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1 Introduction: Why Study Social Policy as a Global Phenomenon?

When a Communist-led Left Front was elected in West Bengal in 1967, many capitalists sought to relocate their assets rather than risk confiscatory taxation by the new government. India made capital exports difficult and the wealthy who hoped to move money abroad often received help from missionary organizations in return for charitable donations. Several businessmen approached Mother Teresa, leader of a network of Catholic charities in Calcutta and international symbol of compassion, and she used the church's relative autonomy from the state to move vast amounts of capital from West Bengal to Western countries in return for generous contributions to her charities.¹ Mother Teresa devoted her life to aiding victims of destitution: abandoned children, lepers, the aged poor. Many wealthy individuals contributed funds to her causes. By contrast, the Left Front embodied a perspective which located the roots of poverty in colonialist social structures, not individual failings or bad luck. For them, wealthy capitalists were the problem, not the solution, to poverty and charities merely provided band-aids as treatment for social failings. Capital lost to West Bengal thanks to churches searching for extra funds for their charitable operations limited the ability of the Bengali state to make social changes.

Both Mother Teresa and the Bengali Communists could point to results from their rival approaches to compassion. Many individual lives were improved by the nun's interventions. Meanwhile, the Left Front government implemented land reforms that produced greater equity for rural residents and more productive agriculture. Levels of rural poverty dropped significantly and the state led India in increasing caloric consumption in the 1980s and 1990s. The power of large land-owners and traditional social elites was dislodged in the countryside.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) did not create a utopia. Rural middle strata were the greatest beneficiaries of their regime, dominating village councils that controlled rural development grants at the expense of farm labourers and small farmers. The compassionate Left Front goals lifted far more people out of poverty than the work of charitable organizations but did not overcome social structures that keep many people poor.

The intertwining histories of compassion and social policy cannot be separated from histories of competition among social classes over the distribution of wealth and competition within elites over who has the right to provide social aid and in what form. In part, the story of "social welfare" is the story of how those with assets, private or public, determine who among the less fortunate is "deserving"

2 *Compassion*

or “undeserving” of aid. It is a story as much about social control as social aid. But subordinate classes interested in gaining more equality or abolishing inequality altogether are also crucial to the history of compassion. Their social struggles have played a key role in influencing how different societies respond to those who require help to survive or thrive.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines compassion as “pity inclining one to be helpful or merciful.” Pity, however, might incline one to be patronizing and to offer minimal assistance. Compassion motivated by empathy is more likely to promote attitudes of “do to others as you would have them do to you.” Social policy is an expression of institutional compassion by private organizations or governments and it may be motivated by pity, by empathy, or simply by a desire to legitimize inequalities through compensatory measures of charity.

Social policy cannot be studied globally as if one narrative applies everywhere with a set of recognizable, unvarying “stages.” The relative strength of elites and subordinate classes follows no prescribed model. Gender roles, racial and ethnic divides, religious attitudes, and attitudes to social hierarchies all play significant roles in creating particular inequalities or equalities. This book aims to uncover factors that produced particular social approaches in various locales at particular periods. But it also demonstrates the diffusion of social policies.

An effort to document the rise of social policies as a global phenomenon faces many challenges. Social policy is often viewed as a phenomenon of industrialized societies. Its study often assumes autonomy for state authorities as they seek compromise between elites and subordinate groups. Such views fall particularly flat when we study imperialism where outsiders controlled many national destinies, and a post-colonial social order where global bodies controlled by a few powerful nations dictate social policies to other nations. The relationship between social policy and economic policy needs unravelling in each society.

Fortunately there exists a vast historical literature for nations and subnational units on this subject. This book draws on that literature to seek patterns and anomalies in attempts to provide solutions to social ills. It challenges the insularity of some of that literature. As labour historian Mary Hilson notes, “One of the great advantages of any form of cross-national or transnational history is above all that it exposes the assumptions of fairly discrete national historiographical traditions to the questions and problems arising from a different national context.”² Throughout, our focus is on how societies responded to mass needs for food, shelter, clothing, health, employment, and a sense of belonging within the broader community.

Part I, “Social Policy from Early Humanity to Bismarck” (Chapters 2 to 6), investigates types of help that existed before World War I, beginning with pre-state societies where sharing became customary and then turning to early state-governed societies where rampant inequalities conjured private charity or state programmes of relief for some destitute people. We examine the precariousness of societies conquered by foreigners with little compassion for conquered “inferiors.” In the late nineteenth century, industrializing countries confronting a militant working class experimented with modest programmes of social insurance. We trace the impact of this innovation on practices of governments, private charities, and social actors generally.

Part II, “Social Policy from World War I to the Cold War” (Chapters 7 to 10), traces the evolution of social policy from 1914 to 1975. We examine how industrializing societies confronted wealth distribution as traditional societies were disrupted by changing economic formations. We explore the impacts of both the Communist challenge and the Great Depression on capitalist economic orthodoxy and social policy perspectives. Our Cold War analysis follows the impact of disintegration of formal empires, expansion of Communist regimes, dominance of Keynesian economic ideas in capitalist countries, and the arrival of unprecedented, but poorly distributed international economic growth.

Part III, “Social Policy Under Neoliberalism” (Chapters 11 to 13), studies the period after 1975 when both communism and welfare-state liberalism faced sustained attack from forces favouring greater marketization of all activities, including social policy. We study manifestations of neoliberalism across the globe, evaluating the relative successes of neoliberals and their opponents.

PARADIGMS FOR STUDYING SOCIAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Competing schools are evident in social policy literature. They embody opposing suppositions about human nature, desirable social goals, the most appropriate sources of evidence, and interpretation of that evidence.

Mainstream social policy literature has changed dramatically in a short period. Before the mid-1970s, feminist interpretations of social policy were rare: examination of how gender roles influenced design and implementation of social policy was absent. Such an absence reflected gender blindness within scholarship and the near absence of women within university history and social science departments. Even in the 1980s, celebrated national social welfare history texts in English-speaking countries largely ignored gender. A collection of essays in 1981 treating all welfare states in Europe and North America, penned by the biggest (all-male) names in the social policy field, made not one mention of gender.³

That erasure of women’s voices as the welfare state evolved contributed to dismissive analyses of early feminist scholars regarding social policy developments. Elizabeth Wilson, writing about Britain, and Mimi Abramovitz, writing about the United States, argued that the welfare state was a patriarchal invention meant to impose social control by a male state over the lives of women and girls. Later scholars such as Linda Gordon and Jane Lewis nuanced social control arguments, observing that women often managed to influence both policy and its implementation to benefit at least some women.

Social policy writing was also usually blind to racism before the 1980s. Detailed research on the racial exclusiveness of social policymaking in the history of much of the world has blossomed since. Subaltern studies emphasize struggles of groups in the former colonial world marginalized in local and global policymaking by class, race, and gender. For example, political economist Meenal Shrivastava, while studying the history of her grandmother, a militant in the struggle for Indian independence, found that her grandmother, whose political life she had assumed must have been somewhat unique, was one of hundreds of thousands of women involved

in the struggle, many of whom were imprisoned for their activities. A continuation of patriarchal structures in the transition from colonialism to independence silenced historical memories of women's involvement in bringing independence. Similarly the roles of other groups marginalized for gender, racial, or class reasons in producing historical changes, including social policy changes, are often obscured because they are poorly represented among the historians who get to decide which events and participants are important. In turn, the blindness about who has made history has an impact on policymaking in the present since our sense of who has been an important shaper of the present influences our views of whose interests should guide the future shaping directions in policy-making.

The late introduction of gender, race, and colonialism in social policy analysis demonstrates the incomplete character of theories dominant before the 1980s. One popular Cold War sociological theory was structural functionalism whose practitioners, largely uncritical of Western social structures, emphasized individual adaptation to institutions and social values. Poverty was explained as unsuccessful adaptations of individuals and groups, and social policy was tasked with encouraging adaptation. A classic statement was Harold L. Wilensky and Charles N. Lebeaux's *Industrial Society and Social Welfare* (1958). For them, social policy accommodated difficulties resulting from industrialization and levels of industrialization determined the timing of the introduction of social measures. The economy, rather than political forces, was the key determinant. The only gender issue they mentioned was an alleged identity crisis for male social workers in a profession viewed as an extension of female nurturing roles.

Critics of structural functionalism, both liberal-pluralist and radical, regarded their theory as ahistorical. Structures alone did not produce particular outcomes. Differences among social welfare regimes even in the West demonstrated that human *agency*, rather than *structure*, provided the primary explanation as to why social programmes are introduced. This meant a need to study political actors, state and non-state, to determine the origins of policies and their implementation. Liberal-pluralists who focused on civil society or non-state actors tended to treat them as somewhat equivalent in a formally democratic society. But some raised scepticism regarding such equivalence. Robert A. Dahl, praising the openness of American politics, observed in passing that 40 per cent of Americans failed to participate and they corresponded to the group most needing government help. Charles Lindblom, who documented the plethora of US organizations engaged in the political process, eventually concluded that the power of large corporations superseded all other political actors combined and threatened democratic institutions. The liberal-pluralist model dominated social welfare writing throughout North America and Western Europe before the 1980s. Its proponents had largely benign views of post-war "welfare states." The preface to Walter I. Trattner's history of American social welfare observed: "Our social welfare system today, then, acts not only to support and enhance the well-being of needy individuals and groups, but also to improve community conditions and help prevent and solve problems affecting all citizens."⁴

Marxists often celebrated social welfare measures, but emphasized their limitations in capitalist societies. In 1957, John Saville combined agency and structure to

explain why governments in market-based societies introduced welfare measures. On the one hand, the agency of working-class actors via their trade union and political struggles caused capitalists to accept social programmes as the political price paid to legitimize the social system among subordinate classes. But Saville concluded that politicians also regarded the welfare state as fulfilling a capitalist requirement for a more efficient industrial environment.

Marxists differ from liberal-pluralists in both giving the working class most credit for reforms and stressing the tentativeness of capitalist concessions. German Marxist philosopher Claus Offe, referring to the historic transformation from pre-capitalist modes of production into capitalism, argued that social policy “is the state’s manner of effecting the lasting transformation of non-wage labourers into wage-labourers.”⁵ Offe highlighted the limited extent to which capitalists bend to workers’ demands for social programmes, and their constant efforts to make workers pay for social measures. He claimed the welfare state, rather than redistribute wealth from rich to poor, transfers wealth within the working class via social insurance. The capitalist class is ambiguous regarding social programmes; they recognize their role in stabilizing social conflict, but balk at sacrificing their share of income to achieve this stability. They place limits on the welfare state by withdrawing capital from jurisdictions that impose a tax load they consider heavy. They have the “power to define reality” because “investors are in a position to create the reality – and the effects – of ‘profit squeeze’.”⁶

But intentions of social actors and actual outcomes can diverge. Supporters of extreme inequality created stringent Poor Laws and supporters of strict equality attempted to regulate almost all social decisions via tightly controlled Communist parties. In both cases, the gap between intentions and outcomes was sometimes remarkable. Historian Linda Gordon notes, “All these structural critiques of welfare policy, emphasizing social control, share a major limitation: they rely only on functional argumentation, focusing on the rationality of welfare programmes for those in power.” In fact, social policy includes

contradictory, fragmented and inconsistent goals of policy-makers—a complexity that could be fitted into a functionalist theory that was supple enough—but also, more importantly, from the fact that most welfare policies represent the jerry-built compromises which are the artifacts of political and social conflict—a dynamic that functionalism cannot encompass.⁷

2 Sharing Versus Domination: Social Policy from 200,000 BCE to the Middle Ages

For many scholars, early human history was a war of each against all. Psychologist Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* is a prime example. Cultural anthropologist R. Brian Ferguson challenges many archaeological examples cited by Pinker. Examining the entire archaeological record for “prehistoric” societies in Europe and the Near East, Ferguson suggests evolutionary psychologists and sociobiologists have assumed that humans are war-like by nature and have exaggerated evidence of violence in early human history. He writes: “Is there archaeological evidence indicating war was absent in entire prehistoric regions for millennia? Yes.”¹ He suggests that pessimists project constant warfare in Europe and the Middle East after 3000 BCE to the early history of humans. In fact, “War sprang out of a warless world.”² Similarly, unequal, authoritarian societies sprang out of a cooperative, equal world.

SHARING SOCIETIES

Archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnohistorians have uncovered innumerable examples of caring and sharing before “great civilizations” were established. Neanderthal communities in Europe and the Middle East, early humans who interbred with our *Homo sapiens* ancestors, kept disabled people alive. Some Neanderthal skeletons from 40,000 years ago bear marks of advanced osteoarthritis, suggesting these individuals were supported by their communities indefinitely after becoming too crippled to support themselves. Neanderthal dead were buried with religious rites that included placing flowers, ochre, and animal horns with their remains.

The simple facts of human birth and the needs of individuals for survival forced early humans to cooperate with their fellows rather than compete with them. The long dependency of human babies on others to feed, protect, and teach them would have resulted in species extinction if foraging females lacked aid of a tribe in performing these tasks. “Evolution thus favoured those capable of forming strong social ties.” Sapiens, unlike other animals that can either only cooperate in limited ways or with a few intimates, “can cooperate in extremely flexible ways with countless numbers of strangers.”³

Recent studies of hunter-gatherer societies that have survived with little contact with “modern” societies suggest egalitarian impulses of our earliest ancestors.

Fieldwork by anthropologists with the Agta in the Philippines, Mbendjéle in the Congo, Batek in Malaysia, and Maniq in Thailand shows involvement of the entire group in hunter-gatherer decision-making. Equality between the sexes is evident in equal participation of women and men in decisions about who should constitute a social group and where it should reside.

Mark Dyble, the study lead, comments: “There is still this wider perception that hunter-gatherers are more macho or male-dominated. We’d argue it was only with the emergence of agriculture, when people could start to accumulate resources, that inequality emerged.” He adds that sexual equality likely helped to shape human evolution even if it was eroded in later societies. “Sexual equality is one of an important suite of changes to social organisation, including things like pair-bonding, our big, social brains, and language, that distinguishes humans.”⁴

Within traditional societies in the Americas, complex systems ensured that no one fended for themselves alone. When these peoples initially met Europeans, both sides judged the other negatively. Indigenous people were censorious regarding European willingness to permit the existence of a class of poor people. They judged both the European societies that they were sometimes taken to view and the European societies developing within Indigenous territories as compassionless. When French explorers took three Tupinambas from Brazil to Rouen in 1562, the visitors “noticed that there were among us men full and gorged with all sorts of good things, and that their other halves were beggars at their doors, emaciated with hunger and poverty; and they thought it strange that these needy halves could endure such an injustice, and did not take the others by the throat, or set fire to their houses.”⁵ A Wendat who accompanied Quebec City founder Samuel de Champlain to France in 1611 made similar observations. The Mi’kmaq of the Atlantic region scolded Europeans to the Jesuits, claiming “you are covetous and are neither generous nor kind; as for us, if we have a morsel of bread we share it with our neighbor.”⁶

European observers often extolled the generosity of Indigenous peoples even when arguing that their “paganism” made them inferior to Christian Europeans. Christopher Columbus marvelled that Caribbean peoples he encountered “are destitute of arms, which are entirely unknown to them.” Furthermore, “no one refuses the asker anything that he possesses, on the contrary, they themselves invite us to ask for it.”⁷ He then added that they would be easy to enslave. W.F. Butler, a British military officer involved in suppressing Indigenous uprisings within the empire, wrote of Canadian Plains peoples in 1872:

This wild man who first welcomed the newcomer is the only perfect socialist or communist in the world. He holds all things in common with his tribe—the land, the bison, the river, and the moose. He is starving, and the rest of the tribe want food. Well, he kills a moose, and to the last bit the coveted food is shared by all.⁸

Generally, egalitarian societies in North America were pre-state societies where custom, enforced by social understandings, shaming, and threats of exclusion from the group kept individuals in line. Emerging proto-state organizations as

populations increased often maintained pre-state egalitarian principles. Conflicts among Haudenosaunee nations inspired creation of a Confederacy to restore harmony at least a half-century before first contacts with Europeans. The Great Law of Peace, a lengthy declaration, was passed orally from Confederacy founders to later generations. Its decrees emphasized equality of Nations composing the Confederacy, equality of men and women, and the right of women to choose a new chief when an existing chief disobeyed rules governing his responsibilities. The Mi'kmaq meanwhile created a Grand Council to deal with disputes between communities while preserving local independence as much as possible. The Council arbitrated issues regarding distribution of fishing stations for spring and autumn, gathering grounds for summer, and hunting ranges for winter.

Sharing, believed North American Indigenous peoples, aligned with the Creator's commands. Prestige for a trading captain came not from accumulating wealth but from giving it away. Compassion was expected not only for members of one's tribe but for all members of one's linguistic group, ties with whom were often reinforced through summer assemblies, kinship rituals, and frequent intermarriage. Nehiwayak elder Danny Musqua notes: "We had agreements between one another, hunting territories that we shared, trapping lands that we shared, gathering lands that we shared, medicinal lands that we shared [sacred lands], peace territorial lands that we designated for the shelter and safety of all people."⁹ Such agreements often extended to trading partners.

In some First Nations in northern Canada and Alaska, argue anthropologists, there were social inequalities based on gender and age. During hard times, female infanticide and abandonment of the aged occurred as a tribe searched for food supplies. But, notes anthropologist Keith Crowe: "When the explorer Ross met the Netsilik people a century and a half ago, he saw Iliktat, an old man who was being pulled on a sleigh by his family across a difficult land. Early in this century [twentieth] Chief Robuscan of Abitibi carried his very heavy crippled wife on his back in their travels for almost twenty years."¹⁰

The extent of sharing varied. Peoples of the North American West Coast practised gift-giving through potlatch ceremonies that ensured inclusion of all free members of society. But they developed a clear social hierarchy and turned war captives into slaves if their people would not buy their freedom. The Aztec established a centralized empire throughout much of Mexico and forced their subjects to pay handsome tribute to the king and his officials, sometimes also sacrificing lives to satisfy Aztec ritualistic beliefs. Mayan city-states with their kings and aristocrats bore resemblance to European feudal states. The Inca Empire by contrast may have been an early instance of communism spread over a large area. The Inca tried to protect everyone within their empire against starvation. They developed effective systems for food storage, good roads, and efficient shipping and moved food from areas with a surplus to areas with shortages. One anthropologist observes:

Storehouse complexes distributed along the spine of the Andes held in reserve hundreds of thousands of bushels of quinoa, maize, *lilas*, *oca*, *añu*, and vast amounts of *chuño*, the world's first freeze-dried food, fabricated from any number of the 3,000 varieties of potatoes domesticated by the pre-Columbian civilizations of South America.¹¹

Inca defenders suggest that they preserved traditional, egalitarian Andean forms of exchange from pre-imperial days as they established their empire. One comparison of Incas and Aztecs suggests: “The Incas were master organizers who redistributed state revenues throughout all parts of the empire. The Aztecs, on the other hand, enriched their capital city and left conquered subjects to their own affairs as long as they met their tribute quotas.”¹²

The Inca achievement stands out because pre-industrial empires were not equipped to replace reciprocity that existed within extended families and communities. Notes historian Yuval Harari:

Traditional agricultural economies had few surpluses with which to feed crowds of government officials, policemen, social workers, teachers and doctors. Consequently, most rulers did not develop mass welfare systems, health-care systems or educational systems. They left such matters in the hands of families and communities. Even on rare occasions when rulers tried to intervene more intensively in the daily lives of the peasantry (as happened for example in the Qin Empire in China), they did so by converting family heads and community elders into government agents.¹³

Australia, Asia, Africa, and Europe all had early societies marked by sharing. The San people of the Kalahari, who still live across a vast region that includes parts of Botswana, Namibia, and southern Angola, are often viewed as the flame-keepers of the earliest human societies as they emerged in Africa. Remaining as hunters and gatherers, living in the forests, while others became agriculturalists, the San practise the rich combination of spiritual rituals and acts of sharing that bound together individuals and groups in early societies. Exchanges of arrows symbolize reciprocity and within an encampment, when large game are captured and eaten, the arrow owner, rather than the hunter, supervises distribution of the meat.

Much of the African bushmen philosophy of living survived the transition to agriculture. Kinship networks that extended over large areas served as insurance when drought and disease threatened starvation. Land was viewed as the property of both a family and a clan. If a family’s crop failed, villagers of their clan joined to feed and care for the family. If an entire community faced a calamity, they could travel to nearby or even distant communities and expect hospitality and sharing of goods from clan or kinship group members. Writes historian Walter Rodney: “In Akan country (Ghana) the clan system was tightly organized, so that a man from Brong could visit Fante many hundreds of miles away and receive food and hospitality from a complete stranger who happened to be of his own clan.”¹⁴ Among the Zanaki in northern Tanzania, rural households enjoyed a double security through the obligations of their clan, the *humati*, to all members regardless of distance, and the reciprocal generosity required of neighbouring homesteads organized as *erisaga*, cooperatives formed for building homes and harvesting crops that also served as mutual aid societies. As in the Americas, religion and social behaviour were closely integrated in Africa, with the values of sharing and respect for nature embedded in spiritual beliefs. As late as the fifteenth century,

much of Africa was still organized on traditional communal principles. As populations increased, headmen, chiefs, and kings made their appearance but largely worked within existing kinship arrangements. There were instances of slavery but no epoch of slavery before the European slave trade on the continent. Nonetheless, particularly in North Africa, where Arab traders had often established both economic and political dominance, feudal social relations involving clear domination by often hereditary leaders became entrenched between the eighth and fifteenth centuries.

As humans ventured beyond Africa about 70,000 years ago, they brought compassionate attitudes with them. They arrived in Australia about 55,000 years ago and their population on the subcontinent reached a million before Europeans arrived in the 1700s. Pre-contact Aboriginal Australians had no class divisions, inequalities in incomes or property, master-servant relations, slavery, or warfare. Living in well-endowed lands where they mastered knowledge of flora and fauna and paid tribute to the spirits of all that surrounded them, the first Australians saw no reason to become agriculturalists or herders or to live in large, permanent villages. According to legend, during “The Dreaming” that began when Indigenous peoples first came to Australia, lands were divided equally among groups of people, leading to traditions of sharing between and within settlements. The Aboriginal people followed pathways and rituals that kept them solidly in touch with their ancestral values.

The seafaring Polynesians who occupied tens of thousands of islands and the waters between them that together constituted almost 20 per cent of our planet were compelled by scarcity to supplement nature’s bounty with agriculture. The Marquesans, residents of ten volcanic islands east of New Zealand, developed terraced farming up the mountainsides and built irrigation canals that watered their valleys, but maintained an orally preserved connection to their beginnings. They viewed the Spaniards who conquered them in the sixteenth century as demons mesmerized by shiny objects and lacking in “understanding that true wealth was found in prestige, and that status could only be conferred upon one capable of acquiring social debts and distributing surplus food to those in need, thus guaranteeing freedom from want.”¹⁵

EARLY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES

While gender differentiated social roles of individuals, women’s roles were more complementary to men’s than subordinate in Africa and Asia. In Vietnam, the Ba Mu, the traditional midwives, handled all aspects of pregnancy without male intervention. In India, where a caste system gradually developed in different regions from about 1,900 years ago, the preceding 2,000 to 4,000 years, depending on the area, featured rampant intermarriage according to genetic studies. Caste society evolved to produce hierarchical social norms in which castes socially constructed as lower in the social scale were expected to serve needs of high-order castes. Before castes evolved, village communities established formal and informal means to control land, cultivate crops, cut timber for subsistence purposes, and maximize

reliance on gathering naturally available foods. While the process of transformation from egalitarianism to castes is debated, some argue that it resulted from the invasion of Indo-Aryan people on the subcontinent who imposed their rule on Natives. The invaders declared themselves the priest and warrior classes, and imposed castes on the larger society. The conquered Natives were divided into differently ranked castes, each with their own privileges and limitations, to prevent them uniting against the invaders. At the bottom of the new social heap were people who were unassigned to a caste and who became “Untouchables,” people with whom most contact by caste members was unthinkable and who were forced to live marginal existences off the leavings of caste members. They were treated as polluted human beings. “Throughout history, and in almost all societies, concepts of pollution and purity have played a leading role in enforcing social and political divisions and have been exploited by numerous ruling classes to maintain their privileges.”¹⁶ Oppressive features of the caste system were muted in its early period by emphasis on *danas* (sharing) and *karuna* (compassionate acts) within Buddhism and Hinduism. This allowed for some fluidity in the caste system. For example, the emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE made no distinction among castes and creeds after his conversion to Buddhism. The voyage from communal villages to kingships was not a straight road, in any case, since republican governments (*jana-padas*) were common in much of India for hundreds of years and pioneered voting systems of substantial citizen-residents centuries before ancient Greece and Rome produced similar republican institutions.

Early farmers along the Danube built no fortifications and their remains include no arms. Remains of their successors included extensive fortifications and weaponry. Similarly, during its development about 7,500 years ago, Sumer within today’s southern Iraq practised communal land ownership, entrusting surplus crops to the priesthood which supervised irrigation, winemaking, and brewing. Over time ever-grander temples bespoke individuals who had usurped political and economic power from the collective and who subordinated farmers and workers to ostentatious desires of an emerging ruling caste. Formerly collectively owned and operated, land became the property of lords (the word derives from *hlaford*, old English for bread supply guardian). Sometimes lords took pity on the new landless and unemployed. Speculation is that Egypt’s pyramids and the Temple of Karnak were public works to ensure the poor did not starve. Eventually the elites enslaved most of the lower classes and created precarious conditions of living for most of the population, slave or nominally free.

SLAVE SOCIETIES

Transformation of the Ancient Near East into a region with ruthless rulers and enforced social class disparities is evident in Hammurabi’s Code of Law, which survives on steles and clay tablets. Hammurabi reigned in Babylonia from 1792 to 1750 BCE and his 282 laws, which began by proclaiming his divine right to rule, protected slave-owners over slaves, property-owners from renters, and higher levels of the social hierarchy from lower-status individuals. About the only concession

made to underdogs was a provision to cancel debts during a year when floods or storms destroyed crops. More typical in a law code which enshrined capital punishment for an array of alleged crimes was statute 202: "If any one strike the body of a man higher in rank than he, he shall receive sixty blows with an ox-whip in public."¹⁷

A similar evolution accompanied development of agricultural societies elsewhere in Eurasia in the following millennia. Ancient Greek democracy excluded subsistence landowners, workers, and beggars, who together comprised 95 per cent of the population of most Greek city-states, from active citizenship. The privileged accepted no obligation to help the destitute though some did out of pity. They viewed the unemployed as the lazy, improvident authors of their own problems.

Within ancient Rome, patricians enslaved marginal peasants while privatizing common lands. Slave labour on huge estates increasingly characterized agriculture and urban workers and artisans lived precarious lives. Slave numbers may have reached up to 6,000,000 of 60,000,000 empire residents at its height. Throughout the Roman Republic and then Empire, between 100 million and 200 million people were enslaved. Slave occupations ranged from agricultural labourer to public works labourer to gladiator all the way through to professional vocations, including some doctors, accountants, and scribes. Slave revolts occurred frequently, sometimes taking on a mass character with the revolt led by the gladiator Spartacus from 73 to 71 BCE creating a particular panic for Roman elites. Urban uprisings occurred when crops failed and slaves and workers could not afford bread. The Gracchi brothers, nobles of plebeian origin, responded to urban unrest in the second century BCE by attempting to recreate a subsistence peasantry through seizure and redistribution of some aristocratic lands. The aristocracy murdered them. But as unrest continued, the Roman elites begrudgingly distributed free wheat to families facing starvation. When Claudius became emperor in 41 CE, 200,000 Roman families received this early form of welfare. The Romans, like the Incas, also made attempts across their empire, with its varying climactic conditions and excellent transportation systems, to provide famine relief. Overall though, in both ancient Greece and Rome, charity involved individuals or the state aiding wayfarers as a means of enhancing prestige. The Aristotelean sense of "distributive justice" was that people should be adequately rewarded for their merits. But this implied that those without recognized merits had no claims to any rewards.

Slavery and vast inequalities had become common throughout Europe by the time of Jesus. In earlier societies, face-to-face groups composed most polities and sharing occurred among individuals who knew all the people with whom they shared goods and decision-making. Successor societies included far more people whose power and wealth were vastly unequal. When ideas of redistribution of wealth gradually reappeared, their proponents inevitably had to rely on intellectual constructs rather than grassroots common sense to construct systems of charity. The beneficiaries would increasingly be unfortunates unknown to the benefactors. Kindness to strangers required a different mindset than automatic compassionate sharing within societies of closely knit individuals.

MONOTHEISM

Some argue that early monotheist teachings, particularly of the Jews, provide the anchor for modern notions of obligation. The Jews believed that the poor deserved pity. But rabbinic sources distinguished between the deserving and the undeserving poor. They provided a prototype for later regulatory regimes by establishing criteria for who deserved relief and determining the distribution of charity to the local poor and wayfarers. There was a defined daily supply of food for wayfarers and a weekly basket of food for the needy. Early Christian communities continued this tradition and while aid provided was modest, Julian the Apostate, the last pagan emperor of Rome, commented that pagans lacked the communal responses to poverty of Christians and Jews.

Neither Judaism nor Christianity called for radical redistribution of wealth. The Mosaic Code said that “the poor shall never cease out of the land” (Deuteronomy 15: 11), and prescribed loans to allow people to eke out a subsistence. Unconcerned with eradicating poverty, its notion of justice is that each person must have equal rights before courts, not a legal right to a particular portion of goods. As for the Christian Gospels, while they warn all to focus on their soul before gaining material goods, they do not demand wealth sharing. About 300 CE, Lactantius, a Christian philosopher, observed that the faithful included rich and poor, masters and slaves. He had no objections to either poverty or slavery because the equality in which he believed was an equality of souls, and therefore applied only to the afterlife. Almsgiving and welcoming all to the faith were sufficient Christian charity in his view and that of most Christians until the nineteenth century. Comments Samuel Fleischacker: “Nothing except wishful latter-day thinking can turn the Gospels into a call for the abolition of distinctions between rich and poor *within the ongoing political and economic order on earth*” (emphasis in original).¹⁸ Moreover, charity need only be provided to co-religionists.

Charity to needy co-religionists was viewed as a monotheistic obligation to win the faithful God’s favour. The Gospel of Matthew names feeding and clothing the poor among acts of charity necessary for entering heaven. For Islam, charity symbolizes closeness to God, *qurba*. In the Middle Ages, an Islamic saying noted: “Any Muslim who gives clothing to the naked, God will clothe him with the greens of the Garden; any Muslim who gives food to a starving Muslim, God will give him food from the fruits of the garden.”¹⁹ Egyptian Muslims in the Middle Ages sheltered destitute individuals in inns and in their absence, a mosque or a madrasa. Special places were built for paying wayfarers where destitute wayfarers were also sometimes sheltered. Jews copied this practice. Mamluk Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, relying largely on private charity, also established public aid. Elite Ottoman, Egyptian, and South Asian society members funded endowments that established soup kitchens, housing, and medical institutions.

The most impressive set of institutions to receive wayfarers and provide both medical and social services to all who required them were found in Buddhist and later Hindu India. By the third century CE, Buddhist monasteries had begun to provide these services and by the seventh century, hospices operated in most cities

and towns on the subcontinent. After 1200, as Hinduism submerged Buddhism, Hindu institutions assumed the responsibilities earlier handled by the Buddhists.

As it spread across Europe, the Roman Catholic Church used charity to connect with the poorest members of society, a chance to win converts among people otherwise too marginalized to access the church. So the institutional church initially responded unkindly to private confraternities that formed in the eighth century. These included worker guilds in each trade providing mutual aid. The guilds often responded by working closely with the church. In France, *compagnonnages*, artisan organizations by craft, governed both production and pricing while providing “mutual assistance during a member’s incapacitation.”²⁰

Charity had social class dimensions. While the chronically poor depended on the basket of food offered by co-religionists, the conjunctural poor (those who fell into poverty) sought help from community leaders via loans or gifts. Some medieval Muslim and Jewish letters on papyrus and paper have been preserved. The Jewish record includes the Cairo Geniza, a hidden chamber for documents, preserving hundreds of petitions. The Jewish conjunctural poor were given the right to hide their poverty. Maimonides, the Jewish scholar whose *Mishneh Torah* in 1178 interpreted biblical teachings on charity, spoke of a “ladder of charity” in which providing the poor with ways to become self-sufficient superseded providing alms because it allowed the poor to conceal the shame of poverty. Shame or not, many Middle Eastern and European people received alms. About a quarter of Jews of Fustat, Egypt received alms around 1500. In Aix-en-Provence, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, about 20 per cent of the population received charity, as did 12.5 per cent of Britons in 1802.

Economic historian Greg Clark provides this dismal claim of well-being before 1800: “While even long before the Industrial Revolution small elites had an opulent lifestyle, the average person in 1800 was no better off than his or her ancestors of the Paleolithic or Neolithic.”²¹ Chapter 3 traces the Poor Law heritage that limited charity, while also exploring popular uprisings to guarantee liveable minimums for the poor.

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