new", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (May, 2010), pp. 335-361, p. 359. See also S. Williams, *Poverty, gender and life-cycle under the English poor law 1760-1834* (Cambridge, 2011) and M. Blaug, *The myth of the old poor law and the making of the new*; K. Williams, *From pauperism to poverty* (London, 1981), Ch. 1.

By ideological is meant a "grouping" or "ideological morphology" of de-contested political concepts that may be deployed for non-rational reasons. In this sense, words are social constructs whose meaning is determined by their usage and political concepts are located within idea-environments. Ideologies bind "together a large number of concepts, each of which has been de-contested by its association with its neighbouring concepts"; the relative binding of such concepts, core concepts and the relative attachment of adjacent/ peripheral concepts constitutes the "ideational profile" of a particular ideology. See M. Freeden, *Ideologies and political theory* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 1-131. For the development of alternative theories of ideology and the differences between morphological, post-Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches to ideology (wherein the balance tends to shift from de-contestation to re-contestation), see A. J. Norval, "Review article: The things we do with words – contemporary approaches to the analysis of ideology", *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Apr., 2000), pp. 313-346.

⁶⁴⁸ See S. Sherman, *Imagining poverty: Quantification and the decline of paternalism* (Columbus, Ohio, 2001). See also D. N. McCloskey, *The rhetoric of economics* (Brighton, 1985), also *Knowledge and persuasion in economics* (Cambridge, 1994).

appreciation of rent and of cyclical unemployment – which further corroborated the authorities' claims that they could and indeed should not intervene to aid the poor at such times as to do so would only worsen the situation – did reconfigure debates over the economy and the poor laws and lend greater authority to those who used such means to argue the case for reform.⁶⁴⁹ Using the moral authority intrinsic to the utilitarian considerations of natural law economics, the ideology of negative self-help (meaning self-help framed coercively rather than aspirationally) and poor law reform gathered momentum, irrespective of attempts to accurately portray as far as possible what was happening in the countryside. Where men such as Copleston or John Maggridge decried the “absolute and increasing inability of the poor to support themselves and families”, the ready-prepared arguments of industriousness and frugality, forged in the distresses of the 1790s and expanded to encompass macroeconomic concerns under the impetus of political economy, proved unmoveable.⁶⁵⁰ The changed and charged political landscape of the early 1830s marked a transition period when ideas over discipline and self-help were wed to those of increased administrative structure, intervention and uniformity to produce a new configuration of poor relief.

By 1834 the notion of an ideology of self-help in Skinnerian terms, as “nothing other than a language of politics deployed to legitimate political action, and to establish and/ or alter a society's moral identity” was established.⁶⁵¹ This ideology and its crucial role in formulating the Victorian response to poverty associated with the 1834 reforms have been overlooked in the literature to date; a closer reading of the associated and constitutive vocabulary has also been neglected. The rhetorical manipulation of terms such as ‘duty’ or ‘virtue’ and the manipulation of “criteria for applying an

⁶⁴⁹ David Ricardo, (1772-1823) radical Benthamite MP, was, along with Malthus, the foremost founder of political economy as a distinct and sophisticated academic discipline. Ricardo made his name in the bullion controversy (favouring a to paper currency convertibility with gold bullion rather than minted coin) and opposed the protectionist Corn Laws (and Malthus on this), achieving lasting fame with his *On the principles of political economy and taxation* (London, 1817). His views on the poor laws can be found in Ch. XVIII of this tract and demonstrate an overriding concern with a fair distribution of the burden of the rates between manufacturing and agriculture, to escape the prospect of a stationary or retrograde state of society being reached (Ricardo favoured abolition within a context of national economic growth as the overall solution). See also T. Peach, “Ricardo, David (1772–1823)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23471>, accessed 19 Aug 2012]. John Ramsey McCulloch (1789-1864), professor of political economy and economic journalist whose efforts in *The Scotsman* and the *Edinburgh Review* did much to popularise Ricardo's ideas, wrote his own hugely successful textbook *Principles of political economy, with a sketch of the rise and progress of the science* (1825), and followed this up with a *Treatise on the principles and practical influence of taxation and the funding system* (1845). His *A discourse on the rise, progress, peculiar objects and importance of political economy* (1824) was ahead of its time in arguing that the emergence of political economy must be seen in materialist terms. See also P. Deane, “McCulloch, John Ramsay (1789–1864)”, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17413>, accessed 19 Aug 2012].

⁶⁵⁰ J. H. Maggridge, *Remarks on the report of the select committee of the House of Commons on the poor laws; In which the proposed alteration of the laws of settlement; and pauperism, its causes, consequences, and remedies, are distinctly considered, By a Monmouthshire magistrate* (Bristol, 1818), p. 8.

⁶⁵¹ Norval, *Review article: The things we do with words*, p. 320.

existing set of commendatory terms”, and the development of the language of character, enabled the mercantilist-paternalist model of beneficent and deferential industry to be subverted by an individualist reading of self-betterment that portrayed societal welfare as the product of individual sedulous, industrious (moral) activity. The “innovating ideologists” of the self-help movement, constrained by the availability of terms in the prevailing morality of society, deployed the terminology of civic virtue to co-opt traditional moral economy understandings of the communal good, fair economics, the subsistence ethic and self-restraint in the common interest to condemn a lack of industriousness or frugality as abandoning one’s duties to society, as damaging to an expanded notion of the common good and hence as immoral, selfish actions. This was the illocutionary force of the languages of self-help and character.⁶⁵² Furthermore, as “the nature of society and its structures, supposedly reflected in ideologies, are themselves partly the product of those ideologies, operating as ways of organising social reality”, it becomes clear that the debt of the 1819 and 1834 reforms to the ideology of self-help derived from the translation of paternalism to more broadly conceived social organisation. Ideology and social structure were held in dialogical tension, mutually reinforcing and informing each other or, as Skinner puts it, “our social vocabulary and our social fabric mutually prop each other up”.⁶⁵³ Thus the poor law reforms of our period were not necessarily primarily a rational response to socio-economic developments so much as an ideological reaction to the distresses and political controversies of the Napoleonic era, focused on exterminating dependent poverty and easing away from paternalist responsibilities and the political culpability for distress that they engendered.

As institutions are mental constructs imposed on and structuring social life they are thereby formed mentally by language and moulded to a certain degree by changes in language and discourse arising in the public sphere.⁶⁵⁴ Ideas about self-help had developed in relation to the intellectual furore surrounding the French Revolution, the provision of allowances and the role of self-betterment in growing national productivity; coupled with a utilitarian concern for the wellbeing of the social whole, they impacted upon the type of practices and strategies suggested as remedies for the

⁶⁵² See Skinner, *Visions of politics*, Vol. 1, pp. 146 -156.

⁶⁵³ Freedon, *Ideologies and political theory*, p. 3; Skinner, *Visions of politics*, Vol. 1, p. 173.

⁶⁵⁴ The linkage between alterations in cultural beliefs about poverty and institutional change may be construed as similar to if not parallel to that between discursive formation and the regime of practices outlined by Mitchell Dean and remarked on earlier. Both allow a primary role to the intellectual and public discussion of socio-economic variables and thus may be said to prioritise the public sphere as a motive force for change. For the concept of the public sphere see J. Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Cambridge, 1989); J. Van Horn Melton, *The rise of the public in enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001). Habermas located the site of growth of the public sphere as that of the sociability of the coffeehouse. See B. Cowan, *Social life of coffee: The emergence of the British coffeehouse* (London, 2005). For the role of the press in government policy and for canvassing support for government measures see J. Black, *The English press in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1987).

perceived social ills of pauperism and related problems. The range of suggested ideas was also constrained by the prevailing morality of the day and the available propositional and prescriptive knowledge sets; the adoption of such ideas was dependent upon circumstances in each locality and the appeal of such designs to parliament at a given moment. The processes of socio-economic change associated with the 'industrial revolution' shifted ideas of the individual in relation to society, and impacted upon the propositional knowledge of poverty and led to searches for new forms of prescriptive knowledge and practices to deal effectively with the changing nature of the problem of poverty. Evangelicalism had an important role to play, informing the development of self-help and motivating interested parties to develop strategies for dealing with poverty, yet this role should not be overstated. Paternalism continued to shape social relations and governance structures, yet adapted to new forms. Such seismic shifts encouraged the development of class consciousness, and certainly self-help played an important part here; an analysis which must await future research.⁶⁵⁵ The development of self-help can thus be placed in the broad context of socio-economic change and not addressed purely within the confines of the development of discourse (although endogenous intellectual evolution moulded its form and direction), hence it can be analysed using a number of theoretical models, as suggested above.⁶⁵⁶ Finally, the ideology of self-help can be seen to be compatible with, indeed descriptive of the kind of alterations in the rationality of government described by Michel Foucault over the early modern period. Certainly the "new economy of power" that Foucault privileges in his analysis of prison reform has resonance with the heightened discipline and discrimination of negative self-help.⁶⁵⁷ Foucault sees over the long Eighteenth Century a transition "from an art of government to a political science, from a regime dominated by structures of sovereignty to one ruled by techniques of government" which "turns on the theme of population and hence also on the birth of political economy". This transition, the "governmentalization of the state" is productive of "governmentality" (the nexus of security, territory and population), which has a concern with population as its "principle form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security".⁶⁵⁸ Foucault understood government as "the conduct of conduct" and used the term "rationality of government" to denote a "system of thinking about the

⁶⁵⁵ See E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (London, 1963); G. Claeys, *Machinery, money and the millennium: From moral economy to socialism, 1815-60* (Cambridge, 1987); G. Claeys, "The origins of the rights of labour: Republicanism, commerce, and the construction of modern social theory in Britain, 1796-1805", *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 66 (Jun., 1994), pp. 249-290. For the contribution of political economy to working class consciousness see N. W. Thompson, *The people's science: The popular political economy of exploitation and crisis 1816-1834* (Cambridge, 1984).

⁶⁵⁶ These models include institutional economics – see the extended version of my thesis at www.academia.edu for more on this.

⁶⁵⁷ A. Sheridan (trans.), M. Foucault, *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (London, 1977), p. 304.

⁶⁵⁸ M. Foucault, "Governmentality", in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality, with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), pp. 101-104.

nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed), capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it was practised". The transition to new forms of paternalism and techniques of carceral coercion (the deterrent instead of the refugial workhouse, the panopticon prison) that accompanied the development of the ideology of self-help and the trend towards the police of individual agency resonates with Foucault's concerns here, connoting a development of governmental rationality away from community strictures towards societal police and that linkage between the microphysics and macrophysics of power that Foucault has termed "biopower" or "biopolitics".⁶⁵⁹ The ideology of self-help emerged from the discursive field of poor law debates and hence, in a Foucauldian sense, may be said to describe the shifting governance structures and power relations that structured such debates. Before such on-going developments can be properly understood there needs to be more sustained and detailed analysis of the on-going debates over other important and interrelated matters of police and improvement over the period, such as the reformation of the prison, the enclosure movement, the capitalisation of agriculture, the development of banking and the political processes that enabled or constrained activity within these spheres of operation. It is only by such a broad and deep investigation of intellectual change that the ways in which people of the past perceived their world and acted accordingly can be recovered, and societal evolution traced.

⁶⁵⁹ C. Gordon, "Governmental rationality: An introduction", in Burchell, Gordon and Miller (eds.), *The Foucault effect*, pp. 2-4. See also R. Hurley (trans.), M. Foucault, *The history of sexuality Vol. 1. The will to knowledge* (London, 1979, originally published in France 1976), Part Five, pp. 135-159.

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