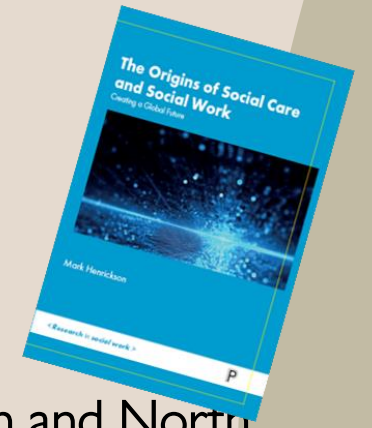




Contested values of social work in time and place: Exploring the origins of social care and social work

Mark Henrickson
Professor of Social Work (ret.)
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Background



- *The Origins of Social Care and Social Work* (Policy Press, 2022) argues that European and North American notions of helping—or controlling—poor and marginalised people have deep roots in religious texts and traditions which profoundly influence contemporary social work practice and social policy in ways we do not realise; we think of ourselves as secular, but we are not.
- The text brings together historical, theological, and contemporary social work scholarship in order to consider what historical and religious influences are best to retain, and which are best changed in order to achieve just and global social work practice. As we critically consider where social work has come from, we can choose and create a global future
- Paperback now available (and affordable!)



Part I

THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL CARE:

'THE ONE WHO IS UNWILLING TO WORK
SHALL NOT EAT'

Social care: A royal responsibility

- The story of social care begins thousands of years ago in the Fertile Crescent (Mesopotamia)
 - Power belonged to the strong
 - Élites who had power ate and flourished
 - The powerless (slaves and most others) worked to feed the powerful, and relied on élites to protect them
 - Widows and orphans had no one to protect them, and so relied on the protection of the powerful
 - Protecting the widow and orphan was the responsibility of royalty
 - Earliest mention is the law codes of Urukagina of Lagash (2400 BCE)
 - Best known may be the Code of Hammurabi (1754 BCE) which boasts of the king's power 'to make justice appear/in the land/[and so that]/the strong might not oppress the weak

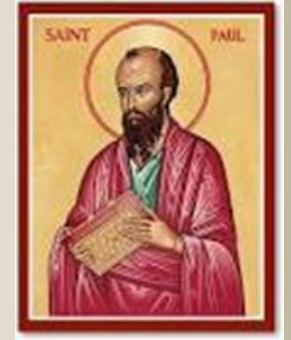




Abrahamic traditions

- The Hebrew scriptures inherited this tradition, and also added ‘the stranger (גר, *ger*)’ to the widow and orphan who required and were deserving of protection
- This tradition was passed on to the other Abrahamic faiths, Christianity and Islam
- Christian scriptures are divided into four gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and 21 letters by faith leaders (+ Revelation), selected and codified in 382 CE (in the Roman West; 692 in the Orthodox Eastern branch)
- Early believers expected their messiah Jesus to return very soon after his death (within their lifetimes)
 - Many stopped working and relied on the charity of their neighbours
 - This attitude toward the apocalyptic (‘hidden things’) divided the early church





Pauline tradition

- The early apostle (missionary) Paul (who logged about 16,000 km in his life) wrote in one of the earliest letters we have (ca 50 CE), to the church in Salonika:

*Now we command you beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us: we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you... For even when we were with you we gave you this command: **Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.** (2 Thessalonians 3:6-8,10)*

- It is 2 Thess 3:10 (I argue) that formed the foundation of Christian charity and civic theology for the next 2000 years
 - Yet (most) NT scholars agree that this is Paul's instruction to believers to get on with their lives while they waited for the return of Jesus, not a condition of charity
 - It was the assumption that the Second Coming could be predicted which concerned Paul in 2 Thess (see esp. 2 Thess 2:1-3; 1 Thess 5:1-3)

Inventing the poor



- Christian beliefs expanded throughout the Roman Empire 50-300CE
 - Because believers refused to acknowledge the emperor as divine they were frequently harassed, arrested, and executed
 - In 313 CE Emperor Constantine agreed to legalise Christianity in the Roman Empire
 - Constantine's city was Byzantium (later, Constantinople → Istanbul)
 - In return Constantine required the Christian Church to adopt the Greek tradition of *philanthropia* (euergetism)—public giving—and specifically to care for the poor
 - The church provided evidence of this care, the 4th century church in Byzantium effectively invented the poor; giving was done through the church



To put it bluntly: in a sense, it was the Christian bishops who invented the poor. They rose to leadership in late Roman society by bringing the poor into ever sharper focus. They presented their actions as a response to the needs of an entire category of persons (the poor) on whose behalf they claimed to speak. (Brown, 2002, p. 8)

The Byzantine Church



- The Byzantine church built the first institutions of care
 - The *Ptochotropheion*, was a poor house, a shelter for strangers and the poor
 - The *Basileias*, considered the first hospital, cared for the sick, the leper and the poor, became the prototype for indoor relief
 - The *Orphanotropheion* became the first orphanage
 - All were staffed by monastics and religious
- The new church's theology also problematised wealth, rather than poverty
 - The poor 'bore the countenance of Christ'
 - The Deuteronomic tradition held that health and wealth were rewards for obedience, poverty and illness punishments for sin
 - In a reversal of this understanding, Basil ('the Great') proclaimed

The bread in your board belongs to the hungry; the cloak in your wardrobe to the naked; the shoes you let rot to the barefoot; the money in your vaults to the destitute. (Homily 6, cited in Holland, p. 142)
- All of these institutions were designed not only to assist the poor, but to keep them out of sight, under control, and to keep them from pestering the wealthy and embarrassing the emperor
 - **Social assistance was also social control**



Managing the poor

- By the 5th century CE a different social control emerged
 - Augustine of Hippo wrote that resources should not be wasted on followers of reprehensible professions such as fortune-tellers, gladiators, actors and prostitutes (Tierney, 1959, p. 56):

It is better to love with severity than to deceive with lenience... The Church ought not to provide for a man who is able to work... for strong men, sure of their food without work, often do neglect justice. (in Tierney, p. 58)

- The many different local practices, church court decisions, canon law, papal decrees, conciliar decisions, civic law, and scripture verses (which often conflicted with one another) were not codified until 1140, in the *Decretum Gratiani*
 - The *Decretum* became the guiding law for poor assistance and was taught at universities
 - It set out notions of the deserving and undeserving poor
 - The undeserving poor were not the 'lazy', but those who undertook voluntary poverty as an act of piety, but relied on the church for assistance



The Great Plague



- And so it continued for the next 1000 years until the Great Famine (1315-22) and the Great Plague (1348-51) in Europe
- There was massive social upheaval during the Plague which saw
 - The loss of the authority of the church (it couldn't pray away the plague)
 - The inability to care for the poor, since priests and religious were dying of plague, and there were no workers to harvest crops from church lands
 - Population migration from country to town created social instability, demand on civic resources
 - Civic authorities took over social assistance, retained church models
 - Statute of Labourers in 1351 (23 Ed.3) required every person under 60 to work; set wages; forbade population movements; controlled food prices; banned direct almsgiving (similar laws found throughout Europe)
 - This statute became the prototype of the poor laws in the UK and elsewhere



Reforming the church, reforming the poor

- We must skip over Islam and the Great Schism here, unfortunately, because you would then understand why we now turn our attention to Europe
 - Roman Catholicism need to raise cash for massive building projects in Rome
 - Reformers such as Erasmus (Holland, 1469-1536), Luther (Germanic states, 1483-1546), and Zwingli (Geneva, 1484-1531) began as RC priests who protested the growing power of the papacy
 - Jean Calvin (France, Geneva, 1509-1564) called for a direct relationship between humans and God without the interference of priests (*scriptura sola*)
 - Work and service were the means by which the faithful expressed their gratitude to God for their redemption;
 - Calvin's notion of 'election'; said that only some people were pre-destined to be saved, and that hard work demonstrated to others that the faithful were part of the 'elect'
 - Idleness and begging banned (Beggars were 'as rotten legs and arms that drop from the body'; Perkins, in Taylor, 2007)
 - **Accumulation of wealth was evidence of God's blessing**
 - Wealth used to justify exploitation of labourers, justify mercantilism (Weber, 1930)
 - 2 Thess 3:10 was now given its more contemporary meaning: the Swiss towns were self-governing theocracies: hard work, frugality and thrift were expected as marks of the truly faithful Christian (the so-called 'Protestant work ethic')



Reforming the church, reforming the poor

- In contrast, Lutheran-influenced (Nordic and Germanic) regions developed 'community assistance' models which led to the contemporary Scandinavian model of social care
- Roman Catholic regions (France, Italy, Spain) retained traditional poor relief (*viz* the Council of Trent, 1545-1563) and opposed secularisation of relief because it erased the benefits to the giver
- Calvinism spread throughout Switzerland, Holland, Britain/Scotland and their colonies, including North America, and provided the theological justification for entrepreneurialism, (what became) capitalism, exploration for profit, and colonisation (British EIC, Dutch VOC in 1600)
 - *Poverty* was now problematised and stigmatised, since the poor were obviously not of the elect, and were clearly being punished by God (Deuteronomic theology revives)
 - Through the English reformers (e.g., Cranmer) Calvinism was introduced to Tudor England
 - Series of poor laws, including the familiar Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601
 - Public assistance remained secularised, but was administered by churchwardens
 - More punitive styles of relief, civic poor laws criminalised begging, idleness, migration, poverty, socially stigmatised lifestyles
 - Social order was maintained through social control

Reforming the church, reforming the poor

- Calvinism (which includes Evangelicalism) laid the foundation for 'Western' liberal humanism and individualism: the individual alone was responsible for their personal salvation, not priests, tribes, or families
- The primary purpose of civic poor laws (I argue) was neither charity nor compassion, but maintenance of social order through managing behaviour and a reliable and stable work force

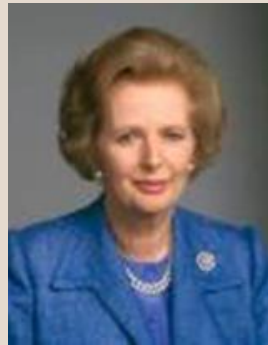


- 18th c. poor laws in England standardised indoor relief; orphanages, almshouses, workhouses and prisons were indistinguishable from one another
- These institutions were run as businesses by an overseer who pocketed the profit (compare with 'social bonds' and privatized care in the 21st century!)
- By 1776 there were 2000 parish workhouses in England
- Under the 'Bloody Code' by 1800, 220 offenses were designated as death penalty crimes, up from 50 in 1688
- Where the poor were not stigmatised they were punished, and where they were not punished they starved

Reforming the Poor Law(s)

- We have no time to explore the British EIC and the Dutch VOC, or slavery and blackbirding, but we cannot pass by without acknowledging them
- The British war against Napoleonic France (1803-1815) led to a severe economic crisis, and in turn to the Royal Commission into the Operation of Poor Laws in 1832
 - This Commission was formed because of government concern about social stability, social order, drain of poor relief on public purse
 - A group of Oriel (College) Whigs formed the Commission with pre-determined ideas
 - New Poor Law received Royal Assent in 1834
 - Poor were responsible for their own poverty
 - Public assistance was no longer a right
 - Established separate workhouses for different kinds of paupers
 - Established Poor Law Unions with a central monitoring authority (for national consistency)
 - Banned outdoor relief (in order to make relief as unpleasant as possible)
- Public reaction widely condemned the new poor law; 10 million people emigrated; private charities flourished; assistance through the churches resumed (funded by private almsgiving)
- Charity Organisation Society (1870) and the Settlement Movement (1884) were born (and flourished on both sides of the Atlantic, creating a North Atlantic Axis of SW theory) from Christian Socialism (FD Morris, TH Green, Benjamin Jowett) who influenced Octavia Hill, Helen Bosanquet, Henrietta and Samuel Barnett



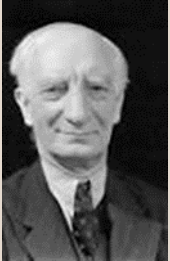


Part II

CREATING AN ETHICAL GLOBAL FUTURE:

'THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SOCIETY. THERE ARE INDIVIDUAL MEN AND WOMEN AND THERE ARE FAMILIES'

Part II: The new reformers



- As part of the recovery plan from World War II, the UK Government asked William Beveridge to develop a recovery plan for social and health services
 - In a series of reports Sir William (as he became) outlined a plan (*Social Insurance and Allied Services*, 1942) to attach the 'giant social evils' of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness
 - Beveridge laid the foundation for the National Assistance Act 1948 (which abolished all existing poor laws)
 - Established the National Health Insurance scheme (1948), with universal coverage
 - Converted workhouses and indoor relief institutions to community clinics, hospitals and residential care for elderly, chronically ill and disabled
 - **At the 1948 Lambeth Conference the Anglican bishops formally handed the responsibility for caring for the poor back to the state for the first time since Constantine**
 - It appears that detheologising social and health care was complete
 - However...

March to neoliberalism

- These public policy reforms were universal, popular and expensive
- A series of global recessions between 1969 and 1982 created economic insecurity (oil crises, inflation)
- Margaret Thatcher swept into power in 1979 (and remained until late 1990)
 - She was the daughter of a Wesleyan lay preacher
 - Reduced public spending, public relief, increased privatisation
 - Held that self-reliance, individualism, hard work as virtue, and prosperity (not ostentatiously displayed) were signs of the virtuous (sound familiar?)
 - Care of the indigent was the responsibility of the family: Over-reliance on the state was a constraint of individual freedom, and the source of social and economic distress (Calvinism in 20th century policy-speak)
 - Enlightenment liberalism had brought about the freedom of the individual to make choices; Neoliberalism held that *only* the individual had the right and responsibility to make choices
 - In the US neoliberalism was known as 'Reaganomics'; in Australia ('Economic rationalism' under Hawke, Keating and Howard); Aotearoa New Zealand as 'Rogernomics' (1984-90); throughout Latin America (beginning with Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, Peru (1970s), then Argentina, Mexico, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panamá (1980s), and finally Brazil, Venezuela, Honduras, Nicaragua, Ecuador and El Salvador (1990s)

Neoliberal reforms of the poor

- Whilst the neoliberal states claimed to have greater freedoms of choice for the poor, we see
 - Greater social control (imprisonment of the poor and racial/ethnic minorities, and any group defined as 'deviant', including gender and sexual minorities), massive growth of criminal justice budgets (to control populations of colour and indigenous peoples)
 - In the 1990s US, African Americans were only 12% of the population, but 40% of the prison population;
 - In the US, national expenditures for public assistance declined sharply relative to need, but criminal justice budget increased 540% between 1972 and 1990; the budget for corrections alone increased 11-fold
 - In England and Wales, 14% of the population was BAME, but 25% of the prison population, and 41% of youth justice
 - In Australia, 3% of the population is ATSI, but 28% of the prison population; in NZ, Māori are 15% of the population, but 51% of prison population
 - Increased privatisation of prisons in US, UK, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Greece, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico New Zealand, Peru, South Africa, South Korea and Thailand (e.g., Serco, CoreCivic, GEO Group, MTCNovo, Agape Foundation)
 - Greater income inequality
 - In NZ number of people living in poverty grew by 35% from 1989-1992, while per capita income nearly doubled by 1990
 - Poor Latin Americans increased from 120 million in 1989 to 196 million in 1990 and nearly doubled to 221 million (44% of total population) by 2002

Social work and the state

- It is the tragic irony of neoliberalism (combined with neoconservatism) that the freedom espoused by its élites is grossly over-balanced by social control of the 'deviant', who are largely defined or created by those élites
- In Sept 2017 Jacinda Ardern (of NZ) agreed that neoliberalism had failed, and Bill English (Opposition in NZ) agreed with her; Paul Keating (Australian PM 1991-96) also said in 2017 that 'the neoliberal experiment had run its course, and [its] policies had led the Australian economy into a dead end'
- Social workers must be aware that their clients, research participants or beneficiaries are largely artefacts of the powerful élites who created them

Social work and the state

- In most countries social workers are paid (directly or indirectly by contract) by the state or by third party payers who enforce particular expectations of behaviours (Augustine!)
 - In the US, the Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest employer of social workers (<https://www.socialwork.va.gov/about.asp>), and the top three industries are all paid by government, contracts or third-party insurers who enforce their own values (e.g., diagnosis)
 - In the UK top employers are child welfare, schools, hospitals, and public sector jobs, including prisons and youth justice
 - In NZ, through the SWRB the Crown educates, regulates, and disciplines all social workers in the country, and employs directly—or funds indirectly through contracts—social workers in child care and protection, health and mental health, forensic settings (corrections, probation, and police), education (primary, secondary, and tertiary), and some social workers in non-governmental and iwi agencies
 - While NGOs are the largest sector employer of SWers, most are contracted with a state agency; the vast majority (>90%) of all social workers are funded by the state
- In all countries with title protection, the state defines what social workers can/not do

An ethical global future

- Social, care, and eligibility workers are clearly expected by public/civic authorities to enforce a set of social values and behaviours
 - Client access to benefits and services are controlled (through requirements to work/training (Calvin!), drug testing, disclosure of personal information, etc.)
 - Workers as employees are often banned from publicly challenging state policies publicly
- Yet our international definitions and ethics language talks about the 'empowerment and liberation of people'
 - Reconciling the tension between enforcing statist expectations and liberating people is a key ethical challenge of social work
 - How do we 'respect diversities' in places where social work organisations support government policies that severely control populations they marginalise, or punish people for being different?
 - At what point are emancipation from poverty, empowerment, and liberation delimited by social control?

An ethical global future

- I have proposed that a global future for social work must take into account:
 - An awareness of how historical theologies (and particularly Calvinism) have informed our current social work theory and practice, otherwise we uncritically reproduce them
 - Contemporary decolonisation discourses and practices, not only from indigenous perspectives, but also from coloniser perspectives,
 - We must also address Western/liberal humanist privilege when >70% of the world is Confucian-, Hindu-, Taoist-, Buddhist-, Islamic- and Ubuntu-informed
 - The question of whether social cohesion, social control, empowerment and liberation can co-exist as goals of our practice and policy
 - The professionalisation debate: I've left this issue out of the presentation, but if SW is not even a recognised occupation in some very large countries (e.g., India, Bangladesh), how can we talk about a 'global profession'?

An ethical global future

- I don't suggest for a moment that I have answers—I have no right to assert any answers
 - But I propose that our discipline must engage with these questions
- Any conversations about a global future of social work and its ethics must take place with humility, open minds and open hearts

Thank you!

(Presentation references available on request: m.henrickson@massey.ac.nz , or read the book!)