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# Approaches to Late Victorian Poverty – A Re-Examination of the London Charity Organization

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Approaches to Late Victorian Poverty – A Re-Examination of the London Charity Organization

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## INTRODUCTION

During the late Victorian era (roughly 1870-1910), rapid change and the effects of previous developments, such as the Industrial Revolution culminated in an age of inquiry and questioning. The decades of 1860-1910 represent a reevaluation of the definition of poverty and its relationship with the middle and upper classes. Yet, the middle class was an inherently new entity, a unique product of its time. Unlike any previous social group, the middle class of this era had both the wealth and ability to engage with and actively address social and political issues. The new domain of an influential middle class enabled a unique intersection of both the interests of the upper classes and the desires of the working and lower classes.<sup>1</sup> Political reform of the era coupled with modernization through industrialization resulted in tension between societal change and maintenance of past traditions and ways of life. This climate of uncertainty manifested itself in the creation of new words, new meanings, and new perspectives. As society attempted to reconcile itself with modernity, individuals attempted to reconcile themselves with their local community, most evident in the debate surrounding poverty and the responsibility of the middle class toward its alleviation.

This thesis explores the construction of the London Charity Organization Society (COS). The COS was established in 1869 in order to help organize the numerous charities in existence throughout London. The COS was inherently a product of its time, created to address a very specific societal issue through a very explicit process and understanding of the aim of philanthropy. To understand goals of the society, it is crucial to look at the mentality of the late Victorian era, and more specifically the mentality of the middle class who composed the primary

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<sup>1</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *The American Political Science Review*, 53, no. 1 (1959): 69-105.

members of the COS. In itself, the COS embodied the struggle of the era in the ascendancy of a new democratic polity with greater agency to effect change.

The work of notable COS member and philosopher Bernard Bosanquet highlighted the COS conception of a social theory of democracy. According to Bosanquet, "...traditional elective democracies rely on crude controls which manifest the 'will of all,' an aggregate of individual interests."<sup>2</sup> However, reforms passed during the mid and late Victorian era promoted a larger civic body through increased enfranchisement and greater availability of social programs, such as education. As a result, according to Bosanquet, the transition occurred from a "crude" democracy, to a "mature" democracy, which, "...rel[ies] upon the 'general will' and the moral independence of individuals and groups. Democracies... 'are beginning to feel the truth of this; that is, to recognize the value of independent and comparatively permanent organs of their will...'"<sup>3</sup> The ascendancy of the mature democracy also mandated a specific form of citizenship, or responsibility on account of the members of society. The COS concept of citizenship placed the individual and concepts such as "...character, independence, self-management, and self-maintenance" at the core. From this perspective, poverty represented a failing of the duties of citizenship. The presence of poverty undermined the foundation of democracy and inhibited a large number of individuals from becoming active members of the civic body.

To begin to explore the COS is to grapple with issues of defining poverty, understanding the ability of the people (middle class) to actively address poverty, the form of such philanthropy, the relationship of private action with the legislation of the state, the importance of localism, and the motivation for philanthropic action in the first place from a political, duty

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<sup>2</sup> A.W. Vincent, "The Poor Law Reports of 1909 and the Social Theory of the Charity Organization," *Victorian Studies*, 27, no. 3 (1984): 349.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

centric perspective - returning to the notion of the construction of a mature democracy composed of participative members.

A major aspect of this exploration is a re-evaluation of the COS, building upon previous conclusions made by historians and attempting to better analyze the COS through the perspective of its own time. A major roadblock to understanding the viewpoint of the COS is its usage of pejorative terms, such as “deserving” and “underserving” poor and individualistic claims of self-maintenance and self-management.<sup>4</sup> However, rather than call the COS an individualist, self-serving organization premised upon the evaluation of the moral worth of the poor, I contend that the COS was “individualistic” in the sense that it placed the individual as of the ultimate importance. To care for the individual was to in turn act according to one’s civic duty as well as to care for the overall well-being of the democratic community. To achieve such care, the COS attempted to act according to a very explicitly defined form of philanthropy. The COS endeavored to alleviate poverty for the “deserving poor” defined as the result of scrupulous investigation, or rather those who had the means to work, but faced economic hardship beyond their control. Prominent COS member and wife to Bernard Bosanquet, Helen Bosanquet, explained this difference in terms of, “...those who are driven to seek public assistance by temporary misfortune and those who habitually rely upon it.”<sup>5</sup> This perspective includes a moral component often misattributed and misunderstood. I intend to re-evaluate the COS not only in the context of its time, but also in relation to its social theory, or theoretical framework. Therefore, my argument is twofold: 1) The COS has been radically oversimplified and 2) through evaluation of the environment in which the COS existed, the society successfully

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<sup>4</sup> Vincent 353.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 349.

achieved its mission within the context of poverty alleviation and the development of effective private philanthropic action at the local level in correspondence with the current laws in place.

To explore late Victorian philanthropy, poverty, its causes, and some of the Victorian era solutions, such as the establishment of the COS, the work of economic historian Michel E. Rose in *The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914* and lecturer of economic history Doctor J.H. Treble's *Urban Poverty in Britain* were assessed. American historian and Professor Emeritus at City University of New York Gertrude Himmelfarb, in both *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* and *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* provided a basis for the inquiry into poverty of this era, with specific emphasis on the social approach to poverty.

The way historians have depicted and approached the COS represented an important point of departure for a re-evaluation of the organization. Rose, in *The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914*, (1972) compartmentalized the Victorian era's unique increased social awareness of poverty and philanthropic attempts to address the issue through distinctions between a "moral" and economic perception of poverty. Rose used the 1834 New Poor Law as a critical starting point for differences and issues in the interpretation of poverty. Rose explained,

The poor law proved to be ill adapted for dealing with poverty, and thus was increasingly ignored as a device for social reform. It is the aim of this study to follow this development, to see the extent to which the oversimplified early nineteenth century view of poverty was broken down by investigation of the causes of poverty, and by changing attitudes towards it, a process which led to the introduction of new methods of treating poverty.<sup>66</sup>

In his thesis, Rose argued that a refusal to accept economic reasons beyond the control of the individual as a source of poverty was a major fault of mid and late Victorian policy and attitude.

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<sup>66</sup> Michael E. Rose, *Studies in Economic History: The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914*, (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1972), 12.

As an economic historian, Rose disparaged the COS for its “moralistic” reading of poverty and portrayed the organization as misguided. Rose abided by a common negative reading of the COS, stating that the COS belief in “individualism” and “self help” “epitomize[d] all that was worst in the Victorian attitude to the poor.”<sup>7</sup> Despite these flaws, Rose continued to explain some of the beneficial contributions of the COS, such as their meticulous analysis of the poor and the development of the method of casework. While Rose contended that the conclusions drawn by the COS were incorrect, their process of investigation was beneficial and aided the development of British social welfare and economic explanations for the prevalence of poverty.<sup>8</sup>

The economic perspective was embraced as part of a larger whole by American historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, who provided greater contextualization to the topics explored by Rose, evident in *The Idea of Poverty: England in the early industrial age* (1983), *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (1991), and *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (1994). Himmelfarb delivered a more encompassing analysis than Rose, taking into consideration numerous perspectives for the rationale behind the Victorian relationship with poverty beyond only an economic or moral perspective. In *The Idea of Poverty: England in the early industrial age* Himmelfarb evaluated the evolution of poverty related philosophical thought, dating back to the eighteenth century with a basis in the work of philosopher Edmund Burke. The focus resided in unifying historical developments with changing conceptions of the poor. Himmelfarb asked the question of what the “idea of poverty” was at a given time, with specific homage to primary literature,

In retaining ‘idea,’ I propose to give the word its largest latitude without depriving it of its more literal, formal meaning. If the present volume attends to the ideas of poverty

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<sup>7</sup> Rose 25.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



implicit in the radical movements of the 1830s or in the fiction of the 1840s, it also takes seriously the text of the *Wealth of Nations* and of the *Essay on Population*.<sup>9</sup>

Himmelfarb aptly pointed out the continuous atmosphere of change surrounding perceptions of the poor and arguments evaluating the best approach to alleviate the situation. Homage to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Thomas Malthus's *Essay on Population* set an important stage for understanding the late Victorian Era. The way poverty was previously dealt with provided an important perspective in regard to the history of poverty in the United Kingdom as well as past perceptions of the best way to approach the issue of the poor. Both historians grappled with definitions of poverty, specifically in regard to whether or not poverty was the result of individual and moral shortcomings or the economic climate. Overall, both the moral and economic perspectives indicated a scrupulous study into the nature of philanthropy and poverty of the era and the acknowledgement that it is incorrect to separate both perspectives.

Social historian and Oxford Professor Jose Harris in *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870-1914* provided further exploration of the mid to late Victorian era, with specific insight on the state of society and its "secularism." Reader in history Doctor Thomas Dixon in *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* assisted in further analysis of the late Victorian era, exploring the meanings and perspectives created during the time and their eventual evolution into changed concepts. Further contextualization of Victorian poverty and arguments surrounding the COS approach of care for the individual were assessed by Gareth Stedman Jones in *Outcast London*. These texts provided an important framework for the synthesis of many disparate trends occurring during the Victorian era. The aim of this introduction is not to define poverty or explain its causes, but rather examine why

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<sup>9</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 11.

poverty was deemed as the seminal focus of contemporary society and how methods of philanthropy arose. The following looks at why the subject of poverty was important, how the middle class encountered it, and how this group of people adopted philanthropic attitudes.

## CHAPTER 1

### SETTING THE STAGE: FRAMING LATE VICTORIAN PHILANTHROPY

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx argued that capitalism was an inherently exploitative system. For the first time in history, an economic structure existed that produced enough to provide for every humans basic needs. Yet, such wealth was relegated only toward the elite at the detriment of the worker.

<sup>1</sup> The issue Marx captured was apparent in English society at the beginning of the 1870s.<sup>2</sup> The realization of poverty during this time was credited as a “rediscovery” of poverty. However, such reawakening was an action attributed only to the newly established middle class. The poor never forgot poverty, but continually endured it.<sup>3</sup> The mid-Victorian era (roughly the 1850s) was characterized as a “Golden Age” during which wealth and excess were predominant. Such portrayal, however, was only one side of the coin. Himmelfarb contended,

One of the least remarked upon but most intriguing aspects of Victorian England is the contrast between the ‘Great Depression’ [1873-1896] and the ‘Golden Age’ that had preceded it... For the working classes, however, that ‘Golden Age’ – measured by the usual standard of wages, employment, and living conditions – was in fact less golden than the period of the ‘Great Depression.’ And the bad years of that ‘Golden Age,’ 1858 and 1862-63, were as depressed as the worst years of the ‘Great Depression.’<sup>4</sup>

The “Golden Age” was only golden for the wealthy. Such characterization of this time reflected a relative unawareness of poverty, despite rampart depression rivaling the later Victorian Great

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<sup>1</sup> Although published in 1848, a popular English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* was not available until 1888. Karl Marx, and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 126.

<sup>3</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

Depression. Poverty of the mid Victorian era was “unobtrusive” and “unproblematic,” given no social significance.<sup>5</sup>

The primary group of people grappling with possible solutions to poverty were the relatively recently established middle class of the late Victorian era. While the middle class was in part established as a result of the Industrial Revolution, such an understanding is limited. The term “middle class” did not refer to a class identity, but rather served to group together disparate peoples who were generally similar in regard to income level. Stana Nenadic in an article published in *Economic History Review* explored common misconceptions of the establishment and composition of the English middle class from 1800-1870.<sup>6</sup> Nenadic contended, “The nineteenth-century urban middle classes consisted of four broad groups: businessmen, professionals, non-manual employees, and the independent or leisured.”<sup>7</sup> The argument continued to state that businessmen numerically dominated the middle class and as minority manufacturers have been used to generalize the class. The reason for the attractiveness of looking at manufacturers as a representation of the whole was their wealth, power, and social reception.<sup>8</sup> In this manner, the myth of the manufacturer was established. Nenadic explained that the myth and glorification of the manufacturer was in part correct, and should not be completely negated. The concept of a “new grouping” of businessmen who came to represent the middle class was the result of a longstanding trend epitomized through the process of modernization,

The processes of modernization from the early eighteenth century based on continuities in the development of commerce has a greater impact on long-term structures of wealth

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<sup>5</sup> Himmelfarb *Poverty and Compassion* 70.

<sup>6</sup> Nenadic used Glasgow as a case study to make his point. Regardless of the specificity, the points made are also relevant to understanding the London middle class.

<sup>7</sup> Stana Nenadic, "Businessmen, the Urban Middle Classes, and the 'Dominance' of Manufacturers in Nineteenth Century Britain," *The Economic History Review*, 44, no. 1 (1991): 66.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

and power than was formerly supposed. But manufacturers did make a significant contribution to the culture of provincial cities. They exemplified aspects of a pervasive ethos and held a particular type of moral influence which helped urban communities to accommodate change.<sup>9</sup>

The concept and realization of the middle class was the result of a gradual process.

Manufacturers have been used to exemplify this grouping of people due to their economic standing and display of wealth. This small minority represented the success of “thrift” and hard work coupled with consumption, leisure, and novelty – essentially embodying the ideal ethos of the late Victorian age.

To reference the middle class by no means indicated a unified people, but rather referred to an economic state whereby leisure and consumption were possible as the result of modernization. Understanding the socially acceptable use of such leisure time is another, albeit weaker, way to understand one reason for the private and social responsibility toward poverty. The members who comprised the middle class originated from a distinctly British modernization process. Therefore, they were products of the British state, yet embodied a distinctly new ethos of modernity. In specific regard to London, British historian Gareth Stedman Jones in *Outcast London* argued that the composition of the London economy enabled for the establishment of the middle class from sources other than industry, “The true aristocracy of Victorian London was predominantly composed, not of those whose income derived from industry, but of those whose income derived from rent, banking, and commerce: a reflection of the importance of London as a port, as a capital market, and as a center of conspicuous consumption.”<sup>10</sup> The sources of middle class wealth, according to Stedman Jones, mandated a specific relationship with the poor and attitudes toward them. The professions of rent, banking, and commerce created a gap of

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<sup>9</sup> Nenadic 67.

<sup>10</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 239.

interaction between the rich and the poor. A major component of understanding philanthropic mentalities of the late Victorian era concerned the bridging of this gap.

The London middle class encountered poverty on a daily basis and in numerous forms. In depicting London of the 1860s and 70s American Historian at the University of Chicago Charles Loch Mowat explained, “Beggars abounded: old men and women in rags, who were said to make large fortunes on their regular pitches; children with running sores, inflicted or prolonged by their parents, it was said, to excite the greater pity from the passers-by.”<sup>11</sup> Mowat’s depiction continued to capture the types of poor who frequented the streets through reference to the sensationalist and anecdotal work of Henry Mayhew provided in *London Labor and the London Poor* (1861-62) - “The street-sellers, the costermongers, the match girls, the ‘Hindu tract sellers,’ the rhubarb and spice sellers, the exhibitors of performing animals, the organ-grinders...conjurers, street photographers, the scavengers, mudlarks’s, sewer hunters, rat-catchers...”<sup>12</sup> While poverty was pervasively evident, it was emotionally interpreted and promulgated via sensationalist literature. The literature of the late Victorian era was filled with an unabashed emotional relationship with contemporary society.

Although poverty was not a predominant concern until the advent of the 1860s, “felt poverty” by the upper classes and descriptions of the plight of the poor were prevalent in literature and news sources since the 1830s. Charles Dickens’s melodrama *Oliver Twist*, published in installments throughout 1837, described not only the squalor of a young orphan, but also the common condition of the poor during that time. The novel addressed both the political component of poverty through the impact of the 1834 New Poor Law and a social, more

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organization Society 1869-1913: Its Ideas and Works*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1961), 258.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

emotional perspective through the plot of the story consisting of a melodrama of the plight of a young impoverished boy.<sup>13</sup> The emotional appeal was established through a widespread acknowledgement of sympathy for a young child, versus the suspicion and at times disgust for a poor adult. Through unifying sympathy with sensationalism, Dickens created a fictional account that, if not relatable, was understandable by the public.

Alberto Gabriele in the introduction of his *Reading Popular Culture in Victorian Print: Belgravia and Sensationalism* argued that one defining feature of literature of the time and its “sensationalist” impact was the way it reached the public. Text was made sensationalist through formatted appearance in publications in the usage of exclamation points and the utilization of the cliffhanger. Additionally, through the usage of the suspended conclusion, the reader was not only emotionally captivated and curious about the story, but was also hooked to purchase the next edition of the publication merging both sensationalism and profit motive. Supply and demand principles evolved through the new technology manufactured during the Industrial Revolution, enabling the mass production of publications. As a result, a new “market economy” logic emerged, focusing on advertising and profit incentive. From this environment, Gabriele argued that new perceptions of reality were formed to appeal to or craft social sentiment and the notions of the past were sweepingly rejected,

This trend in popular culture touched sensitive areas of public opinion at a time in which new pressure was exerted upon traditional society and its principles of political organization. The sensational effect is not limited, however, to the narrative structure of popular fiction; the disturbing unveiling of secrets regarding upper-class characters opens the literary representation of invertebrate and stable rituals of class identity to a world of social mobility, entrepreneurial calculations and maneuvers, reinvented and manufactured identities that went beyond fiction.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 133.

<sup>14</sup> Alberto Gabriele, *Reading Popular Culture in Victorian Print: Belgravia and Sensationalism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 6.

Here Gabriele aptly concluded that sensationalism was more than a literary tool. Emotionally capturing the present and portraying it to a mass audience radically altered perceptions of reality and created a climate of new thought with an active rather than passive audience. Gabriele's point of greater capability and frequency of reaching the public unified with the emotional, sensationalist appeal made by authors such as Dickens established not only a sympathetic audience, but also primed readers to expect drama and excitement in their literature and even news. As a result, the blending of fact and fiction was pervasive and the audience was beguiled into associating fictional accounts with their surroundings. Portrayals of the poor incited active outrage and action, rather than passive acquiescence. Through sensationalism, the public was given a level of autonomy and power to actively affect change through a supposedly greater awareness of their surrounding world. Even further the middle class, as an agent of relative wealth, leisure, and political influence, was able to actively work toward addressing and potentially rectifying the plight of the poor.

A prominent example of the trend of the unification of literature and journalism was evident in the usage of the fictional account of the life of Oliver Twist as a fact of reality. At times, *The London Times* "...reprinted the more colorful parts of this chapter, following them with ostensibly factual reports about conditions in real workhouses, thus confounding fiction and fact."<sup>15</sup> Sensationalism in journalism was common, but was adopted as a visible strategy in the 1880's with the publication of *The Bitter Cry of London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* in 1883.<sup>16</sup> Known most commonly as *The Bitter Cry*, the "anonymous" pamphlet made an emotional and religiously moral argument for the case of the poor,

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<sup>15</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 134.

<sup>16</sup> According to Thomas Dixon, the pamphlet was authored by Congregationalist minister Andrew Mearns as the result of his association with editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, W.T. Stead.



Whilst we have been building our churches and solacing ourselves with our religion and dreaming that the millennium was coming, the poor have been growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral more corrupt; the gulf has been daily widening which separated the lowest classes of the community from our churches and chapels, and from decency and civilization.<sup>17</sup>

The pamphlet continued to suggest the ways in which religion and the members of its community could act to alleviate the plight of the poor. However, rather than a condemnation in despair, *The Bitter Cry* and later sensationalist journalism consisted of a cry of outrage,<sup>18</sup>

Here is a mother who has taken away whatever articles of clothing she can strip from her four little children without leaving them absolutely naked. She has pawned them, not for drink, but for coals and food...Is this enough to arouse our indignation...?<sup>19</sup>

The publication of *The Bitter Cry* was associated with the sensationalist journalism present in the London *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Review of Reviews*.<sup>20</sup> Descriptions of the poor were a predominant feature of the publications as well as an important influence on the London population. Poverty and the situation of the poor became a principal topic of discussion in social and popular discourse. Gabriele explored the nature of Victorian sensationalism, and concluded that sensationalism was a “cultural trope.” The term referred to the idea that sensationalism was not merely a tool pervasively used by writers of the age, but expanded as a part of larger society influencing the “experience of reality and its representation.”<sup>21</sup> Gabriele contended, “...sensationalism encompassed industrial production and aesthetic theory, reverberated in new expanding markets and new political agencies, [and] shaped advertising strategies and the

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Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making of Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 231.

<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor*, (London: James Clarke & Co., 1883), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Himmelfarb *Poverty and Compassion* 75.

<sup>19</sup> *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* 17, 18.

<sup>20</sup> W.T. Stead, an “often controversial promoter of the new mass-circulation ‘sensationalism’ journalism edited both publications. Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870-1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 163.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriele 3.

success of popular fictional characters.”<sup>22</sup> Sensationalism was not relegated to the domain of literature, but was in fact a predominant way reality was both portrayed and understood – an effective ethos of the age. Emotional appeal, therefore, was an inherent part of understanding and experiencing late Victorian society. In returning to depictions of the poor, the modern concept of portraying the “facts” to the Victorians was achieved with an arousing sensationalist slant. The society the late Victorians lived in was new and full of change. Capturing the emotional fervor of the time was capturing the ethos of society.

During the late Victorian era, poverty was THE seminal social issue of society, despite the fact that the worst period of economic decline had passed and wages were generally increasing. In fact, despite defining the late Victorian era as one of economic depression, the situation of the worker had actually improved substantially. A report provided to a Royal Commission in 1893 stated that the purchasing power of the ordinary laborer had increased roughly three to five times what it had been.<sup>23</sup> Further, “Between 1850 and 1885, real wages rose by almost 50 percent, and by the end of the century, by another 40 percent.”<sup>24</sup> If in fact the standard of living of the poor and the worker was improving, why was poverty considered an issue? One potential answer resided within the idea of the relativity of want. Although the situation of the lower class was improving, stark contrasts of wealth were more apparent within society, creating distinctions.<sup>25</sup> From the standpoint of the poor, poverty was not quantified, but rather “felt,” seen as “...a function of ‘felt wants’ rather than of basic needs.”<sup>26</sup> From the perspective of the upper class, greater social awareness and seeing poverty on the streets made

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<sup>22</sup> Gabriele 4.

<sup>23</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 139.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>25</sup> An obvious manifestation of wealth differentials was evident in the slow social creation and understanding of class differences. Harris 8.

<sup>26</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 32.

wealth discrepancies both apparent and viewed as a social problem. Himmelfarb explained, “For poverty was measured not only against the rising expectations of the working class but also against the rising affluence of the upper class.”<sup>27</sup> While the upper class was getting richer, so were the “poor.” Increased belief in the availability of wealth coupled with relative economic expansion and opportunity provided a framework for the belief in economic and social mobility. The mobility, ascendancy, and increased influence of the middle class established an arena for the development of the notion of a group of people with a greater level of awareness of poverty amid them and the concept of the achievable increase of one’s economic position - essentially if you were poor, through hard work and the right start you could obtain greater wealth and a better quality of life. On the opposite side, the increased capital acquired by the upper and middle class provided a significant contrast to the poverty that was pervasive in their communities. Poverty made relative was a potent reason toward understanding why poverty arose as a central issue to the middle class. Concurrently, the acquisition of wealth and profit motives became an institutionalized and continuously pervasive part of social identity.

Despite its prevalence, not all citizens were at ease or were swayed by the sensationalism that overwhelmed news outlets and arguably distorted the mind of the public. Parallel to the publication of sensationalist journalism was the investigation of poverty from a scientific premise in statistics. A cited impetus for the increased usage of statistical analysis was revulsion toward the manipulation of public thought by emotional appeals pervasive throughout print publications. Although caution should be used in regard to the evaluation of the established statistics, the fact that they were credited as a correct way to understand poverty indicated a change in thought toward defining poverty as well as classifying the poor. One of the most

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<sup>27</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 32.

prominent statistical works on the poor of the time was Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London*. The first volume was published in 1889 and the final 17 in 1903. Rose

explained the source of Booth's inspiration for the compiled work,

He was annoyed by sensational accounts of urban poverty which were appearing in the early 1880s in pamphlets like the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Such alleged revelations, Booth felt, provided sustenance for the emergent socialist societies whose doctrines he abhorred. Yet what irritated him most about these accounts was less the political use to which they could be put than the scientific misuse which they involved. To Booth's rational, scientific mind, allegations such as...that 25 percent of London's population was in distress had little factual basis and were calculated to appeal to emotion rather than reason.<sup>28</sup>

While Booth's works should not be trivialized as motivated by mere "annoyance," the fact that scientific investigation of social ailments was a perceived approach to understand the surrounding world was revolutionary, especially in regard to poverty. Statistics were recognized as the most apt way to characterize and understand poverty and contend against sensationalist descriptions incorrectly perceived as fact. In contrast to the more anecdotal and observation based *London Labour and the London Poor* by Henry Mayhew, Booth attempted to not only refute past conceptions of the poor, but also tried to approach the topic more holistically, encompassing the entirety of "the poor."<sup>29</sup> Specifically Booth embarked upon the negation of the imaginative perception of the poor as "street-folk" and,

...tried to correct this mistaken identity by creating separate categories for the 'very poor,' the 'poor,' and the 'comfortable' working classes... The 'very poor' were in a state of 'chronic want,' largely because of their aversion to regular work or their incapacity for it...The 'poor,' on the other hand, although not in 'want'...were in 'poverty,' engaged in a constant struggle to make ends meet.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Rose 27.

<sup>29</sup> Himmelfarb *Poverty and Compassion* 10.

<sup>30</sup> This interpretation of poverty, while more scientific, still contained the perception of poverty as the fault of the poor in the notion of "aversion to regular work." Ibid., 11.

Such separation drastically affected the conversation around poverty, the direction of government relief and private action, and attempted to mitigate incorrect and sensationalist perceptions of the poor. Unlike the previous inherently anecdotal perceptions and definitions of the poor, Booth strived to define poverty from an economic impetus based largely on intensive and extensive investigation. Through his work, he classified the poor as well as established the concept of the poverty line. Through these delineations, economic explanations for poverty were promoted over subjective interpretations.<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding the scientific premise, “moral” interpretations of poverty remained, albeit for a positive, rather than negative purpose. Himmelfarb contended that with this separation, Booth “re-moralized the poor” through disassociating the destitute from the working poor.<sup>32</sup> The working poor received the assistance of charitable, private organizations, while the very poor were relegated to dependence on government assistance. This perspective was one of the many provided by Booth’s work and represented a new definition of poverty and “the poor.” The result of such classification manifested itself in the responsibility society embraced to address the problem,

The poor who now emerged as the social problem were deserving...in the sense of being deserving of society’s attention and concern. And they were thought of deserving because most of their difficulties (unemployment, sickness, old age) were recognized as not of their own making; because in spite of adversity and temptation most of them, most of the time, made a strenuous effort to provide for themselves and their families; and because for society’s sake as much as their own they should be prevented from lapsing into the class of the very poor.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Toward the end of his career, Booth worked with his cousin Fabian Beatrice Webb, on the constructing of the Majority Report for the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, published in 1909. The Minority Report was offered in contrast to the Majority Report, authored by members of the London Charity Organization Society.

<sup>32</sup> Himmelfarb *Poverty and Compassion* 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Previously, the existence of poverty was not troubling. Poverty was perceived as natural state for the decrepit. The notion of a moralized “deserving poor,” however points to the issue of outside factors beyond the control of the individual that were the cause of poverty. In this context, even the most hardworking would still not be financially well off. Society adopted greater responsibility for poverty, especially with the realization that often the causes of poverty occurred due to uncontrollable and unforeseeable circumstances, such as economic decline. The emotional appeal of sensationalism plus rational statistical analysis and definitions of poverty resulted in an un-paralleled mobilization of the middle class. As a result, society commenced upon the process of forming new ways to relieve poverty as one of the ailments of modernity.

Beyond the relativity of wealth, encountering poverty, and emotional versus scientific interpretations of poverty, understanding the late Victorian middle class focus on poverty was encapsulated in the political climate of the time. Poverty became a central factor in determining what might be the expanded responsibilities of the state. During the mid to late Victorian era, political affiliation was far from clear-cut. The Liberal Party, captured by the character of William Gladstone, was a medium for both “new mass politics and an enclave for many votaries of older civic ideal.”<sup>34</sup> Political culture was at a critical point, with the option of either continuing the male, protestant, and property based nation or evolving toward a pluralist and open polity embracing all individuals as citizens. The issue of poverty illuminated popular opinion or rather popular questioning of the role of national government intervention in the daily lives of its citizens. A great puzzle of the time was the reconciliation of the traditions of the past with the changes of the present. Past British definitions of the national polity referred to a landed elite. However, with the extension of the franchise, the concept of a government influenced only by

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<sup>34</sup> Harris 16.

the desires of the nobility was challenged. The emerging society of the late Victorian era consisted of a “...newer vision of the national polity as coterminous with all adult members of British society, regardless of economic standing, gender, character or class.”<sup>35</sup> Political thought moved toward the perception that power was derived from a social, rather than inherited basis. A central issue to this debate, however, was how the state was actually defined – whether the aim of the state was to provide a framework in which society could develop, or if the state was to actively involve itself in providing for its citizens and further, if such action was to be achieved at a local or national level. As apparent in the 1834 Poor Law, previous conceptions of state involvement were oriented around aid only to those who could not help themselves – the destitute of the destitute,

The poor law had been designed for the unemployed and the unemployable, providing ‘outdoor’ relief in the form of the dole (of food, clothing, medical help, or whatever else the parish might think fit) and ‘indoor’ relief in the workhouse and poorhouse.<sup>36</sup>

The law essentially aimed at the alleviation of poverty at the lowest level by government aid, leaving the remainder of society to fend for itself.

With the emerging realization of poverty beyond the destitute and rather as an infliction upon hardworking members of society, the middle class embarked upon reorienting its opinions of aid, as well as the inherent limits it faced in the challenges of a larger, modern, and national society. Harris stated that from the 1860s and beyond “...there were many movements and pressures – economic, social, political and intellectual – conspiring after the character of the British state and to promote a wider conception of its role.”<sup>37</sup> Private action, or rather action outside of government mandate, was to coincide with government aid. Rather than act as a

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<sup>35</sup> Harris 180.

<sup>36</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 128.

<sup>37</sup> Harris 181.

solution itself, individuals within society grouped together to address issues they perceived as particularly relevant or worthy of addressing within a local context. As a result, private action acted as a supplement to observed issues not addressed by government action. Rather than petition the government to expand its action, onus resided upon society and its obligation to promoting an increased quality of life for the individual, a group of people, or a combination of both. Most private action was prescriptive in that it addressed an explicit failure and a specific group of people. National government action was to be carried out at the local level in correspondence with local private action. Private action was to coincide and act as a supplement to government action.

Government action was relegated to dealing with the extreme cases and situations. In regard to poverty, according to the findings of Charles Booth, during the 1870s 30 percent of the London population was in poverty. Of this percentage, the “very poor” represented 7.5 percent, while the destitute represented two to three percent of the very poor.<sup>38</sup> In this presented statistic, the very poor referred to both the destitute and individuals employed at low wage and irregular jobs. Government action or relief was available only to the very poor and the destitute. Private philanthropy assisted the remaining poor population, those who worked but were still struggling to make ends meet. Although not always unified in direct effort, both government action and private initiative addressed the issue of poverty. As a result of such cohesion, the interests of private organizations began to influence government policy,

Active partnership between the state and private organizations – educational, philanthropic, moral, scientific, or punitive – was much more acceptable...than it had been half a century before, and interest groups which aimed to influence public policy were decreasing to be viewed as automatically ‘sinister.’

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<sup>38</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 138.



The participation of society in political reform increased and the government began to expand beyond past delineations.<sup>39</sup> Rather than separate society from the state, the two began to harmoniously exist and shape each other. The ability of private action to impact government aid and reform resided within understanding the agents of private action. The middle class represented the modern capability of effectively enacting change in society while in correspondence and union with state initiative and policy. Society and the state, therefore, were uniquely unified, with society at times as the impetus for change.

Within the middle class, however, there were disparate opinions as to how to approach poverty, and even further, what level of state interaction was necessary in comparison to individual, or private, responsibility specifically concerning conceptions of duty and citizenship. Discussions on the place of the individual as well as group interests were prevalent throughout public and political spheres. Philosophers and common society grappled with understanding the nature of citizenship and the responsibilities it entailed. Forming the body politic, or rather understanding its organization and functioning centered around the concept of “common citizenship,” which aimed at,

...connect[ing the disparate classes], to create the common bond of citizenship that would mitigate not only class distinctions but also individual distinctions of wealth, occupation, status, and talent – distinctions that were inevitable but that should not be allowed to obscure the common claim to citizenship.<sup>40</sup>

This generally loose outline of “the common bond of citizenship,” however, was spoken of in a very specific context. The establishment of this union was perceived as the responsibility of society, or rather the newly affluent middle class, rather than by the government. To create the

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<sup>39</sup> A complementary perspective to understanding government interaction of the public and attempts at gauging the state of society can be obtained through exploring the history of the establishment of Royal Commissions.

<sup>40</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 158.

common bond of citizenship the middle class adopted the mentality of philanthropy as the best way to supposedly “craft” the lesser classes in their image, or rather enabling the poor to have the wealth and leisure of the middle class. The bridging of the gap between the rich and the poor empowered the poor to ascend their current situation and the middle class to act upon their moral obligation, or civic duty toward fellow members of society.<sup>41</sup> Beatrice Webb, at one point a visitor for the COS illustrated,

[Webb] concluded that it was ‘distinctly advantageous’ for us to go amongst the poor,’ not only to have a better understanding of their lives and problems but because ‘contact with them develops on the whole our finer qualities, disgusting us with our false and worldly application of men and things and educating us a thoughtful benevolence.’<sup>42</sup>

Philanthropy, therefore, was inherently intertwined with individual motive and societal impetus for change. Webb’s perspective was particularly relevant due to her active involvement in both social work and political reform. After her brief involvement in the COS, Webb became a member of the Fabian Society and significantly contributed to understanding poverty from a more economic, systemic based perspective. Understanding poverty of this age encompassed the dual relationship between the individual and society, and even further, the responsibility of the state. The continuation of poverty and greater realization of its presence threatened the social cohesion on which democracy and citizens’ loyalty to the state depended.

To attempt to understand the place of poverty within society and efforts at its alleviation, numerous philanthropists adopted, or rather continued the belief that poverty was the result of a flaw in character. This concept must be treated with caution, as it refers to a lack of civic duty in numerous capacities, such as not actively participating in society or squandering resources on addictions, such as alcoholism. Morality, therefore, can be substituted with a specific disposition

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<sup>41</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 157.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

toward the obligation of civic duty – or rather the duty one holds in relation to the fellows in the community. A moral reading of societal organization and hierarchy prevalent during this time, and a possible source of moralistic perceptions of poverty, was found within the political philosophy of Oxford Professor Thomas Hill Green. In *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* Green reconciled the discrepancy between individualistic perceptions of humanity and beliefs of communitarianism. For Green, membership in a society or citizenship consisted of far more than the right to vote. Citizenship unified the interests of the individual and society in the pursuit of the common good. Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Kansas Rex Martin in the essay “T.H. Green on individual rights and the common good” explained that Green’s definition of the common good was intertwined with his understanding of civil rights, “...civil rights are justified by the fact of mutual perceived benefit and that such benefit refers to interests each citizen has in the establishment, within society, of certain ways of acting or of being treated, ways that are identically the same for all.”<sup>43</sup> Martin continued to explain that this idea was encapsulated in the idea of mutual perceived benefit. However, such benefit did not advocate for pure individualism, but the idea that the desires of the individual are to the advantage of greater society. This benefit, the establishment of the common good, was intertwined with the desires of the individual. The common good was achievable only through social recognition, or the “affirmation within a society that a certain way of acting, or way of being treated, was desirable or should be permitted, together with appropriate steps taken to promote and maintain that way.”<sup>44</sup> Through social recognition, a set of civil or rather natural rights was established. An understanding of acceptable ways of acting was essentially codified in

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<sup>43</sup> Rex Martin, “T.H. Green on individual rights and the common good,” in Avital Simhony, and David Weinstein, *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 59.

<sup>44</sup> Martin 51.

natural rights protected by set government institutions. Green believed that social recognition was an obligation of the citizen and encompassed a moral awareness manifested in the “appropriate consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> What this meant is that Green understood individuals as socially constituted, and therefore products of their environment. As a result, individuals embodied the mentality of their society, which Green believed should consist of a moral obligation, awareness, and abidance to societal norms to the benefit of the community, and therefore the state. Therefore, the concept of a “flaw in character” pertained to an individual ineptly performing or acting within his or her moral obligation in positively contributing to the community.

A belief in the centrality of this defined form of morality necessitated a specific form of government and type of interaction between government and citizen. In analyzing Green’s theory, Martin astutely pointed out, “Active civil rights...require an agency to formulate and maintain and harmonize them.”<sup>46</sup> The argument continued to maintain that democratic institutions and procedures are the best way to ensure civil rights. Green did not make this claim, but it is a possible conclusion to his theory. What Green desired, however, was the establishment of a “middle ground” that mitigated individualist tendencies and overemphasis on the community. Associate Professor of Political Science at Wake Forest University David Weinstein in the essay “The new liberalism and the rejection of utilitarianism” further explained this idea through the contention that Green’s society and government was inherently moral. Green believed that the common good was achieved through individual pursuit of the “best-self” as a form of positive freedom.<sup>47</sup> Positive freedom is the freedom to achieve ones desires, versus negative freedom focusing on the freedom from constraints and obligations. The “freedom to”

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<sup>45</sup> Martin 55.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>47</sup> Himmelfarb *The Demoralization of Society* 152, 153.

implied the point that the individual is actively engaged with his environment, acting within its confines rather than outside. An individual can achieve “self-realization” through involvement in society, maintained by a specific type of government. Weinstein argued that self-realization was a moral vocation. Green believed that man’s realization of his moral capacity was “an end desirable in itself.”<sup>48</sup> Weinstein unified the end aim of man’s moral development with positive freedom through stating,

As our ‘highest good,’ moral self-realization is equally a matter of ‘free morality.’ Realizing oneself morally means being fully free by having more than just the enabling ‘positive power or capacity of doing something worth doing or enjoying’ but actually ‘doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying.’<sup>49</sup>

Weinstein attested to a mentality promoted by Green’s conception of the moral nature of man. Actions are not the expression of mere freedom, but rather constitute a belief in individual action concerning the achievement of moral self-realization, both as a result and an aim toward the achievement of the common good by society.

Green’s theory of a morally based individual and society defined the meaning of morally interpreted poverty and illuminated a great part of the attitude of philanthropy upheld by the late Victorians, especially the COS. The advantageous benefit to the individual philanthropist mentioned by Webb was reconciled through understanding a union of the individual and society, all contributing to a conception of the common good. While at times distorted, Green’s philosophy provided a pertinent perspective for understanding late Victorian perceptions of philanthropy and understanding poverty. The COS was a potential manifestation of Green’s

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<sup>48</sup> David Weinstein, “The new liberalism and the rejection of utilitarianism,” in Avital Simhony, and David Weinstein, *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 160.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

emphasis on the pervasiveness and importance of morality and its benefit to both the members of society and society itself.

The morality referred to by Green existed in an increasingly secular society in which religion became more privatized and less of a public factor of consideration. Green's definition of citizenship and duty focused on the idea of a moral obligation. Yet, morality was not necessarily religious in nature, or at least did not refer to a specific set of religious beliefs. By the 1870s, religion had ceased to act as the predominant force of shaping politics, and was decreasing in societal influence. That is not to say that religion was eradicated or completely relegated to a minority. Rather, religious orientation and belief became increasingly privatized, important on only an individual or small community scale. Religious influence within society decreased as society increasingly "secularized,"

Religious matters progressively withdrew from the centre of the periphery of public life, and national and local politics were realigned around the axis of social class, while its pastoral functions were taken over by the growth of social welfare and commercial leisure.<sup>50</sup>

Despite such withdrawal, religious sentiment still influenced society. Rather than as a directive of the Anglican Church, however, religious content manifested itself through the public presentation of individual beliefs or associations. For example, W. T. Stead, the editor of the influential *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Review of Reviews* was an active member of the Congregational Church. Although not voicing religious content, the common tone of moral outrage toward the ailments of society was predominant in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, often with religious undertones. Churches were not a critical force as an official actor of social policy. Harris raised the critical point that the state did not adopt a policy of secularization or "...[a] system of anti-religious belief. It stemmed, rather, from the intensity of competition between

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<sup>50</sup> Harris 150.

different religious groups, which almost accidentally forced the state of act as an impartial umpire.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the state adequately handled competing actors in social issues through impartiality, inadvertently reducing the influence of the religious argument toward social policy. The state’s action, coupled with the increasing belief of late Victorians in private, “conscious” religion, attributed significantly to the increasing secularization of society, but with a unique continuity in the idea of morality, or obligation unto others.<sup>52</sup>

Within this climate, there was an intricate relationship between poverty, its perceived definition, and the enactment of “charitable aid,” begging the question, who in fact did philanthropy assist – the provider or the receiver? Understanding the late Victorian establishment of ideas of altruism and egoism provided a rather unique look at the developments of moral meanings that associated intent with action. Thomas Dixon spent an extensive amount of time exploring the creation and evolution of terms and their associated moral meaning during the end of the late Victorian era, with specific focus on the establishment and then negation of the word “altruism.” According to Dixon, “There was no ‘altruism’ before 1852...prior to 1852 nobody used the word ‘altruism’ to refer to moral sentiments, actions, or ideologies.”<sup>53</sup> By 1910, however, the concepts of altruism and egoism were established notions in society. The formation of such terms and their associated meanings is relevant to understand the late Victorian era. Such creation indicated the construction of a new perspective as to approach and deal with contemporary society. Initially, in the 1850s the term altruism was associated with “solidarity and hope.”<sup>54</sup> By the 1880s, altruism served as a potent rationale for philanthropic action outside of a religious context. Positivists of the age argued that “...theology was no longer either socially

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<sup>51</sup> Harris 167.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Dixon 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 226.

or logically useful” and the prioritization of love toward God over ones fellow brother served as a detriment to social reform.<sup>55</sup> Instead, altruism was suggested. Altruism embodied all of the good will engendered by religion, but directed it toward society, rather than the individual attainment of the afterlife.<sup>56</sup>

The appearance of altruism also represented a respectability in terms of voicing dissent within society or of society. The secularist and ethical voice increased its challenging of the Church while also voicing different perspectives as to the nature of man and his functioning within society, specifically in regard to the duty of aid toward the impoverished.<sup>57</sup> The increase of the voice of dissent also manifested itself against the concept of altruism. In the 1890s advocates of egoism, retrospectively termed the new men and new women, rejected the morality Victorian society resided upon, “The new man was unimpressed by traditional morality; rejected the sentimental and earnest philanthropy of his parents...”<sup>58</sup> The altruism, or rather philanthropy, of the older generations coexisted with the egoism developing in their children. While Dixon’s treatment of the growth of egoism pertained to literary trends, specifically the works of Oscar Wilde, the understanding that disparities coexisted within society is important. Understanding the Victorian mentality cannot be determined in a few mere adjectives. Instead, it has been the attempt of this brief summary to capture the energy of the era, the challenges it faced, and some of its proposed reconciliations. The coexistence of altruism and egoism represented a societal grappling with the obligations an individual had toward his fellow citizens as well as a questioning of the authenticity of charitable acts toward the impoverished.

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<sup>55</sup> Dixon 229.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 326.



While it is important to remove current biases from understanding the past, there is a remarkable amount of continuity and similarity with the present when approaching arguments toward poverty and attempted aid in both the public and private spheres. Despite such similarities, the context of the issue was radically different. The proliferation of different charitable organizations and the active way in which society wrestled with its perceived role in addressing poverty was unique to the mid to late Victorian age. As a result of the rather shaky and new ground upon which the middle class resided as the result of modernization and change, fear and mistrust toward specific courses of action were common. The concept of indiscriminate giving of alms to the poor was strongly condemned. The belief that in actuality charitable organizations created a dependent poor who were unable to become self-sufficient was a common argument against private philanthropy. The establishment of the COS represented a potential solution to these arguments and fears as well as made evident the relative chaos of the time. The COS represented an attempt to rectify the tumultuous, and perhaps inadequate, attempts at the amelioration of poverty. The establishment of such an organization also illuminated the relationship between wealth and poverty, the central topic of this thesis. Poverty was perceived as a problem the wealthy were at responsibility to rectify. The role of wealth to ameliorate poverty was at the crux of the issue – the rectification of the causes of poverty and the reasons why people of the time were impoverished. The remaining part of this thesis will address not only the nature of the COS, its purpose, and the character of its members, but also its legacy, how historians have come to understand the organization, and its lasting impact. Significant emphasis is placed on the moralistic stance of the COS, or its social theory, and understanding the difference between the local versus systemic explanations of poverty and different Victorian perceptions of rectifying the issue.

## CHAPTER 2

### MORALITY AND THE COS: UNDERSTANDING THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF THE COS

In order to approach the social theory of the COS and its mentality toward philanthropy and poverty, I will examine the development of the COS social vision with specific attention to its reliance on a scientific secular mentality that still embraced notions of morality. The COS's moral perspective of poverty was uniquely Victorian and inspired by the ideas of Oxford professor and British idealist Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882). The philosophy of T.H. Green and his pupil and later philosopher, Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923) provided a basis for exploring the predominance of a moralistic understanding of poverty encapsulated in the mission and social vision of the COS.

In order to gain greater clarity on the topic, scholarship is broken into four sections: 1) the life and work of Thomas Hill Green 2) the creation of moral meanings and associated philanthropic action through analysis of prominent COS members Bernard Bosanquet and Helen Bosanquet and 3) the histories of the establishment of the COS authored by both its members and by later historians, and 4) how the social theory of the COS was unified with scientific processes in the actual application of philanthropy. Through these areas of focus, I intend to conclude that the Green's specific philosophy on the nature of man within the community and Bosanquet's adoption of this perspective was a central component of the development of the COS theory of philanthropy relating to non-governmental societal units and the importance of individual civic action.<sup>1</sup> This philosophy was then made actionable through unification with "scientific" methods, such as that of scrupulous organization and investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bosanquet specifically refers to the societal unit of the family as a medium through which poverty can be mitigated.

Despite rampant notoriety during his life, Green's philosophy is not a common area of analysis and is rather niche. The majority of the secondary literature was published directly after his death, from roughly the 1880s to the 1920s. A lapse or rather a movement away from Green as a relevant figure was a result of the outbreak of World War I and the resulting negation of British idealism in favor of other philosophies. *The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green* by W.H. Fairbrother (1896) was a longstanding authority on the portrayal and interpretation of Green's thought. In a prefatory note, Fairbrother explained that the text was a result of numerous lectures at Oxford focusing on Green and his beliefs. As a philosopher, Green's discourse centered on the nature of man and his role within the community and state. According to Fairbrother, Green's philosophy started in the metaphysical, inquiring into whether man was natural, referring to the centrality of man's belonging only to this world and its biological processes or spiritual in relation to the metaphysical. Green concluded that man was spiritual, and his action was used as a "criterion" for the, "moral progress, or condition, of political society at any time, regarding civic and social institutions as the objective expression of moral ideas..."<sup>2</sup> Green's metaphysical, moral, and political philosophy was rooted in the concept of the spiritual man. Civic action and social institutions were a benchmark for measuring the current morals held by a society and the individuals within. Fairbrother's presentation of Green remained a staple authority in shaping how Green's ideas were later approached.

Green's beliefs were revolutionary, and greatly influenced academic society. Specifically, in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* Percival Chubb (1888) argued that Green's thought was a necessary combatant to contemporary agnosticism meaning a decrease in emphasis on morality, contending, "agnosticism...[was] the mere outcome of intellectual indolence" and that

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<sup>2</sup> W.H. Fairbrother, *The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1896), 11.

Green not only recognized the flaws of agnosticism, but presented a “thoroughly philosophy as the basis of a worthy life.”<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, Green’s thought was a direct outcome of the age in which he lived, as well as rooted in the concept of the moral, religious, man and his obligation to act within society to shape its direction.

Beyond Chubb, Robert Murray (1929) represented the end of the initial discussion on Green and in a way unified and validated the opinions of Fairbrother and Chubb. Murray explored both the life of Green and his thought, as well as explained how Green perceived his philosophy coming to life through public action. Murray continued the trend of explaining Green within a religious context, citing how his religious upbringing affected the formation of his beliefs and his commitment to aiding the poor through the greater availability of education.<sup>4</sup> Murray explained Green’s perspective on education in unison with his religious belief in the ascendancy of man to his highest nature, “[Green’s] aim was to efface the demarcation of class, to give freedom of self-elevation in the social scale other than that given by money, and to keep ‘the career open to the talents.’”<sup>5</sup> Murray explained that Green advocated for the advancement of the individual to his potential without the hindrance of current convention and believed that society should change to aid the advancement of the individual. This belief reflected Green’s opinion that mankind often faced a “gulf” between aspirations and the shape those ambitions morphed into as a result of existing “customs and institutions.”<sup>6</sup> The three texts encompassed the

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<sup>3</sup> Percival Chubb, "The Significance of Thomas Hill Green's Philosophical and Religious Teaching," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 22, no. 1/2 (1888): 3.

<sup>4</sup> Green’s religious orientation and background is of crucial significance in understanding his character, the formation of his beliefs, and the continuation of his thought by his pupils, specifically Bernard Bosanquet.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Murray, “Studies in the English Social and Political Thinkers of the Nineteenth Century,” (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons LTD., 1929), 278.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

common perspectives used to place Green. Generally, texts published directly after Green's death explained his thought in light of his religious background and educational development.

In the 1960's, there was an apparent return to Green, evident in Richard A. Chapman's "Thomas Hill Green" (1965). Chapman provided a basic overview Green's character and the major tenets of his beliefs through synthesizing past assessments. Later, from 1970s to the 2000s, scholarship focused more on either the negation or validation of Green's philosophy, moving beyond who Green was to whether or not his thought on the nature of man and political theory were correct. Kenneth Hoover's "Liberalism and the Idealist Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green" (1973) condemned Green within the domain of liberal political philosophy, while Darin R. Nesbitt's "Recognizing Rights: Social Recognition in T.H. Green's System of Rights" (2001) represented a re-evaluation of Green's perspective on man's rights within the state, advocating for greater legitimacy of the theory.<sup>7</sup> Hoover argued that Green's theories, while provocative, were illegitimate due to their reliance on perceptions of human nature in abstract theory, with no supporting methodology for such claims. Therefore, Hoover claimed that Green's theory failed "largely because his methodology [did] not probe the reality of human nature –relying instead of concepts as reality."<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Nesbitt promoted that despite Green's reliance on an abstract theory of human nature, the theory of natural moral rights, or an abstract claim to moral rights, was correct. Regardless of whether or not such rights were protected and manifested into actual law, they did exist, and therefore Green was correct to rely on an abstract rather than concrete

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<sup>7</sup> Avital Simhony and D. Weinstein are an additional source for examining Green and British idealism in *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth R. Hoover, "Liberalism and the Idealist Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green," *The Western Political Quarterly*, 26, no. 3 (1973): 565.

notion of morality.<sup>9</sup> Nesbitt continued to explain that the transfer from abstract to concrete occurred through a process of recognition, stipulated by Green in his theory. As evident in the work of Fairbrother, Chubb, Murray, Chapman, Hoover, and Nesbitt, from the 1880s to the present, literature on Green endured a cycle of reverence, neglect, negation, and re-evaluation.

Philosopher Bernard Bosanquet was recognized as one of the major individuals who was influenced by Green and continued his thought. In slight contrast with the more scholarly coverage of Green, initial literature about Bosanquet emerged directly after his death in the form of personal obituaries and testaments to his nature and character. During this time, J.H. Muirhead, a close acquaintance of Bosanquet, published a series of articles as well as a book dedicated to the philosophical contributions of Bosanquet.<sup>10</sup> Muirhead explained Bosanquet's ideas in terms of moving beyond what Bosanquet absorbed from Green, crafting the idea that "the activity of mind in knowledge" does not merely indicate the presence of a universal consciousness, as set by Green, but rather that the mind can actively participate and comprehend this universal consciousness, albeit at times imperfectly.<sup>11</sup> What this conclusion indicated is that Bosanquet believed in a greater level of agency on the part of the individual, moving beyond Green's belief in the limitations of man due to social constraints. Bosanquet perceived man as capable of grappling with and changing such limitations. Muirhead's work also contained references to Bosanquet's relationship with his wife, Helen Bosanquet, most evident in a poem published by the couple and made available by Muirhead in the journal *Mind*. H. Wildon Carr was also a prominent commentator on Bosanquet, focusing on his academic contributions and

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<sup>9</sup> Darin R. Nesbitt, "Recognizing Rights: Social Recognition in T.H. Green's System of Rights," *Polity*, 33, no. 3 (2001): 424.

<sup>10</sup> Muirhead also exerts a great deal of effort in portraying Bosanquet's character and personality, evident in Muirhead's *Bernard Bosanquet and his friends* (1935).

<sup>11</sup> J.H. Muirhead, "Bernard Bosanquet." *Mind*. No. 128 (1923): 396.

participation in the COS, the Ethical Society, and the Aristotelian Society. Carr was a member of the Aristotelian Society and therefore spent more time exploring Bosanquet's involvement in this organization. However Carr did briefly emphasize Bosanquet's devotion to the COS, "On the practical side, Mr. Bosanquet was an active worker for the Charity Organization Society, and for many years was the chairman of the committee..."<sup>12</sup> Both Muirhead and Carr did not focus on a critique of Bosanquet's thought, but rather aimed to portray his opinion as well as his character in an extremely positive light. Scholarly discourse on Bosanquet changed after the period following his death, and his thought was relatively unexplored until 2000, specifically in 2008 with the publication of William Sweet's *Bernard Bosanquet and the Legacy of British Idealism*. In a review, David Boucher explained that Sweet's coverage of Bosanquet was a "rehabilitation," diverging from negative portrayals of individualism and returning his conception of the role of the state in the enfranchisement of the individual,

Bosanquet's support for allowing free market forces to prevail, or for social or state intervention, was always based on the capacity of whatever institutional arrangements were in place to facilitate or impede individuals in realizing their natures.<sup>13</sup>

Boucher highlighted Bosanquet's belief in individual enfranchisement through either state or social support. Boucher continued to unify Bosanquet's perception of poverty with contemporary issues facing the nation. Bosanquet utilized Green's theories of the moral individual and society and unified it with the current situation of the evolving British democratic state.

Morality of the Victorian era was a pervasive concept. The realization of the moral individual through enfranchisement articulated by Green and adopted by Bosanquet pertained to the unique development of the meaning of morality in correspondence with the relations between

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<sup>12</sup> H. Wildon Carr, "In Memoriam: Bernard Bosanquet." *International Journal of Ethics*. No. 4 (1923): 443-444.

<sup>13</sup> David Boucher, "Bernard Bosanquet and the Legacy of British Idealism by William Sweet," *Victorian Studies*, 50, no. 4 (2008): 727, 728.

the individual and the local community. In his work, Dixon evaluated this relationship in terms of the concept of altruism during the Victorian era. Dixon set out to determine the source of the invention and usage of the term “altruism” and its relation to morality, focusing on the “language of altruism” or the construction of new moral meanings during the late Victorian era. Through looking at altruism, Dixon outlined the evolution of the importance of morality within the Victorian era. The term altruism represented the inherent tension between the relationship between actions of goodwill toward others and the benefit, or lack thereof, received by the actor. Dixon explained that altruism was first coined in 1852 and within Victorian times last disparaged in 1901, “In 1901, the year of Queen Victoria’s death, a clergyman in George Gissing’s novel *Our Friend the Charlatan* was depicted sitting at his breakfast table reading a newspaper article that condemned ‘altruism’ as a ‘silly word’ often associated with nauseating moral self-deceit...”<sup>14</sup> The establishment of the common understanding of the term “altruism” was not uncontested by critics of such “supposed care” for others. The relationship between the poor and the COS stemmed from the idea of a specific type of morality, consisting of a vision of an organic community necessitating a very personable form of casework or philanthropy. The contention is made, therefore, that the COS believed in an altruistic premise for their actions toward the amelioration of poverty, but there were many Victorians who viewed such “altruism” with caution.

Although *The Invention of Altruism* was specified to the development of the concept of altruism, Dixon devoted a section to social conceptions of the poor in “Poverty and the ideal self.” In this segment Dixon provided helpful analysis and unison of poverty, morality, the philosophy of Green, and the action of the COS. Dixon united Green’s philosophy with

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making of Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.



contemporary society through usage of Mary Augusta Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1886). In this novel, Green was the inspiration for the fictional character Mr. Grey. Through elements of popular culture such as *Robert Elsmere*, Dixon depicted the academic and cultural climate Green resided within, and further how similar minded individuals focused on civic action,

The economic, cultural, and moral development which the educated men and women who volunteered in the settlement houses offered was generally, at least initially, of the more traditional kind favoured by the Charity Organization Society.<sup>15</sup>

Separating moral sentiment from public life was to negate a central part of Victorian society, or at least the motivation for the mentality of the many components of the middle class. Dixon contended that the culture embodied by this middle class was most evident in the composition and action of the COS, but it is important to understand that the COS represented a small minority of the middle class Victorians. While slanted toward altruism and more emotional and social understandings of poverty, Dixon's analysis of the climate was helpful to unify the disparate and largely cultural elements of the topic and provided useful unison of the entire topic so far, from Green and Bosanquet to the COS and civic activity.

Conceptions of poverty, explorations of its causes, the political philosophy of Green and Bosanquet, and the concept of altruism were unified through understanding COS "civic action" toward the alleviation of poverty. This cohesion was evident in the public actions taken by Bosanquet, stemming from the formation of his ideological beliefs. Gerald Gaus, in the essay "Bosanquet's communitarian defense of economic individualism: a lesson in the complexities of political theory" (2001) explored the merging of ideology and its implementation through the formation and endeavors of the COS,

...Helen and Bernard Bosanquet were leading figures in the [COS]...which emphasized the importance of non-governmental social work and often opposed uniform government

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<sup>15</sup> Dixon 254.

programs for aiding the poor...to a large extent this debate between the Bosanquet's and the new liberals focuses on the tendency of "charity"-produced dependence. Bosanquet insisted that state provision of "charity" is apt to create dependent characters and ruin lives.<sup>16</sup>

From this perspective, it is important to note that while the COS did not reject all forms of state intervention and involvement, it did deny the concept of government action as the primary source of dealing with poverty. Gaus not only framed the cooperative relationship between Helen Bosanquet and Bernard Bosanquet, but also placed their ideas within the broader context of political action and debate of the time. Helen Bosanquet and Bernard Bosanquet believed that state aid produced dependence, and therefore the degradation of the individual in achieving self-sufficiency. Gaus continued to explain that this belief cannot be simplified into "government aid produces dependency." Rather, Gaus cited the Bosanquet's communitarianist perspective, advocating that the government cannot expect blanket legislation to address the qualms of numerous individuals facing unique issues.<sup>17</sup> State aid was recognized as beneficial in a limited quantity and in cooperation with local, civic action.

Re-evaluation of past and oversimplified evaluations of the COS was evident in scholarship published in the 1980s and the following decades. James Leiby, in the article "Charity Organization reconsidered" (1984) contested the traditional negative analysis of the COS, held by individuals such as Rose. Specifically, Leiby constructed a series of new questions aimed to obtain a better perspective on the organization,

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<sup>16</sup> Gerald Gaus, "Bosanquet's communitarian defense of economic individualism: a lesson in the complexities of political theory," in Avital Simhony, and D. Weinstein, *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 152.

<sup>17</sup> Gaus explained that the communitarian perspective is that all individuals are highly differentiated. *Ibid.*, 154.

I want instead to raise the following question; Where did the charity organizers think they were going and why? Not: Were they right about the course of events, or good or bad in their influence. Rather: What did they look for and how did they reason?<sup>18</sup>

Leiby evaluated why a group such as the COS existed in the first place, not whether or not the organizations ideas were correct. Leiby did, however, conclude in favor of the majority of the COS's approach and understanding. The process of negating past perceptions of the COS not only stipulated new questions regarding the mentality of the society, but also promoted the exploration of the society's legacy through its political action. Andrew W. Vincent in "The Poor Law Reports of 1909 and the Social Theory of the Charity Organization Society" explored an unacknowledged fluidity between COS policy and greater state activity. Vincent analyzed the COS from the perspective of its historical development and authorship of the Majority Report and argued for a more nuanced reading of the organization and its thought,

Many COS ideas were fluid enough to allow a subtle transformation of COS policies towards a greater acceptance of state activity... This paper aims to show first that the Majority Report was not a manifestation of individualism *simpliciter*, and second, that the Majority Report encapsulated a more complex social theory than is often realized.<sup>19</sup>

"Individualistic" interpretations of the COS by historians missed a large part of the organization's aims, especially in regard to the role of political and government action to the poor. Vincent's perspective provided an important critique of past portrayals of the COS and evaluated the COS from both a social and political perspective, unifying the two through analysis of the Majority Report. Rather than completely reject state aid, Vincent concluded that the COS worked extensively within its framework.

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<sup>18</sup> James Leiby, "Charity Organization Reconsidered," *Social Service Review*, 58, no. 4 (1984): 524.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew W. Vincent, "The Poor Law Reports of 1909 and the Social Theory of the Charity Organization," *Victorian Studies*, 27, no. 3 (1984): 345.

A significant amount of emphasis has also been placed on documenting the history of the COS and its lasting legacy to the present day. Charles Loch Mowat, grandson of a prominent COS Secretary Charles Loch, explored the history of the organization and its current existence as the Family Welfare Association in *The Charity Organization Society 1869-1913: Its Ideas and Work*. In the preface, Mowat explicitly stated that the history provided was specific to the COS and did not attempt to place the organization within larger context of the history of philanthropy in Victorian England. However, there are obvious parallels between the actions of the COS and its context.<sup>20</sup> Mowat explained,

The COS was a child of this middle age, of a time of contrasts – progress and pessimism, wealth and poverty, self-confidence and skepticism; it presupposed a leisured class with the means and the tie to devote to charity and the ‘consciousness of sin’ (as Beatrice Webb has called it) to impel it to do so.<sup>21</sup>

In itself, the COS embodied the contrasts of the age as well as a unique moral impetus for action, credited by Mowat as a “consciousness of sin” or more clearly put as a moral basis for action and premise for understanding poverty and subsequent philanthropy. Mowat continued to concisely explain the relevance of the organization and the importance of its history due to the organization’s unique “idea and method.”<sup>22</sup> The “idea” Mowat referred to focused on the COS’s belief in the creation of a certain type of community, promoted as an alternative to socialist ideals, yet also concerned with the state of the individual. According to Mowat,

The COS embodied an idea of charity which claimed to reconcile the divisions in society, to remove poverty and to produce a happy, self-reliant community. It believed that the most serious aspect of poverty was the degradation of the character and the poor man or woman... True charity demanded friendship, thought, the sort of help that would restore a man’s self respect and his ability to support himself and his family... The ‘organization’ of charity, which began as an attempt to co-ordinate the work of charitable societies and

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organization Society 1869-1913: Its Ideas and Works*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1961), xi.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

the Poor Law, thus became a movement to reform the spirit not only of charities but of society.<sup>23</sup>

The idea and method of the COS focused on the restoration of man's dignity to the benefit of a community. The rationale for such action was moral and regarded the well being of a community or a "happy, self-reliant community" incorporating elements of both social and political reform. In this manner the COS sought to radically transform social interaction through the realization of both the individual and societal "best-self and community." While this rather utopian dream failed, Mowat contended that the legacy of the organization through its approach of personable casework radically transformed approaches to poverty. Through Mowat's history, the ideals of the COS were captured. This source provided the opportunity to explore the organization in-depth and understand the specific mentality of its members in regard to poverty and the moral responsibility and dreams of the middle class. Rather than refer to a separated "idea" and "method," Mowat's explanation arrives at the inherent relation to the two. Instead, I propose the usage of the term "social vision."

The COS concept of morality, or its social vision, embodied a unique combination of an obligation toward others believed as achievable through a scientific method or process. Such an idea existed during a unique era of secularization enabling the seemingly contradictory union of a scientific rational that incorporated the moral. Scientific process was heralded and appreciated for its supposed objectivity and use of statistical analysis to understand society and formulate adequate programs to address prominent issues. A specific application of morality, according to the COS, worked within this framework. Gertrude Himmelfarb spent an extensive amount of time exploring the unique COS scientific rationality. Looking at the first name used by the COS,

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<sup>23</sup> Mowat 1, 2.

“London Society for the Organizing Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendacity,” illuminated its idea and desired action. Himmelfarb explained,

It was because of [the] proliferation of societies that the COS was founded – not to add to their numbers but to subtract from them, to coordinate and rationalize their efforts so that they did not aggravate the problem of poverty by the evil of ‘indiscriminate charity.’<sup>24</sup>

At the time of its inception, there was a “proliferation” of charitable organizations and institutions, each addressing an individual facet of the overall issue of poverty. The COS was created to organize charity within the framework of a specific attitude and societal perspective. This approach unified COS social theory with a very concise and “scientific” methodology in first, the examination of instances of poverty and second, the philanthropic means to address it.<sup>25</sup> In continuity with this theme, the COS adopted the concept of the “science of charity,” a process

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<sup>24</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 186.

<sup>25</sup> A brief glimpse at the Classified Advertising section of *The London Times*, especially around and after Christmas made evident the numerous charitable establishments. The 20 January 1870 Classified section indicated the pervasiveness of different charitable associations and organizations through numerous advertisements. Examples are an advertisement by The Society for the Relief of Distress, The Organized Society for the Repression of Mendacity, and numerous refugees and school for destitute children. In its own way, each advertisement captured the specificity of the organization as well as the appeal for monetary donations. The advertisement posted by The Society for the Relief of Distress stated, “The Committee beg to offer to their friends and subscribers their best thanks for the liberal support that have received at this season and they would desire earnestly to impress on the mind of those may be disposed to assist in their work how greatly the poorer classes stand in need of aid at the present moment...The Committee venture to hope that the public will readily furnish them with means to combat this want and disease when they assured that all the money entrusted to this Society is distributed directly to the poor by unpaid almoners with careful discrimination with no deduction whatever, and without any distinction of creed or sect...”<sup>25</sup> The advertisement captured the method of the organization and the specific way it dealt with contributions and subsequently distributed them. This advertisement also illuminated the very prominent issue of the contribution of money to alleviate poverty and donors fear their contributions were not entirely and directly going to the needs of the poor. This issue is evident in many arguments against private and public philanthropy today. "The Society for the Relief of Distress." *The London Times*, Print edition, sec. Classified Advertising, January 20, 1870.

of discriminate relief to “specific groups of the poor.”<sup>26</sup> Even with a basis in a scientific approach to philanthropy, or rather scrupulous investigation of individual instances of poverty and the proper forms of alleviation, a social vision shaped the COS and provided a basis for its mission. According to the COS, the “science of charity” was in actuality the true “religion of charity.” The COS merely attempted to codify a perception of moral responsibility in action made manifest in the establishment and action of charitable societies throughout London. In this manner, scientific process was used to advance the organization of charitable societies, with the undertones of a moral impetus for action.

In both *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* and *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* Himmelfarb directly dealt with the mid to late Victorian era and its grappling with poverty from a more moralistic, yet scientific, perspective. In the introductory chapter of *Poverty and Compassion* Himmelfarb delved into the “compassion” of the Victorian era and explained its process of democratization of society and an awareness of the poor, resulting in a “compassion for humanity.”<sup>27</sup> In regard to the mid to late Victorian understanding of poverty Himmelfarb stated,

A later generation of reformers, with a much attenuated commitment to religion, redoubled their social zeal as if to compensate for the loss of religious faith. It was then that the passion for religion was transmuted into the compassion for humanity. Humanitarianism became a surrogate religion, a ‘Religion of Humanity’...<sup>28</sup>

The “Religion of Humanity” referred to the concept of the replacement of religious values with a general moral concern with social issues of the time. However, this “Religion of Humanity” was not exercised flippantly, but rather consisted of a practical and concise rationale. Such precision was evident in the mentality of the COS in the adoption of the concept of a “science of charity”

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<sup>26</sup> Himmelfarb *Poverty and Compassion* 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

or rather rational, proportional, and thoroughly organized philanthropic activity. The exercise of goodwill toward those experiencing poverty, according to the COS, was an intensive process of investigation into many facets of the individual's life. Morality was evaluated as a changing concept inherently intertwined with ways to address poverty. According to Himmelfarb, the COS believed in the exercise of compassion without sentimentality. Sentimental compassion "recognizes no principle of proportion" and manifested in indiscriminate philanthropy.<sup>29</sup> To the members of the COS, such a careless form of relief caused greater harm and contributed to the pauperization, or rather destitution and stigmatization, of the poor. Himmelfarb's analysis of compassion explained the reconciliation of compassion, or moral sentiment, with attempts at practical solutions to poverty of the late Victorian era. This morally motivated science abided by a scientific process and rationality contemporarily perceived as the most effective and meaningful way to address the issue of depressed quality of life and standards of living.

The reform of society through of the unification of morality with scrupulous scientific or rather quantitative and investigative processes rested in understanding morality and the composition of society from a specific perspective. Green's belief in man's centrality in his moral composition reflected but was not the primary source of a powerful sentiment within society, elucidating the belief that poverty could be overcome with proper instruction and aid.<sup>30</sup> While Green's thought by no means explained why the middle class focused on poverty, it did provide an important explanation as to how the middle class and specifically the COS both perceived and responded to the poverty it encountered. To understand the COS necessitated not

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<sup>29</sup> Himmelfarb *Poverty and Compassion* 6.

<sup>30</sup> Although Green was not directly involved in the COS, Green tutored Bosanquet, who in turn was a member of the society and close to prominent COS secretary Charles Loch.



only an examination of its social theory, but also the usage of the era's increasing secularization and reliance on scientific methods.

Through analysis of the multiple perspectives provided, unified with primary text analysis, greater perspective was achieved as to how the morality adopted by the COS originated, how it reflected conceptions already present in contemporary society, and the way such ideology and perception manifested itself in COS action toward the poor. Collectively, these sources illuminated that in their philosophy, individuals such as Green and Bosanquet represented an increased awareness and concern with inequality in society. Rather than place the onus on the individual, Green and Bosanquet created conceptions as to the role of society and facets related to it, such as the role of the government and inter-societal organizations. While the individual was responsible for his or her quality of life, society was responsible for providing the means to achieve a higher, equal, standard of living. The actions of the COS represented the moralistic conversion of Green and Bosanquet's beliefs from an idea to legitimate public action. Poverty was perceived as the manifestation of a crisis of morality only to be rectified through a specific form of action, idealized by the COS as quasi-socialist reform and encapsulated by its social and case-work approach.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE HISTORY OF THE COS

Historians often remember the Charity Organization Society critically, as an organization that embodied an outdated and inaccurate perception of poverty. However, these readings often do not give justice to the complex environment from which the organization originated or the mentalities backing up its supposedly simplistic ideas. In fact, the philosophy of the organization continues today, evident in social work methods. To fully understand the COS it is important to realize that the mission of the organization was the result of a specific mindset evident in the 1860s and the following decades. In this way, the COS was as an inherent “child of its time,” addressing a specific problem pervasive in London.<sup>1</sup> The mission of the COS consisted of its perception of poverty, the importance of the individual, and almost individualized forms of care. Through analysis of the COS, as well as contextualizing the group to understand the reason for its initial creation, it is evident that the supposedly “individualistic” claim used to often reject the COS was a gross oversimplification of its rationale for the best way to address the poverty of the time. Through analysis of two histories of the organization authored by Charles Mowat Loch, the grandson of secretary of the COS Charles Stewart Loch, and a history authored by Helen Bosanquet, a prominent second generation member of the COS, it is apparent that the COS mission arose as the result of the proliferation of charitable societies within London and the desire to co-ordinate private philanthropic efforts through a specific vision for the development of the mature democratic state. To term the organization as individualistic is to minimize its deep thought concerning the importance of the family, social organizations, the community, and civic obligation. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the organization was indeed flawed in its

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organization Society 1869-1913: Its Ideas and Works*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1961), 82.

placement of the care of the individual as the first and foremost way to address statewide poverty and its general hesitance toward state intervention. Such caution highlights a potential COS error from a contemporary perspective in limiting its definition and understanding of poverty.

Therefore, rather than reject the COS, analysis of its history proved that the organization represented a very important perspective toward approaching poverty as one facet of a larger whole in relation to the construction of a mature democracy. The individualized care of the poor individual addressed one component of the multiple causes of poverty at a local level. This chapter will discuss the formation of the COS, the relationship between poverty, philanthropy, and democracy, prominent COS members, the COS definition of poverty, its mentality in attempting to address poverty, and the resulting COS mission.

The formation of the COS emerged out of a nonlinear organizational and developmental process, undergoing a series of name changes and a slow process of expansion throughout London and beyond. However, it is clear that a primary reason for the establishment of the organization was to address and help rectify the numerous charities acting within London and an attempt to consolidate their efforts. Helen Bosanquet, in *Social Work in London 1869-1912: A History of the Charitable Organization Society* provided a very personal account of the formation of the COS and its ensuing development until 1912. To alleviate poverty, Bosanquet stated that initially individuals of greater wealth and leisure acted out of personal benevolence and gave alms to the poor. Such indiscriminate private giving was a primary reason for the establishment of the COS. The organization represented the unification of likeminded individuals who all agreed that such “frivolous giving,” both in the form of personal action and scattered charity organization, was a primary reason for the continuation of poverty. Such individuals

believed that the private sector was capable of reducing the number of the poor only if such action was unified and coordinated. Bosanquet argued,

If we are to understand why [the COS] was needed, it is essential to consider some of these agencies and the kind of work they were engaged in. At first we may mention those which, in the attempt to mitigate the evil [of poverty], were undoubtedly aggravating it. In the front rank of these we may place the frivolous public, which whether moved by pity or sheer carelessness, supported the great army of beggars and made laziness and imposture more profitable than work.<sup>2</sup>

Bosanquet continued to cite numerous individuals who went even further to suggest that indiscriminate almsgiving become a punishable offense.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, while private indiscriminate almsgiving, or rather private unorganized “throwing of money” at the poor, was perceived as a cause of poverty, organized private philanthropy such as attempted by the COS was believed to be a more than capable solution.

During this time, poverty was addressed by both private philanthropic organizations and government legislature in the form of the Poor Laws. However, Bosanquet made evident that both these establishments were inadequate to deal with the challenge of poverty, and even suggests that the Poor Laws were an “arch offender in the matter of giving indiscriminate and inadequate relief.”<sup>4</sup> The turning point and a credited source of the idea of the organization of private philanthropic societies to better address poverty was the 1869 Goshen Minute delivered by George J. Goshen, president of the Poor Law Board at that time. In the Minute, Goshen “plead[ed] for a wiser form of co-operation between philanthropy and the poor Law.”<sup>5</sup> The Minute was positively received among charities, specifically The Society for the Relief of

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<sup>2</sup> Helen Bosanquet, *Social Work in London 1869-1912*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1914), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Sir C. Trevelyan, a later member of the COS, argues for the punishment of the “large dole-giving community” and cites it as an inherent crime against society and the poor. Bosanquet 6.

<sup>4</sup> Bosanquet 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Distress, The Metropolitan Visiting and Relief Association, The Strangers Friend Society, The Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, Visiting and Bible Societies, and the Parochial Mission Women Fund.<sup>6</sup> From these organizations, there arose the idea of the organization and unification of private philanthropic efforts through the creation of a central body, eventually giving rise to the establishment of the COS.

Charles Loch Mowat, in his *The Charity Organization Society 1869-1913: Its Ideas and Work* approached the formation of the COS from a more critical perspective, with greater hindsight and less personal association, although his conclusions mirror much of what is described by Bosanquet. In his opening chapter, Mowat argued that at initial glimpse, it is a quandary as to why the COS was created in the first place. Mowat contended, “The worst consequences of the Industrial Revolution had been mitigated” and that the Chartist unrest of the 1840s had past.<sup>7</sup> In fact in London “the rate of pauperism was actually declining.”<sup>8</sup> However, Mowat pointed out that the London population was increasing, resulting in an absolute value increase in the number of paupers.<sup>9</sup> The poverty that always existed was merely more visible to the middle and upper classes. Mowat emphasized the visibility of poverty and the ensuing wealth gap as a primary impetus for the formation of the COS. Dickens’s description of the London poor in *Bleak House* (1852-53), Henry Mayhew’s *London Labor and the London Poor* (1861-62), and Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil/Two Nations* (1845) all represented rather sensationalist depictions of the poor and the discrepancy between poverty and wealth apparent within British society. Within this sensationalism, there was the perception of transition and hope for a better

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<sup>6</sup> Bosanquet 10.

<sup>7</sup> Mowat 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

future, or at least an agency within the upper classes to adequately address the growing concern with poverty,

Change was at work, but its task was far from finished...the ‘conversion of the vast and shapeless city which Dickens knew – fog-bound and fever haunted, brooding over its dark, mysterious river – into the imperial capital of Whitehall, the Thames Embankment...is the still visible symbol of the mid-Victorian transition.’<sup>10</sup>

According to Mowat, this sense of transition contributed to the development of opinions critical of the Poor Laws and the government’s handling of poverty.

Bosanquet also placed a significant amount of emphasis on rather sensationally portraying the vast London poor and used such sentiment to explain the development of the COS. In her opening chapters, Bosanquet offered a description of the climate of London preceding the establishment of the COS as an explanation for the impetus of the organization.

Bosanquet stated,

Perhaps the most striking difference from the London of to-day lay in the mass of neglected childhood...and it is constantly stated by contemporary speakers and writers that there are in London at least 100,000 children ‘destitute of proper guardianship, and exposed for the most part, to the training of beggars and thieves... We may find some corroboration in Poor Law statistics, which show that the number of children on the relief lists was very large.’<sup>11</sup>

Bosanquet continued to explain that 40% of the London poor consisted of children. The large numbers of the destitute were compounded as the result of the 1846 termination of the deportation of English convicts to the colonies.<sup>12</sup> Society subsequently became very aware of the poverty that existed at its doorstep. Within this climate, there was also a great demand for work and labor, but no available jobs in the direct vicinity. Laborers migrated to areas with available

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<sup>10</sup> Mowat 4.

<sup>11</sup> Bosanquet 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 3.

jobs, but according to Bosanquet, the London poor were rejected on account of being lazy and “knowing too much.”<sup>13</sup> Levels of employment were increasingly an issue.

With the slow increase of the rights of the middle class, the worker, and eventually the poor, greater emphasis was placed upon poverty with the understanding that it represented a social and political failure.<sup>14</sup> Mowat continued to cite other reasons for changing perceptions toward the treatment of poverty, primarily “concerns with the evils of street begging” and changes in political thought, especially in regard to reform and the establishment of a democratic state with an enfranchised majority as the result of the 1867 Reform Act, also known as the Representation of the People Act.<sup>15</sup> The COS arose from the interpretation of these new issues, specifically the notion of civic duty or the responsibility of personal action toward the less fortunate. The most common manifestation of this action was through the idea of “friendly visiting.” In 1819 Glasgow, Dr Thomas Chalmers, later credited as the patron saint of the COS by members of the Council, established a system of visitors and investigators to address poverty.<sup>16</sup> Through his local parish, Chalmers set up a system where “elders and deacons of the church were the visitors and investigators, carrying out the ideal of neighborliness and aiding those in need with funds raised in church.”<sup>17</sup> Chalmers termed such forms of assistance as “natural helping” stemming from a “sense of personal and social responsibility.”<sup>18</sup> James Leiby, in the article “Charity Organization Reconsidered” framed Chalmers as a very important source of inspiration and example for the members of the COS. Leiby explained that Chalmers’s

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<sup>13</sup> Bosanquet 6.

<sup>14</sup> As the result of the passing of a series of reforms, the majority of British citizens had not only the ability to vote, but also increased labor rights and access to public education.

<sup>15</sup> Mowat 7, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> James Leiby, "Charity Organization Reconsidered," *Social Service Review*, 58, no. 4 (1984): 528.

perspective originated from his personal study of the political economy. Chalmers interpreted the poverty of his time (1820s) as the result of moral disorganization, deriving the conclusion that, “...institutional charity, especially government poor relief, contributed to demoralization...”<sup>19</sup>

According to Leiby, Chalmers’s resistance to government relief was the result of a longstanding fear of government intervention and the abuses and corruption that accompanied it. Charity organizers of the early nineteenth century had a “suspicion of politics” and rather vested their trust in the ability of the community to rectify social ailments.<sup>20</sup> This mentality was clearly reflected in Chalmers’s outline of natural help in the “four foundations of charity,”

...the willingness of the people in need to help themselves; the willingness of their families to help; the willingness of neighbors to help; and the willingness of wealthy people in the community to help...Natural helping was spontaneous and informal.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast, artificial help, such as later represented by the work achieved by the COS, was to mirror the natural process of helping in a formal, codified manner. Therefore, the COS concept of individualized care of the poor through a focus on the family and community represented an already pervasive conception of addressing poverty. The major contrast, or rather modified approach of the COS, rested in its coordination of a systematization of natural forms of philanthropy alongside reform of the Poor Laws. In this way, the COS acted as a mediator between private and public interests to best facilitate the care of the poor.

The idea of friendly “neighborliness,” personal interaction, and careful investigation into addressing individual instances of poverty later became popular in London, especially evident in the work of Charles B.P. Bosanquet, the older half-brother of the philosopher Bernard Bosanquet. Mowat explained that C.B.P Bosanquet devoted a significant amount of his time to

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<sup>19</sup> Leiby 528.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 529.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 528.



friendly visiting and authored *London: Some account of its Growth, Charitable Agencies, and Wants* (1868). The six-chapter book explored poverty in London and specifically cited the admirable work of Chalmers. *London: Some account of its Growth, Charitable Agencies, and Wants* was just one example of the proliferation of thought surrounding ways to approach the poverty the middle and upper classes encountered on a daily basis. The vast amount of literature, in the form of pamphlets, letters to the editor, and reports pertaining to philanthropy during this time reflected its pertinence as a seminal issue. From this context Mowat derived,

In this setting the COS was born, not without some difficulty, in 1869. Its origins are hard to discover; for a pamphlet on its history, written as early as 1874, provokes four rejoinders and an unsuccessful appeal to the Council of the Society for a decision on the question of its origins. It is clear that the ideas behind it had long been in the air, and trace back to at least the founding of the Society for the Relief of Distress in 1860.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, the formation of the COS represented the solidification of an idea not necessarily new to contemporary thought. Mowat continued to outline the rather unorganized establishment of the COS. From this assortment, the two most notable dates are the 11 February 1869 conference of the representatives of Metropolitan Charities and the 29 April 1869 formation of the Council of the COS. During the February conference, debate centered on the aim of the desired organization of philanthropy, with the conclusion of the adoption of methods of inquiry into cases requesting help, the establishment of district offices to best organize this effort, and cooperation with the Poor Laws.<sup>23</sup> The COS was officially, yet roughly formed on 29 April 1869 under the name of the Society for Organizing Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity.<sup>24</sup> Both Bosanquet's and Mowat's histories of the COS captured the intricate origins of the organization. This complexity, however, highlighted the crucial point that perspectives on

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<sup>22</sup> Mowat 14, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

philanthropy were not homogeneous. Rather, the formation of the COS exemplified the continuous grappling with poverty and subsequent ways to best alleviate it. Even further, thought within the COS was far from uniform.

Regardless of nuanced diversity within the organization, there was a very clear union of thought in regard to the basic philosophical, or idealist, perceptions of poverty, philanthropy, and citizenship. In its inception, the COS operated under the assumption of local philanthropy, very similar to the parish geographical limitations applied by Chalmers in 1820s Glasgow. Philip Harling, in the article, "The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy, and Local Consciousness in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain" explored localization tendencies toward the end of the nineteenth century, arguing that the "rehabilitation of localism" during this time, "...suggests a new interpretation of Britain's democratization process that stresses the gradual inclusion of poor men and women at the local level and not simply their formal exclusion at the national level."<sup>25</sup> Through focusing on social issues, such as poverty, on a local level philanthropists not only reflected the notion of society as a social organism which necessitated a focus on poverty in order to improve the overall well-being of the community, but also a reaction to the democratization of era. Harling contended that there was a, "...dramatic broadening of the local electorate, c.1850 to 1900, which created new participatory opportunities for a good many women and working-class men on the local level."<sup>26</sup> Harling continued to state that by 1869 electorate represented "...18 to 20% of the total borough population."<sup>27</sup> Increased

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<sup>25</sup> Philip Harling, "The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy, and the Local Consciousness in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 2, no. 9 (2004): 218.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

enfranchisement necessitated an evaluation of the definition of citizenship, which at the time was intertwined with concepts of philanthropy,

At the turn of the century, debate about the proper role of charity was tied to discussion about citizenship. Some of the most influential leaders in the world of charity believed that charity amounted to a social principle. Charitable endeavor represented citizens united by a moral purpose, voluntarily fulfilling their duty to those less fortunate than themselves. The idea was that better-off people would voluntarily perform their duty as citizens and help the poor to become fully participative members of society.<sup>28</sup>

The COS concept of “friendly visiting” on a local level was established with this perspective of democracy in mind, envisioning a society with a specific mentality in morality, or civic duty contributing to the common good accomplished at a local level. In this manner, the COS mentality, or its social theory premised in British idealism, embodied the liberal duality of retreating from the state, but also actively engaging with it.<sup>29</sup> From this vantage point, the COS was able to critique both current forms of state aid (the Poor Laws) and private philanthropy via indiscriminate almsgiving and promote an alternative manner of approaching poverty, philanthropy, and the democratic structures of Britain. To understand the COS mission and its creation in 1869 is to explore not merely one approach to philanthropy, but a perception of British democracy and the responsibility of the citizen.

Despite the diverse backgrounds and associations that eventually conglomerated into the mission of the COS, the members of the COS represented a group of like-minded people who often shared similar interests and beliefs beyond poverty. For example, the Loch family and the

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<sup>28</sup> Jane Lewis, “The Voluntary Sector in the Mixed Economy of Welfare,” in David Gladstone, *Before Beveridge: Welfare Before the Welfare State*, (London: Civitas, 1999), 14.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Freeden, “European Liberalisms: An Essay in Comparative Political Thought,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, 7, no. 9 (2008): 11.

Bosanquet family shared a series of familial ties, were at times taught by the same professors at the same universities, and were neighbors.<sup>30</sup> Mowat explored such unity,

[In 1874 Charles] Loch took up voluntary work for the COS...His friendship with his future wife, Sophia Emma Peters, daughter of Edward Peters (a member of the Council of the COS)...influenced his thoughts in the same direction, since Miss Peters was at this time serving as secretary to Octavia Hill. When he was asked by C.B.P Bosanquet, half-brother of his friend Bernard Bosanquet, whether he would let his name be proposed for the Secretaryship of the COS, he was 'taken aback' but agreed, and was subsequently chosen, in November 1875.<sup>31</sup>

Through his association with the COS, Loch met his future wife, worked with her father who was a COS council member, came into contact with the thought an work of Octavia Hill, and continued correspondence with his friend, Bernard Bosanquet. The COS clearly attracted like-minded individuals connected through a diverse assortment of associations. Loch later became a powerful spokesperson for the COS and often his personal thought became the dogma of the organization. Mowat's unification of many prominent characters of the COS, both inside and outside the domain of the organization, suggested that the COS did not merely represent an attempt to codify the alleviation of poverty, but rather exemplified a specific mentality and belief toward the organization of societal interaction itself.

Perceptions of poverty and philanthropy, according to the COS, were captured in much of the Loch's work as secretary of the organization from 1875 to 1914. Mowat explained that Loch's role as secretary was twofold. First, Loch "managed the Council and the Society."<sup>32</sup> This duty consisted of typical secretarial tasks, such as drafting agendas, minutes, reports, and framing resolutions.<sup>33</sup> The second and far more influential role was that of the spokesperson of

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<sup>30</sup> Mowat 64, 72.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, "Charity and Casework in Late Victorian London: The Work of Charity Organisation," *Social Service Review*, 31, no. 3 (1957): 264.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

the COS. Loch wrote extensively for the COS as well as authored numerous articles published in the *Economic Journal*, a reputable economic journal commissioned by the Royal Economics Society in 1891 to the present (2015). A primary topic addressed by Loch was poverty and the object of philanthropy to alleviate instances of substandard living. According to Loch, "...charity was a science based on social principles" whose object "... is to render to our neighbor the services and duties of goodwill, friendship and love. To prevent distress charity has for its further object to preserve the manhood and womanhood of individuals and their self-maintenance in and through the family."<sup>34</sup> Such philanthropy was to encourage or rather assist individuals in need to achieve thrift and self-reliance. Loch's perception of philanthropy and its aim stemmed from a deeper ideological commitment to the belief that society was an organism maintained through the fundamental unit of the family, reinforced by communal ties.<sup>35</sup> Mowat argued that destitution, or perceived laziness and resulting poverty, was viewed as a central issue because it damaged the social organism, "With the growth of democracy, no one was outside the pale of citizenship. 'Pauperism is the social enemy of the modern State. The State wants citizens. It cannot afford to have any outcast or excluded classes, citizens that are not citizens.'"<sup>36</sup> From this perspective, poverty directly threatened the new democracy and the interests of every citizen. The extension of full citizenship to all mandated an active and "healthy" involvement by all, of which poverty impeded.

This perspective, rather than necessitate a specific definition of poverty, required a specific definition of philanthropy. Poverty was perceived as rather diverse and felt in numerous ways, evident in issues of housing, sewage, and mendicity. Philanthropy, on the other hand, was

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<sup>34</sup> Mowat "Charity and Casework in Late Victorian London" 264.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 70.

a specifically defined idea that, according to the COS, had to be performed in a precise way in order to be effective. In its seventh annual report (1875), the COS outlined its objectives and essentially defined its approach to understanding and acting in a charitable manner,

‘The aim of this society is to improve the condition of the poor by 1) systematic cooperation with the Poor Law authorities, charitable agencies and individuals 2) careful investigation of applications for charitable aid, 3) judicious and effective assistance in all deserving cases, 4) the promotion of habits of providence and self-reliance and 5) the repression of mendicity and imposture.’ ‘It should be distinctly understood...that the chief aim of the Society [is] to deal with the causes of pauperism, rather than its effects, and permanently to elevate the condition of the poor by the application of the above principles, combined with pecuniary and other material assistance.’<sup>37</sup>

It is crucial to understand the COS perspective of philanthropy to appreciate the rationale behind its mission. The COS concept of philanthropy represented a perception of poverty from the middle and upper classes, and therefore aimed to reconcile the gap between the poor and the elite. This gap, and therefore poverty itself, ideally would be completely eliminated.<sup>38</sup> In this manner, the COS was highly idealistic in their actions, aiming to promote the individual character to a higher state of being and therefore end the demoralization of the individual in poverty, resulting in the establishment of a “happy, self-reliant community.”<sup>39</sup>

One potential source of this idealism was the result of the community and rather academic oriented affiliations of the COS. One such association was that Loch was educated at the University of Oxford, Balliol College under Benjamin Jowett, who also taught influential British idealist Thomas Hill Green. Additionally, Green tutored Loch’s close friend Bernard Bosanquet. Through these associations, there existed a relative consensus concerning lofty

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<sup>37</sup> Mowat "Charity and Casework in Late Victorian London" 264.

<sup>38</sup> The idea of the elimination of poverty, however, did not mean the removal of class distinctions via income level, but rather the end of a substandard state of living as the result of personal matters. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 162.

<sup>39</sup> Mowat 1.

opinions of “society and the state.” Bosanquet’s treatise *Philosophical Theory of the State*, dedicated to Loch, encapsulated the idea that “Society and the State... have their value in the human capacities in which they are the means of realizing.”<sup>40</sup> At the center of this theoretical idea was the understanding that the “end of the State is moral purpose.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, society and the state serve the individual to realize his or her best self. The state was limited in this endeavor as it could only provide the context for this realization. The state could not enforce morality. Society, however, served as a forum through which morality could be enforced. Collectively, the roots of COS idealism embody the notion that the state was a positive entity in that it could provide the context for growth. Achieving a “moral end” in the realization of the best an individual could be, however, was the result of sources within society and therefore was the responsibility of the people, or the private sphere. This perspective was important in that it negated the argument that the COS was inherently anti-state. Rather, the COS believed in the agency of the people to enact change, in contrast to state mandated reform.<sup>42</sup> All of this change, however, operated within the confines of the state and its political organization.

As a result, a rather specific definition of what it meant to be a citizen in the emerging democracy materialized. Andrew W. Vincent, in the essay “The New Liberalism and citizenship” explored what the term “citizenship” implied from the British idealist perspective, specifically from roughly the 1880’s to 1914. Vincent explored the ideas of T.H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet and explained that the pervasive idea of citizenship during this time focused on a communal and socially oriented concept of duty, or the requirements of citizenship. Vincent stated, “[Green and Bosanquet] lamented the growth of individualist self-interest and stressed the

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<sup>40</sup> Mowat 72.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> This point also alludes to the later COS argument against socialism and the control of the state over what was perceived as private, societal matters.

need for strong duties correlative with rights. The citizen was not the passive recipient of rights, but rather an active self-realizing being with recognized civic duties to fellow citizens.”<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, the idea of active involvement on the part of the citizen was an inherent part of what it meant to be an enfranchised citizen. Further, the action of the individual citizen to achieve his best self enabled the societal realization of the common good. While lofty and abstract, this basis of citizenship, or rather the idea of duty toward others and therefore society, was a powerful proponent of what it meant to be a citizen according to prominent members of the COS and therefore what they perceived as their responsibility in regard to poverty.

To return to the COS perception of philanthropy, the condition of the poor was of primary concern, as the individual was the basis of the ideal society the COS hoped to achieve. However, this ideal often became muddled in actual application, and if misinterpreted, represented a violently individualistic condemnation of the poor and the reasons for poverty. For example, in her history Helen Bosanquet referenced a pamphlet authored by prominent COS member Sir Charles Trevelyan, who argued that the purpose of philanthropy, and more so the COS, was to facilitate the “re-union” of the poor and the rich and to bridge the gap between them. In his pamphlet, Sir Trevelyan argued that philanthropy cannot consist of merely donating a five-pound note, but must involve an a greater level of personal activity,

It is time that we should cease to do all our charity by proxy, and to think that we have discharged our duty to society when we have subscribed a five-pound note to a public institution... Since the beginning of this century, the gulf between the rich and the poor has become fearfully wide. The rich have become richer and the poor poorer. The proposal is to close this gulf and to bring back the rich into such close relation with the poor as cannot fail to have a civilizing and healing influence, and to knot all classes together in the bonds of mutual help and goodwill.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Andrew W. Vincent “The new liberalism and citizenship” in Avital Simhony, and D. Weinstein, *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 209.

<sup>44</sup> Bosanquet 53.



When read out of context, Sir Trevelyan's proposition reads as if the rich have to civilize the poor, when in fact it rested upon the assumption that society has lost touch with itself, and it was the responsibility of those who have the capability, or rather wealth and time, to unify all people.<sup>45</sup> From this position, the complete eradication of poverty as a condition was both possible and represented at least idealistically an aim toward a common good for all. The COS perceived its role as a facilitator for the correct application of philanthropy, with specific emphasis on the employment of the able-bodied. Bosanquet explained that the main object of the COS was to work "...not by doing other people's work for them, but by bringing Government, societies and individuals to do their share of the required work at the right time and in the right way."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, even though the society had an idealistic and rather philosophical component to it, at the end of the day its objective was to facilitate the real application of philanthropy. This philanthropy or alleviation aimed to provide assistance to those who were willing to help themselves out of poverty, but needed initial financial or other forms of assistance to do so.

The method of interaction the COS adopted in regard to its contact with the poor was reflective of its basic ideological commitment to the development of the individual for the betterment of all, and was exactly correlated to the development of the COS Council and District Committees throughout London. In this manner, the COS embraced the idea of "friendly visiting" and one-on-one interaction between voluntary visitors and the poor. As apparent in the earlier work of Chalmers, the idea of personalized interaction between the wealthy and the poor within a specific framework was pervasive idea before the establishment of the COS.

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<sup>45</sup> Sir Trevelyan's premise of the gap between the rich and the poor also highlights the pervasiveness of "felt differences" when in fact comparatively; the poor were not nearly as bad off as they were in the preceding decades of the 1840s and 1850s.

<sup>46</sup> Bosanquet 22.

Specifically in London, however, the idea of friendly visitation and interaction was prominently evident in the work of Octavia Hill, housing activist for the poor and later member of the COS. Mowat explored the work of Hill, crediting her as the first professional case-worker.<sup>47</sup> Mowat explained that through exposure to poverty while in her teens, Hill developed a keen activist spirit toward aiding the poor, with specific focus on “housing management as part of social work.”<sup>48</sup> John Ruskin, notable artist of the Victorian era and later member of the COS, also instructed Hill in painting, just another example of the interconnectedness of the members of the COS beyond philanthropy.

In her history, Bosanquet articulated the deplorable state of housing for the poor in London as the result of an increase in the city’s population and credited housing and sanitary legislation as one of the main issues the COS attempted to rectify,

If we take, for instance, the question of Housing, much still remains to be done in London; but the reformer of to-day [1914] has to seek diligently to find conditions even approaching those which were widespread forty years ago. It was a commonplace of the time that over a million poor persons had been turned out of their houses within a period of ten years by railways and improvement schemes, while fresh accommodation has been provided for only 20,000.<sup>49</sup>

Bosanquet continued to cite evidence used by Lord Shaftesbury before the Housing Commission in the 1860s, which depicted an area called Bermondsey Island – a large swamp of sewage inhabited by the poor.<sup>50</sup> The lack of housing not only degraded the poor to live on the streets or in deplorable conditions, but also made poverty clearly visible to the public eye. In order to attempt to remedy this issue, under the assumption that giving the poor a stable and clean place

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<sup>47</sup> Mowat 13.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Bosanquet 14.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 15.

to live enabled them to re-embrace their dignity, Hill embarked upon the process of managing a series of houses for the poor. Mowat explained,

[Hill] and her ‘fellow-workers’ – women who she trained in voluntary service on her principles – were rent collectors who were also friendly visitors, whose care it was to get to know ‘their’ families and to help them not only by providing decent housing but by advice in their personal problems and by the encouragement of thrift (they collected their tenants’ savings and managed a savings fund).<sup>51</sup>

Hill’s system of philanthropy to the poor, although addressing only the specific issue of housing, represented almost exactly the mission of the COS in the cultivation of the individual and personal philanthropy through a very specific and set process. Hill’s work also made evident the important understanding that the philanthropy the COS attempted was not confined to a specific type of poverty. In this way, housing was one of the many areas of poverty the COS addressed.

The COS endeavored to achieve a method of friendly visiting, essentially “casework” through the establishment of District Committees, which regulated both volunteers and trained workers on a local scale.<sup>52</sup> This approach embodied the COS mission and offered scrupulous process of investigation to address it. In 1869, Hill authored the paper “The Importance of aiding the poor without almsgiving” in which she argued that “...man’s spirit was more important than his material prosperity; any gift which did not make a man better, stronger, more independent, damaged rather than helped him.”<sup>53</sup> This idea was directly reflected in the principles and definition of philanthropy outlined in the COS Annual Report in 1875. Mowat explained that the COS attempted to actualize these ideas through the establishment of District Committees, or the effective partitioning of responsibility and aid via a localized approach. Bosanquet articulated

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<sup>51</sup> Mowat 13.

<sup>52</sup> It is important to note that the idea of casework is a retrospective association. During its establishment, while essentially the same idea, going to the poor on a personal level was not understood as what is now termed “casework” or the activity of social workers.

<sup>53</sup> Mowat 25.

that the main body of the COS, the Council, decided to “organize charity by means of district committees.”<sup>54</sup> The Council was essentially the first established part of the COS and consisted of its thought leaders. Therefore, from the outset, the COS consisted of a main Council and many local District Committees to deal with local charities in the area as well as the types of poverty encountered within that local community.<sup>55</sup> Each District Committee included a chairman, members, a treasurer, and a secretary.<sup>56</sup> At times, District Committees would also form sub-committees to deal with specific issues at hand. On a day-to-day basis, the District Committee was staffed by volunteers, typically women, and by paid and trained caseworkers called “Agents.”<sup>57</sup> The responsibility of an Agent was to keep track of all of the cases relieved by the District Committee and to “inquire and investigate” into special cases on the instructions of the Committee.<sup>58</sup> According to Bosanquet, Hill and Lord Lichfield led the establishment of the first COS District Committee in the London district of Marylebone.<sup>59</sup> The actions and organization of District Committees were heavily monitored by the Council, which published papers, forms, and registers for local use. For example, Mowat cited the publishing of the 1880 “Charity Organization and Relief, A Paper of suggestions for Charity Organization Societies.” The paper outlined twelve principles of relief to be used on a day-to-day basis by the District Committees,

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<sup>54</sup> Bosanquet 28.

<sup>55</sup> On this point it is important to note that the organization of the District Committees reflected the government organization of Poor Law assistance, as the Poor Law also functioned through districts with Poor Law Relieving Officers. Initially, the idea was to establish a working relationship between both government action and private philanthropy to most efficiently provide aid to the poor. At the time of the initial formation of this system, the president of the Poor Law Board was George J. Goshen. Goshen authored the “Goshen Minute on The Relief of the Poor in the Metropolis” and was a credited source and advocate for the idea of the union of the actions of the Poor Law and Charity. Mowat 21.

<sup>56</sup> Mowat 27.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>59</sup> Bosanquet 29.

while also reflecting the larger ideology of the COS.<sup>60</sup> By 1872, there were 36 District Committees established throughout London.<sup>61</sup> It is difficult to measure the success of the District Committees in their alleviation of poverty via the COS specific method of philanthropy. However, throughout the numerous reports of the COS, there were examples of how these District Committees acted and what they perceived as a successfully resolved case.

It is important to stress that the COS and its District Committees did not intend to be charitable entities in themselves, but rather act as a facilitator or “middleman” to ensure that the right cases were addressed by the right charitable organizations in association with the COS. Monthly summaries published in *The London Times* showed how the COS evaluated cases and then doled accepted cases to the appropriate institution. The COS Third Annual Report in 1871 shows that during that year the COS handled 12,506 cases.<sup>62</sup> Of these, 4,273 were dismissed on account of not requiring relief, ineligible request, underserving, or giving false address.<sup>63</sup> 3,909 cases were referred to the Poor Law (government), District Agencies, Private Persons, or to a Charitable Institution.<sup>64</sup> Financially, 4,360 cases were assisted by grants, loans, employment, letters to hospitals, and labor registration.<sup>65</sup> In analyzing these numbers, Mowat articulated that the COS clearly addressed a prominent need within society and was rather creative in its approach. An area of important discussion was the rejection of some cases on account of being “undeserving.” Upon further exploration, it was clear that this designation did not refer to a callous perception of moral inferiority and superiority, but rather was founded upon investigation

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<sup>60</sup> Mowat 28.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

into the stability of an individual and their commitment to working to improve his or her situation. Mowat provided the example,

Some underserving cases may be cited from the Hammersmith District Committee's report for 1873...In another case a woman with four children applied for help, her husband having been out of work for two weeks and the family in great distress; inquiry showed that the husband was very lazy and he and his wife confirmed drunkards. A widow's plea for help was dismissed on the ground that she was a bad character, much given to drink.<sup>66</sup>

While the language of the account sounded rather harsh to later historians and a contemporary reader, the points made were valid. The COS was not the correct agency or facilitator to deal with issues of alcoholism and its effects on the family's home life. Bosanquet specifically addressed the issue of the "undeserving" and when or if in fact the COS should step in and act. Bosanquet clearly articulated that in extreme cases and as a last resort, the organization was to act in a philanthropic capacity, but only after careful investigation of the issue. More often than not, however, the COS was a facilitator – not a direct actor of aid.

Bosanquet continued to explain that often the organization did not have the funds or capability to act as a personal agent of assistance.<sup>67</sup> Instead, Bosanquet focused on the issue of the undeserving and the organization starting of its efforts "on the right line."<sup>68</sup> This endeavor, however, proved to be a challenge and was credited as the source of initial animosity toward the organization. Bosanquet explained the issue the organization initially encountered in rejecting aid to those who merely wanted money, not actual assistance, "During the first fortnight those who presented themselves were almost exclusively tramps, mendicants by profession, and characters known to the police."<sup>69</sup> In this manner, the COS attempted to direct its philanthropy to

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<sup>66</sup> Mowat 36.

<sup>67</sup> Bosanquet 41.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

people who were poor not as the result of intentional wrongdoing. However, the way in which the organization articulated this sentiment did not capture such goodwill and rather came off as obnoxious and condemnatory. For example, the public statement made by COS member Colonel Lynedoch Gardiner in 1870 in response to the rejection of cases deemed as “undeserving” after investigation exemplified this point, “Our intention was to cut off charity from the worthless and divert it to the deserving. As yet, though we may have partially succeeded in cutting it off from the worthless, we have at the same time suspended it from the deserving.”<sup>70</sup> The COS was not an organization that attempted to rehabilitate those who had violated the law or who were dealing with the physical and mental ramifications of addiction – the “undeserving” or “worthless.” Rather, the organization aimed to give the “deserving” – people who would legitimately benefit from the help the COS could provide – the type of assistance that would enable them to prosper without being reliant on others or government assistance.<sup>71</sup> Later testimonies of the actions of the COS published in its *Charity Organization Review* show successful action in the facilitation of philanthropy,

The Shoreditch Committee asks for £9, 2s. towards continuing an allowance to a carpenter permanently disabled by asthma. He had saved a considerable sum by small savings, on which he lived for three years; while able to work he allowed his mother 5s. a week. Clergy and visitors contribute, and baker allows bread gratis.<sup>72</sup>

In this instance, the COS was able to help an individual who, due to a medical condition, benefited from aid and was able to achieve a better standard of living. Such an example was representative of the later work the COS was able to achieve. In his article on the COS, Mowat further explored this definition of the “deserving,” arguing the concept did not incorporate those

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<sup>70</sup> Bosanquet 41.

<sup>71</sup> The difference between the deserving and the undeserving does acknowledge that within British society, there was a group of people beyond the capabilities of the COS.

<sup>72</sup> Mowat 100.

who were in fact deserving, but at the lowest level of the “spectrum” and in most need of aid, “It tended to deny help to those who most needed it but least deserved it; and by the same token it was ready to help those, namely, the thrifty, who should least have needed help.”<sup>73</sup> This distinction, however and according to Mowat, enabled the COS to solidify its casework approach, still employed by social workers today.

The COS legacy of casework deserves significant attention, as it is one of the most important lasting impression of the organization, especially in terms of modern social work, casework, and sociology. While Bosanquet cannot offer this perspective, Mowat explored it extensively. Mowat stated that due to its philosophy of the intensive investigation into the individual, and importantly the state of his or her family, the COS “stumbled into casework.”<sup>74</sup>

Mowat explained,

...it succeeded in another, because of the COS’s philosophy of charity and its emphasis on character and the family; it became the center for friendly and systematic investigation and thoughtful relief – that is to say, for casework and the skills of the social worker. Partly from good sense, partly from imperfectly conceived ideas, partly from luck, the COS stumbled into casework, refined it, and gave it form.<sup>75</sup>

The COS mentality of the application of philanthropy via intensive investigation into the individual, and the belief that the individual was crafted and in a sense stabilized by the unit of the family, almost necessitated a personalized approach, and hence the evolution of casework. Even further, the COS actively cultivated this idea through holding seminars and lectures for volunteers stressing how to best foster a relationship with the individuals or families visited. The idea of the education, formation, and training of COS caseworkers was not a topic thoroughly

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<sup>73</sup> Mowat 268.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.



developed until 1896. During this year, the Council outlined an ideal process concerning the training of volunteers. The Council stated,

The District Committees should become centers for interesting and training those men of ability and insight...ought by reason to have a chief place in the administration of local charity...In this way by degrees an outer ring of workers may be formed, persons of all classes and professions working in connection with other agencies, but ready to accept the obligation and thoroughness in charity.<sup>76</sup>

Beyond volunteers, the COS desired a core of individuals who were trained in a specific method of action in regard to the application of philanthropy. To achieve this education, the COS established a Joint Lectures Committee in 1896. Lectures were performed in London during 1896-98 and continued until 1901.<sup>77</sup> The Council also established a Committee on Training, which focused on two kinds of training: 1) “the proselytizing of clergy, district visitors and ‘outside workers’ of every sort and 2) the training of executive members of the society.”<sup>78</sup> The COS specifically focused on the latter, as this was the group of individuals it intended to rely upon for the dissemination of philanthropy. From its start, the Council on Training and COS lectures had academic undertones and associations, specifically with the London School of Sociology. Due to a funding issue, the School merged with the London School of Economics, and still exists today within the university.

This picture of the COS is not particularly representative of common portrayals of the organization. Rather than depicted as individualistic and cold hearted, I have attempted to capture the enthusiasm and general good will members of the COS had toward addressing the poverty of the era. The COS was established as the result of myriad of different factors contributing to a public awareness of poverty, but from a top down vantage point of a wealthy

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<sup>76</sup> Mowat 105.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 109.

and leisured middle class who had the opportunity to spend great effort and time dealing with the issue. Despite this portrayal, there were serious qualms with the COS perspective, especially evident in the late 1880s and the following decades. The next chapter will explore a counter argument to the COS perspective of poverty, philanthropy, and its overall social theory.

## CHAPTER 4

### CRITIQUE OF THE COS AND CONCLUSIONS

Numerous historians reviewed the COS and its form of philanthropy as crude, individualistic, and rather unreflective of the actual climate of poverty. As a result, the COS has been used to illustrate the critical flaws of the mentality of the mid to late Victorian era. More recent scholarship has taken this criticism to task, exploring the COS to ascertain if in fact the organization was as harsh as it has been depicted and the historical significance of the organization in relation to conceptualizing poverty and democracy. A critical tension uncovered by such analysis was either an incomplete assessment of COS social theory or a separation of the “theory” from the “method.” Criticism of the COS has often evaluated the group compartmentally, focusing on aspects that overlooked the overarching COS mission and social theory or misattributed the total aim of the society. Such misreading’s of the organization have contributed to misunderstandings of the society and an anachronistic understanding of Victorian philanthropy. In this chapter, I explore historical perspectives regarding the impact of the COS and conclude with a favorable reading of the organization. I argue that the impact of the COS should be measured not by the organization’s success at addressing systemic poverty, but rather through evaluation of its promotion of local and civic action to the benefit of others in society – essentially a flourishing of civic duty in a focus on addressing tangible and intangible needs to the benefit of both the agent of philanthropy and the receiver of assistance.

The most prominent, and by far a very basic, interpretation of the COS regarded its supposed mentality as “purely reactionary individualist[ic].”<sup>1</sup> Asa Briggs, in analysis of the work conducted by British sociological researcher Seebohm Rowntree (1871-1954), portrayed the

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew W. Vincent, “The Poor Law Reports of 1909 and the Social Theory of the Charity Organization,” *Victorian Studies*, 27, no. 3 (1984): 343.

COS in an extremely negative light, taking the organization's terminology of the "individual," "deserving," and "undeserving" poor at face value and from a 1960s retrospective. Briggs contended,

...the Charity Organization Society, founded in 1869, were strong individualists, critical of 'the foolish charity of the public' and shocked by what they regarded as 'the horrible cruelty of sentimental interference with the lives of the poor.' They drew a sharp distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'underserving poor,' and advocated measures which would encourage self-help and personal reliance. They expressed 'steady dislike' of 'undue government interference with movements for assisting the poor,' and considered that a large proportion of the poverty in cities was the fault of the poor themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Briggs, through face value analysis of writings authored by Bernard Bosanquet and Helen Bosanquet, concluded that the COS represented all that was worst in understanding poverty of the late Victorian era and the conceptualization of alleviating methods. Briggs interpreted the COS aversion to indiscriminate almsgiving as an affront to public, or rather state aid toward poverty. From this perspective and reading, the COS attempted no coordination with the state concerning philanthropic private efforts and rather continued the stigmatization of the poor through a harsh conception of the "deserving" and "underserving." In his critique, Briggs continued to articulate this view of the COS, arguing that the organization, through the perspective of the Bosanquet's, "...drew that with the help of wise guidance the poor had to be turned into 'liberal economic men,' and one that had been so converted they would, of course, cease to be poor."<sup>3</sup> Briggs attributed COS thought to concepts of liberalism, individualism, and essentially a purely capitalistic, free-market conception of society. Therefore, according to Briggs, the COS aimed to enable the poor to become free-market, individualistic agents, currently unable to obtain this position due to individual shortcomings and deficiencies. COS

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<sup>2</sup> Asa Briggs, *A study of the work of Seebohm Rowntree, 1871-1954 (Social thought and social action)*, (London: Longman, 1961), 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

philanthropy was not necessarily “philanthropy” but rather a civilization process of making the poor more like the middle-class members of the COS.

A second conceptualization of the COS utilized such individualistic claims, but argued that there was some benefit to COS philanthropy, specifically its establishment and legacy of individualized care or casework. In this manner, the “idea” of the COS centered in an individualistic rationale for causes of poverty was separated from a rather caring and beneficial process of “casework.” This perspective allowed for the distinction between a philosophical idea and its actual application under the contention that the two could be separated. Therefore, regardless of the flawed mentality of the members of the COS, their action toward the systematization and professionalization of social work and philanthropy was perceived as highly beneficial. Economic historian Michael E. Rose was a prominent advocate of such separation. In *The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914* Rose stated, “With its stern insistence on individualism and self help, its rejection of state aid except in a minor role and its distinction between the deserving and the underserving poor, it might seem to epitomize all that was worst in the Victorian attitude toward the poor.”<sup>4</sup> Rose continued to elaborate, “It is, however, essential to recognize the very positive contribution which the society made towards the attack on nineteenth-century poverty, particularly through its insistence on careful, dispassionate investigation.”<sup>5</sup> Rose reinforced the traditional individualistic reading of the COS but continued to argue that the physical application of such “individualism” via casework or a “careful, dispassionate investigation” was beneficial. According to Rose, the establishment of casework and its process would not have been possible without such individualism. Yet, Rose operated under the assumption that casework, a practice

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<sup>4</sup> Michael E. Rose, *Studies in Economic History: The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914*, (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1972), 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

rooted in the care of the individual, was aimed to the eventual contextualization within a system that looked at the greater issue beyond individual circumstances. Such an opinion was contradictory, as one facet of individualism was deplored while the other credited as beneficial. This perspective marked not only the concept of a distinction between ideology and action, but also a rather compartmentalized rationale supposedly held by the COS.

Historian Gareth Stedman Jones picked up this discrepancy. Stedman Jones contended that COS casework was inherently individualistic, as it represented a mentality of the centrality and importance of the individual. The process of casework should not be adopted to rectify systemic issues. In *Outcast London* Stedman Jones stated,

Historians have generally tended to treat the COS as if its social philosophy could be detached from its methods of work, and have argued that while the philosophy of the COS looked to the past, its methods looked to the future. For, on the one hand, imprisoned in its ‘sternly individualist philosophy,’ the COS was unable to participate in the creation of the welfare state. But, on the other hand, by systemically investigating each individual applicant, the COS was a pioneer of ‘casework’ and thus laid the foundations of modern social administration. Whatever the validity of this claim, it provides no insight into the original historical meaning and purpose of the ‘casework’ of the COS, and to make this dichotomy at all does violence to the unity between the theory and practice of the Society.<sup>6</sup>

Stedman Jones identified the important distinction of conceptualizing the COS in terms of its “social philosophy” rather than a separated “idea” and “mission.” This depiction promoted the concept of philanthropy and poverty held by the COS as far more unified, representing a coherent social vision. However, Stedman Jones was deeply critical of the COS. Rather than focus more on the formation of COS social philosophy, Stedman Jones contended that the COS represented the fears of a section of the middle class and an attempt at addressing the issue of the increasing separation or “gulf” between the upper and lower classes, essentially “the poor.” In the explanation of this concept, Stedman Jones stipulated that the COS acted paternalistically,

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<sup>6</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 256, 257.

not out of general good will, but rather, "...because the poor no longer knew and respected the rich."<sup>7</sup> Stedman Jones argued that the COS was primarily motivated to address this "gap" through its conceptualization of the "gift" or essentially concepts of "organic" or natural help as stipulated by Chalmers. Members of society, according to the COS, were to interact with each other in a specific way, of which poverty impeded. Therefore, Stedman Jones maintained that COS actions represented a mentality within the middle class and a manifestation of their fears through personalized casework, or the perception that it was the obligation and duty of the middle class to interact with the poor in order to enable the poor to ascend their current means. This perspective is evocative of arguments made by Briggs for the establishment or ascendancy of more "like-minded middle class citizens" who would actively participate in the current democratic system. The middle class members of the COS desired a hierarchical and deferential society where the poor respected the upper classes.<sup>8</sup> Stedman Jones synthesized an entire philanthropic movement as motivated out of fear and self-interest.

There is, however, a fourth reading of the COS that diverged from the three perspectives outlined. Rather than use the assumption of pejorative individualism as was traditionally accepted or that the actions of the COS were motivated purely out of class and self-interest, historians have begun to further evaluate the true nature of the "individual" in unison with COS social philosophy. In his work, and specifically in "The Poor Law Reports of 1909 and the Social Theory of the Charity Organization Society," Andrew W. Vincent extensively examined the COS through an evaluation of its social philosophy as a "coherent, thoroughly articulated social vision."<sup>9</sup> Rather than completely reject the perspective of previous historians, Vincent conceded

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<sup>7</sup> Stedman Jones 257.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent 342.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 345.

that at times the language of the COS was “harsh and uncompromising.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, to stop at face valuation of incidences of “uncompromising” language missed the deep philosophical roots of the COS mentality. Vincent adopted the approach of analyzing the COS through its association with philosophical idealism. While Stedman Jones argued that to separate the ideology of the COS from its practice was violent, so too was the reduction of COS social philosophy as a manifestation of class fears.<sup>11</sup> Stedman Jones argued that COS social philosophy was in fact individualistic, but then continued to explain that the COS was motivated by a collective class mentality. Such an interpretation seemed at odds with itself, and illuminated the complex unity between the individual and the surrounding society envisioned by the COS. The COS believed in the growth of the individual within a local, communal context. To stop at mere individualism missed a significant portion of the mission of the COS. Stedman Jones “fundamentally misunderstood the nature of this social theory, specifically the idea of individualism.”<sup>12</sup> Historians have evaluated this perspective and contended that to understanding the COS is to grapple with its coherent social vision. Vincent stated, “To stress these negative features of the COS, however, can easily lead to caricature; a different picture emerges by giving equal stress to those COS figures how presented a coherent, thoroughly articulated social vision and tried to put it into practice.”<sup>13</sup> To focus only on the negative aspects of the COS through a specific reading of its literature missed the organic and community focused tone of the COS narrative and its philanthropic action toward instances of poverty. Further, the COS social vision was also a

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<sup>10</sup> Vincent 345.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that Stedman Jones’s usage of “fear” was used to indicate the middle class concern with the “separation of classes and the deformation of the gift.” Even with this distinction, however, Stedman Jones abides by an interpretation of the COS as paternalistically motivated to address poverty, rather than rely on arguments of civic duty.

<sup>12</sup> Vincent 345.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



relatively fluid idea, according to Vincent, and therefore its policies were able to slightly evolve and advance alongside general changes of the mentality of the era, specifically in regard to the level of state intervention.

Due to the background of prominent COS leaders, to separate the COS from its philosophical roots was just as violent as to separate its ideology from its practice. Similar to the approach used in this thesis, Vincent used the philosophical thought of Bernard Bosanquet to articulate the COS perspective, “Bernard Bosanquet...saw a specific relationship between idealist philosophy and COS casework. Both idealism and the COS version of casework embodied, according to Bosanquet, a vision of reality as a whole.”<sup>14</sup> This “vision of reality” articulated the centrality of the individual in that the individual was the most basic part of society. Therefore, to care for the individual was to care for society and each individual was to act according to a morality intertwined with citizenship, or a moral duty to one’s fellows. COS social theory did not aim at the advancement of individual material status, but rather prioritized an advancement of the internal self and the mind or the development of one as a person, although material advancement was recognized as a necessary component. In contrast with the interpretations of historians such as Asa Briggs, the COS regarded interaction and cooperation with the state and necessary and positive, “The COS were in fact progressively pushed by the logic of their argument on the standard of life to accept certain state guaranteed levels. Total independence and total dependence were equally illusions.”<sup>15</sup> However, while the COS believed that philanthropy should operate in correspondence with the state, it intended its role and focus to be on the development of the local community, not the nation itself. This perspective necessitated the question of what exactly was to be the balance between state and private aid or

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<sup>14</sup> Vincent 352.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 359.

philanthropy. Such a question characterized the majority of the discourse surrounding the COS throughout the 1880s to early 1900s.

The question of the level of interaction between the state and private philanthropic efforts remained a quandary not necessarily solved by the COS or their contemporaries. Rather, extensive debate occurred surrounding the issue. From a present-day standpoint, a major critique of the COS was its insistence on a rather limited approach to poverty, focusing only on individual, casework issues rather than looking at systemic issues that caused poverty in the first place. This perspective was outlined in “The Victorian Ethical Foundations of Social Work in England: Continuity and Contradiction” by social policy academics Bill Forsythe and Bill Jordan. In the article, Forsythe and Jordan evaluated the social inclusivity of late Victorian philanthropists. Forsythe and Jordan argued in favor of the ethical foundation of late Victorian philanthropists, but contended that the application of such moralism backfired and resulted in a “...strongly discriminatory moralistic basis to social policy and mainstream charitable intervention that militated against these ethical foundations.”<sup>16</sup> From this perspective, Forsythe and Jordan accepted a more nuanced version of COS social theory as a positive feature of the organization, but argue that the application of the social philosophy in itself was flawed, as its ethical component was distorted and its approach focused on a small facet of the issue rather than the encompassing whole, resulting in “discriminatory” practices and contradictory social action. Therefore, the COS conception of reality was in itself too minimalist, ignoring larger processes at work. Forsythe and Jordan stated, “Voluntarism, social entrepreneurship and the mobilization of community spirit cannot simply substitute for professionalization and the development of

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<sup>16</sup> Bill Forsythe, and Bill Jordan, "The Victorian Ethical Foundations of Social Work in England: Continuity and Contradiction," *British Journal of Social Work*, 32 (2002): 847.

public services...”<sup>17</sup> If the aim of the COS was to address poverty on a national level, then its mission failed as it narrowed itself to the circumstances of the individual and an over-assumption of the capabilities of private, philanthropic aid. The COS was limited by its own “...strong suspicion...of state intervention and public provision and a fear that entitlements to benefits and services, whether public dole or private handouts, eroded these forms of personal and communal responsibility.”<sup>18</sup> The COS’s drive for a more inclusive society through the ascendancy of the poor was impeded by its inability to embrace greater state involvement. As a result, and according to Forsythe and Jordan, the COS was unable to truly address the crux of the poverty of the era. Methods of Victorian philanthropy, evident in the numerous charities the COS attempted to coordinate, embraced an inherent conflict in a moral obligation to the individual, but a refusal to address the greater inequality embodied by the system that promoted and maintained poverty in the first place. From a contemporary perspective, Forsythe and Jordan argued for a union of private philanthropic efforts, but with a focus on social justice and inclusion within the national system, rather than the development of local communities, as stressed by the COS through its philosophy of the individual. Therefore, the mission of the COS was not to address national poverty, but to address local instances of poverty. In actuality, the COS was more than aware of its limitations as a facilitator of aid and therefore was very particular with the cases it did address. The COS only assisted cases it believed it was capable of addressing.

To further articulate an argument against the perspective outlined by Stedman Jones and counter Forsythe and Jordan’s contention concerning systemic exclusion and social inequality supposedly left unaddressed by the COS, it is helpful to evaluate the importance of localism, or local action, during the late Victorian era. Returning to Philip Harling’s exploration of late

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<sup>17</sup> Forsythe and Jordan 848.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 854.

Victorian localism (chapter 3) illuminated how contemporary perspectives of nationalization and increased state control were a relatively new concept during the Victorian era as was by no means representative of late Victorian beliefs in democracy making. From the perspective of local agency and action Harling argued, "...historians now stress that the parish vestries, improvement commissions, and charitable organizations of the second half of the eighteenth century did a relatively effective job of targeting poor relief and bringing amenities to the rapidly growing towns."<sup>19</sup> Philanthropic organizations such as the COS were successful in their aim of addressing local need. Therefore, to evaluate the COS from a nationalistic, systemic perspective was to not only miss the point of the organization, but place it within a context that it simply did not operate within. Harling further clarified that local charities, such as the COS, were also successful in their cooperation with the government,

When government did intervene to provide welfare or urban amenities, it was overwhelmingly the local authorities that did the intervening, which is why local-government expenditure was growing twice as fast as central expenditure between 1850-1890. So if it is in any sense accurate to talk about the late-Victorian 'revolution in government,' this was emphatically a revolution carried out through local means, and chiefly for local reasons.<sup>20</sup>

The localism focus of the late Victorian era represented onus on the agency of the community in acting to address the issues it faced and therefore represented a very specific belief in the development of democracy in Britain.<sup>21</sup> The perspective of localism provided an alternative to Stedman Jones's interpretation of a larger class issues, as national class-consciousness was not a pervasive focus of local community and democracy making, and limited the applicability of

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<sup>19</sup> Philip Harling, "The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy, and the Local Consciousness in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 2, no. 9 (2004): 217.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 217, 218.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

Forsythe and Jordan's conception of systemic poverty at a national level.<sup>22</sup> When understood within its natural context, the COS was successful at its local approach to poverty alleviation and in facilitating aid to those it could aptly assist.

The COS language of morality, individualism, and civic duty is suggestive of the angle I have used to depict the mission of the COS. The members of the COS were reformers, as their aim was to change society to achieve a better condition of existence and interaction. The organization did not attempt to preserve the ways of the past or maintain hierarchical processes of domination, but rather attempted to "reform" society toward the aim of the organic community composed of participative members. It is important to note that the idealism used by the COS was pervasive in society beyond the beliefs held by the COS. Harris stated, "One point that should be made clear is that, although idealism has often been equated with reaction and conservatism, it did not create a single political orthodoxy."<sup>23</sup> Harris continued,

What [idealism] did do, however, was to subordinate the analysis of specific social problems to a vision of reconstructing the whole of British society, together with reform of the rational understanding and moral character of individual British citizens.<sup>24</sup>

Idealism promoted a holistic re-evaluation of society and an ideal end in "perfect justice and...the ideal state."<sup>25</sup> The COS represented one interpretation of this philosophy by addressing myriad sources of poverty in a unified fashion to promote an advancement of the local community beyond its current situation. Such change consisted of the advancement of all through focused care. The COS believed that the most effective way to achieve this ideal was by

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<sup>22</sup> In fact, working class individuals actively worked within the COS and were paid Agents. Mowat 28.

<sup>23</sup> Jose Harris, "Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy," in David Gladstone, *Before Beveridge: Welfare Before the Welfare State*, (London: Civitas, 1999), 51.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

taking social change on in a focused manner, or from the ground up.<sup>26</sup> Such a vision necessitated the care of the individual first in order to craft the “larger whole,” or the community. British idealism clarified a significant amount of the terminology used by the COS and highlighted the centrality of social theory in its approach to poverty, such as Helen Bosanquet’s concept of “social collectivism” or the COS adaptation of friendly visiting.<sup>27</sup>

A major component of the political achievement and historical legacy of the COS was the drafting of the Majority Report as one of the conclusions from Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress (1905-1909). The Commission consisted of twenty members tasked with an evaluation of the current Poor Laws.<sup>28</sup> The members of the Commission consisted of guardians of the poor, civil servants, members of the COS and members of the Fabian Society.<sup>29</sup> Due to the diversity of the members of the Commission, a split of opinion emerged, resulting in the authoring of two opinions: the Majority Report by prominent members of the COS and the Minority Report by members of the Fabian Society. The reports assessed the condition of the Poor Laws and offered recommendations regarding how best to reform the laws, resulting in the ideas surrounding the complete replacement of the laws with an alternative system or breaking up the laws for the institution of specialized departments to deal with specific

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<sup>26</sup> The COS perspective, as identified by Harris in the article “Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy” originated in idealism’s usage of the thought of Plato. British idealism interpreted Plato as having a, “. . . vision of the ethical nature of citizenship; a vision in which individual citizens found happiness and fulfillment not in transient sensory satisfactions, but in the larger development of ‘mind’ and ‘character’ and in service to a larger whole” or the local community, as large nation-states did not exist during Plato’s time. Harris 53.

<sup>27</sup> This perspective contended against Stedman Jones’s argument that COS casework was a cold and uncaring process. Rather, casework aimed at the creation of numerous bonds between individuals, contributing to an increased integration and union of all members of society.

<sup>28</sup> Rose 44.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

issues of “distress.”<sup>30</sup> While characterized as representing drastically different perspectives, recent reevaluation of the context of the debate illuminated that the arguments articulated were in fact far more similar than different and addressed a nuanced issue rather than a colossal conflict between “socialism” and “individualism.” Harris explained, “The 1909 Poor Law Commission, classically portrayed by Beatrice Webb as a battleground between socialist and individualist ideals, has been recast as a conflict of a very different kind.”<sup>31</sup> The reports, while expressing the major arguments of the era surrounding poverty, did not differ drastically and argued for the same result. Both reports argued for a breaking up of the Poor Laws, but by different processes. In his evaluation of the Majority and Minority Reports, Rose elucidated,

Despite the very considerable differences between the Majority and Minority Reports, there was perhaps more common ground between them than is often realized. Both were agreed in their condemnation of the existing system of poor relief. They criticized the failure of the central authority to impose any degree of uniformity in relief practice on local boards of guardians... Both reports, therefore, argued for the abolition of the boards of guardians and the poor law unions established under the Act of 1834.<sup>32</sup>

Rather than diverge drastically, the Majority and Minority Reports both envisaged significant change to the current government method of addressing poverty. The main area of contention between the two reports was the Majority’s promotion of greater government action working alongside or parallel to private aid, very reminiscent of the COS approach toward poverty, while the Minority argued that such an approach was too lenient, failing to address what it believed to be a systemic issue or rather acting in the capacity of alleviation rather than prevention. This difference, however was minute. Both perspectives advocated for drastic reform of the existing Poor Laws, the Minority merely slightly more radical than the Majority.

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<sup>30</sup> Kathleen Woodroffe, "The Making of the Welfare State in England: A Summary of Its Origins and Development," *Journal of Social History*, 1, No. 4 (1968): 318.

<sup>31</sup> Harris 45.

<sup>32</sup> Rose 44, 45.

Yet, the immediate impact of the reports was limited and failed to significantly impact approaches to poverty before the outbreak of World War I. Kathleen Woodroffe, in the article “The Making of the Welfare State in England: A Summary of Its Origin and Development” clarified that processes of addressing poverty continued to change at a gradual pace. Woodroffe contended that the years of 1906-1912 saw a gradual breaking of fragments of the Poor Laws and voluntary or uncoordinated organizations toward the building of “new services around them.”<sup>33</sup> Rose credited the relative inaction as the result of the split within the Commission and a rather vicious public awareness campaign launched by the Fabian Society, specifically Beatrice Webb,

This division was exacerbated when the Webbs, alarmed by the initially favorable reception accorded to the Majority Report, began their ‘raging, tearing propaganda’ for the break-up of the poor law as advocated by the Minority Report. This campaign of committee-forming, public speaking and writing did a great deal to publicize the ideas of the Minority Report.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, historians have interpreted the results of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress as a success for the Minority Report, when in fact the advancement of the ideas of the Minority Report were the result of a vicious attack of the Majority Report over a small nuanced difference. Therefore, the Majority Report and the members of the COS involved in its publication have been remembered in a negative light due to the prominence of deleterious and over exaggerated caricatures of its stance. The Minority Report was successful and superior to the Majority Report in terms of the social awareness of the Minority perspective and the critique of the Majority viewpoint, despite the already pervasive acceptance of the Majority opinion. In this manner, the popular ideas of the past were challenged and addressed in the public sphere, specifically through news outlets, resulting in a reevaluation of opinion.

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<sup>33</sup> Woodroffe 319.

<sup>34</sup> Rose 46.



Critique of the COS was rampant in numerous forms. To truly explore the COS is to encounter a social vision and philosophical orientation of the state and its citizens. In this chapter I have attempted to clarify the numerous ways in which the COS has been interpreted and outline some of their shortcomings, and evaluate reasons for a specific historical interpretation of the society. It is clear that many past critics of the COS have completely missed the complex social vision of the organization, making the critique inadequate. To truly criticize or praise the COS necessitates a thorough examination of its philosophy and the context of poverty and political activism, or democracy, of the era, and a thorough understanding of the political climate of localism.

## CONCLUSION

### **Chapter 1 – Setting The Stage: Framing late Victorian philanthropy**

- The impacts of the Industrial Revolution felt through the process of modernization, most evident in the increasing democratic reforms of the Victorian era, placed poverty as a crucial social ailment and enabled for the formation of a group of individuals who, as a product of modernization, had the wealth, leisure, and agency to address poverty.
- Increased secularization through the adoption of concepts of the “privatization of religion” enabled for the prevalence of a common belief in a secular “morality.” Secularism also promoted approaching questions and obtaining their answers through scientific process, in contrast to anecdotal and more subjective solutions.

### **Chapter 2 – Morality and the COS: Understanding the philosophical roots of the COS**

- In its mission, the COS embodied a philosophical social theory indebted to the ideas of Oxford professor and British Idealist Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882) and his pupil and later philosopher and COS Council member Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923).
- A significant part of COS social theory was the belief that extensive government assistance to the poor created dependency that aggravated rather than helped the situation. Additionally, unorganized private “indiscriminate almsgiving” continued poverty and was an inept form of philanthropy. The COS believed that local civic action, as formulated by Green and Bosanquet, should work in correspondence with government action. The result was cooperation between local private action and government involvement in the social ailment of poverty and the application of philanthropy.

### **Chapter 3 – The History of the COS**

- The COS was founded in 1869 as the result of a series of events that resulted in the union of many like-minded individuals who all believed that private philanthropic action should be organized to achieve the most effective results.
- The aim of the COS, as outlined in its Annual Report in 1875, was to investigate individual cases of poverty, facilitate aid once the case was accepted, act in cooperation with philanthropic organizations throughout the local area as well as with the government, and promote a morality in which the bonds established between individuals worked toward the establishment of a mature democracy of participative citizens.

### **Chapter 4 – Critique of the COS and Conclusions**

- Historians have interpreted the COS in four different ways:
  - The COS embodied a purely individualistic and condemnatory perception of poverty, and therefore believed that poverty was the fault of the individual. As a result, the COS acted in order to “help the poor help themselves.”

- The work of the COS can be compartmentalized into the notion of an “idea” and a “method.” The idea being individual condemnation of the poor and the method being the establishment and implementation of the process of casework.
- The COS embodied a particular middle class mentality. COS philanthropic action was a preservation mechanism for the superiority and way of life of the middle class.
- Understanding the COS through the perspective of its social theory provides the most comprehensive evaluation of the organizations work and total aim, moving beyond poverty to the composition of the mature democratic community.
- I argue that the fourth perspective is a very powerful way to evaluate the COS and best situate and understand its philanthropic work during the late Victorian era.
- Through evaluation of the environment in which the COS existed, the society successfully achieved its mission within the context of poverty alleviation and the development of effective private philanthropic action at a local level in correspondence with the current laws in place.

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