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***Social Security as a Developmental Institution?
Extending the Solar Case for the Relative
Efficacy of Poor Relief Provisions under the
English Old Poor Law***

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Abstract

This paper assesses various issues concerning the operation of the English Old Poor from 1600 to 1834 that are presented as facilitating economic growth. It identifies those factors contributing to the efficacy of welfare provisioning by reference to problems that are frequently identified in the operation of such systems: the free-rider problem, risk covariance, adverse selection and information elicitation. The entitlement to relief through an individual's possession of a legal settlement in a parish thereby guaranteeing poor relief is seen as a key factor enabling risk-reduced labour migration and especially migration from the rural to urban sector, as well as minimisation of the free-rider problem as far as taxpayer willingness to furnish welfare funds were concerned. The extent to which welfare was generated in the agrarian sector and provided in the households of rural communities, and the minimal use of town-based 'indoor institutions' for welfare delivery, are seen as key factors supporting rural household economies. These factors limited refugee flows from country to town, with positive epidemiological advantages, and enabled, by pre-industrial standards, modest levels of infant and child mortality, which also made it possible for fertility change to be the major force driving demographic change.

Keywords:

Adverse selection, Citizenship, Collective action theory, Economic growth, Entitlements, Free-rider, Infant mortality, Infectious disease, Information elicitation, Malthus, Path dependency, Poor relief, Refugee, Risk covariance, Rural, Social security, Urban migration

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1. Introduction

In the 1960s and 1970s, it was widely believed that ‘development’ in the West was both a fundamentally economically-driven process and one which had exploded into life with the world’s first industrial revolution, which occurred in Britain between 1780 and 1850. This was reflected in the statistical narrative of growth researched by Deane and Cole and in the influential interpretation of W.W. Rostow’s *Stages of Economic Growth*, with its celebrated metaphor of the British economy ‘taking-off’ into self-sustaining flight during the early 19th century.¹ In many respects this general narrative continues to be influential in development policy circles today.

However, development scholars and practitioners alike need to take on board the full implications of the profound transformation that has come about during the 1980s and 1990s in historians’ understanding of the nature of industrialisation and associated urbanisation in Britain. The new orthodoxy is a much more evolutionary model of centuries-long build-up from 1600 through to 1800. As Table 1 demonstrates, during these two centuries England’s economy achieved a sustained trajectory of upward economic growth, quite abnormal for all the rest of western Europe. This can be proxied by the extent of growth of the urban population in England and England’s contribution to overall European urban growth from 1600 to 1800. By 1700 England had surpassed her great rival as a crucible of European commercialisation and growth of the secondary sector. Thus, historians of the world’s first episode of ‘development’ are now, following the lead of the Nobel laureate Douglass North², focusing on examining the full range of economic and social institutions which could account for that exceptional performance across two centuries before steam power was first used to spin yarn in Lancashire.

One of these institutions attracting great interest is the role of the precocious ‘Old Poor Law’, a national social security system deemed by act of parliament to operate throughout England in 1601. Though it was an institution comprised of many parts, and one that evolved over time, it is helpful to think of it as being comprised of two general elements: an ‘indoor’ component, which sought to provide basic assistance in the form of housing and hospitalised healthcare to the poor (and especially to orphans and unmarried mothers); and an ‘outdoor’ component, which provided cash payments and food rations to the destitute (and was available to broader sections of the population during economic downturns and episodes of harvest failures resulting in food price inflation). Both forms of assistance were ‘portable’, in that eligibility was not conditional upon permanent residence as a basis for membership in a particular geographical community, though assistance itself was monitored and distributed through local parishes. Recent scholarship, which this paper surveys and extends, suggests that the Old Poor Law was instrumental in encouraging labour mobility and in providing an elementary but innovative and relatively comprehensive social safety net, which facilitated broad-based entrepreneurship and innovation by ensuring that failure in such ventures did not lead inexorably to destitution.

¹Deane, P., and Cole, W. A. (1969). *British Economic Growth 1688–1959*, 2nd edn. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Rostow, W. W. (1960). *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

²North, D. C. (1981). *Structure and Change in Economic History*. New York: Norton.

Table 1. English share of European urban growth 1600-1800 (populations in millions)

	<i>Total population</i>	<i>Urban Population</i>
<i>Europe</i>		
1600	70.6	5.65
1700	75.0	7.13
1750	88,5	8.57
1800	111.8	11.85
<i>England</i>		
1600	4.11	0.249
1700	5.06	0.680
1750	5.77	1.012
1800	8.66	2.079

English percentage of European 'net' urban gain

1600/1700	33
1700/1750	57
1750/1800	70
1600/1800	53

Source: Wrigley, E.A. (1987). *People, Cities and Wealth*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, Table 7.7, p.179.

Over a decade has passed since Peter Solar, in a stimulating revisionist analysis of the English Old Poor Law, made a forceful case for the role it played in facilitating the distinctive character of pre-industrial economic success, achieved by what Wrigley has termed England's primarily 'organic economy'.³ Solar made a claim that, when comparisons are made between English poor relief and other systems of poverty alleviation to be found in most other areas of pre-industrial Europe, levels of English poor relief exceeded those provided elsewhere. His principal interest was in the ways that this provisioning led to certain economic efficiencies, particularly when compared with England's near neighbour France. In particular, he stressed the role played by the poor law in facilitating labour mobility, contrary to Adam Smith's view of the system and its assistance in enabling a particular type of capitalist agriculture to arise. The latter argument has subsequently been endorsed by Wrigley in his more recent attempts to chart both the causes and consequences of English agrarian success in underwriting both rapid urban growth and the shift of employment into the secondary sector well before 1750. While Solar's paper has received some comment of a critical nature⁴, the argument has become tacitly accepted in many quarters.

³ Solar, P. M. (1995). 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development before the Industrial Revolution'. *Economic History Review* 2nd ser., 48, 1–22; Wrigley, E.A. (2007). 'The Transition to an Advanced Organic Economy: Half a Millennium of English Agriculture'. *Economic History Review* 2nd ser., 69, 436-486.

⁴ Some critics, for example, are unwilling to view the Old Poor Law as possessed of systemic qualities because of what is thought to be far too great a variation in the levels of relief from parish to parish and from region to region. Steve King has argued that the numbers of persons in receipt of relief in the late 18th century—and what he terms

This present paper attempts to develop some of Solar's arguments still further and in so doing to confront some of the criticisms made against Solar's case. More is made in this current assessment of the distinctive role played by parishes as units of revenue raising and welfare distribution, particularly with regard to issues of equity and welfare citizenship. A more wide-ranging attempt is also made to extend Solar's observations about the centrality of the agrarian underpinnings of revenue generation for welfare provisioning, not just in rural but in urban industrial regions as well. Finally, certain demographic consequences that may have flowed from the operation of the system that help to account for the benign nature of the Malthusian 'positive check' when applied to English mortality in a wider European context are considered.

2. Settlement laws, parochial residence and welfare citizenship under the Old Poor Law

While this paper is primarily concerned with the issue of welfare entitlements and discriminations in relation to parochial residence and particular notions of citizenship that flow from this membership or association, and is largely set within a pre-industrial English context, it is also concerned with a key issue in the comparative treatment of these matters over time within England and between England and her continental European neighbours between 1600 and 1800. Some of these matters will have to be drawn with broad brush strokes, given the scope of the paper. The issue underpinning the bulk of the paper, and one that has long preoccupied historical demographers of pre-industrial societies, concerns the susceptibility of their populations to demographic crises associated with short-term economic difficulties, primarily due to dearth and harvest deficiencies.

It was over 20 years ago that the Cambridge Group for the History of Population, in a demographic reconstruction of England from 1541 to 1871, was able to establish how much of the variation in mortality was explicable in terms of variation in the price of wheat in the same year and the four subsequent years. For England from the mid-16th to early 19th century, it was discovered that price variation accounted for only 16 percent of the variation in mortality and that most of this was the result of nine years of extreme upward fluctuations in prices. It was also revealed that the net effect of price fluctuations was essentially zero and that runs of years of high prices had no effect on mortality⁵. The contrast with other parts of Europe is striking. In France, for instance, 46 percent of the fluctuations in the non-infant death rate in the 17th and 18th centuries were associated with grain price fluctuations and runs of high prices had an extra

the generosity of support offered to them—were much reduced in the north and west of England compared with the south and east. See King, S. (2000). *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850. A Regional Perspective*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press; King, S. (1997). 'The Poor Law and English Economic Development Re-appraised', *Economic History Review*, 50, 23-37; but see Solar, P. (1997). 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development: A Renewed Plea for Comparative History', *Economic History Review* 50, 369-374. Steve Hindle has wondered, however, whether this argument about regional differences is 'significantly overdrawn (not to say exaggerated)' and prefers to see it, based on his work in the 17th- and early 18th-century welfare provisioning and rate-raising to support it, as reflecting 'mosaics of local variation rather than a major regional schism'. Hindle, S. (2004). *On the Parish. The Micro-politics of Parish Relief in England 1550-1750*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

⁵ Wrigley, E.A. and Schofield, R.S. (1981). *The Population History of England: A Reconstruction*. London, UK: Edward Arnold, 371-382

effect on mortality.⁶ Clearly, we would need to consider a host of factors to do with the nature of agrarian institutions (particularly legal and tenorial issues), marketing and productivity in a comprehensive comparison of these situations. In this present discussion, a set of issues to do with welfare provisioning—and particularly to do with revenue raising through taxation at the level of the politically constituted parish, as well as the criteria by which eligibility for the receipt of relief were determined—is singled out for comparative consideration.

One theme that looms large in the research of early modernists who have focused their attention on poor relief in early modern England has been, from the mid-16th century, the increasing government interference with, centralisation and emerging uniformity of, poor-relief provision. For the most part, this research turns a blind eye to the medieval situation. If attention is given to the earlier period, it is usually granted within the framework of discussions of voluntary charitable activities performed by ecclesiastical and monastic institutions, and the welfare provided by guilds and fraternities and individual benefactions as reflected in the acts of testators in their wills⁷.

To these concerns may be added the traditional medieval peasant 'poor law', as it was first termed 70 years ago by Frances Page. Such a poor law was conventionally seen as having been based upon family arrangements by which, within the manorial courts, new tenants promised to the 'retired' or impoverished elderly peasant shelter in housing, food, clothing and fuel⁸. Some historians have noted how great was the *public* dimension in these contracts, particularly in the late medieval demographic conditions when arrangements were made between persons who were frequently unrelated⁹. This public involvement in welfare provision went beyond the curial monitoring of intra-familial and interpersonal maintenance agreements, since what was to become a fundamental element in early modern poor law, the common parish box, is known to have existed and is frequently mentioned in the wills of testators of the 15th century, who left money or requested through 'death bed land transfers' that land be sold specifically to raise funds for the poor, or for the payment of the king's taxes on behalf of fellow disadvantaged parishioners¹⁰.

Given what appears to be a veritable 'mixed economy' of welfare prevailing before the events of the 1530s, when the early Tudor regime effectively 'nationalised' the church and its institutions that rendered charity, it is not surprising that what emerges, as a result of a succession of legislative moves from 1536 onwards, culminating in the Elizabethan statutes of 1598 and 1601, should be regarded as so fundamentally different from prevailing practices in the later middle ages. Noteworthy in this respect are moves to fund welfare through a compulsory property tax, the 'centralisation' (at the local parish level) of its administration being carried out through parish vestries and their unpaid officials working in conjunction with JPs, as well as steps to punish vagrants and to put the able-bodied poor to work. The emerging focus upon the parish as the unit of welfare funding and administration is now so frequently

⁶ Galloway, P. (1981). 'Basic Patterns in Annual Variations in Fertility, Nuptiality, Mortality and Prices in Pre-industrial Europe', *Population Studies* 42, 278-304.

⁷ MacIntosh, M. (1988), 'Local Responses to the Poor in Medieval and Tudor England', *Continuity and Change* 3, 209-245; Bennett, J. (1992), 'Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England', *Past and Present* 134, 19-41; Harvey, B. (1993). *Living and Dying in England 1100-1540*, Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

⁸ F.M. Page (1930) 'The Customary Poor Law of Three Cambridgeshire Manor'. *Cambridge Historical Journal* 3, 125-133.

⁹ Smith, R.M. 'The Manorial Court and the Elderly Tenant in Late Medieval England', in Pelling, M. and Smith, R.M. (Eds.) (1991), *Life, Death and the Elderly*. London, UK: Routledge, 39-61; Clark, E. (1982). 'Some Aspects of Social Security in Medieval England'. *Journal of Family History*, 7, 307-320.

¹⁰ Dyer, C. (1994). 'The English medieval village community and its decline', *Journal of British Studies* 33, 407-420.

singled out as not only differentiating early modern England from her European neighbours, but as also marking a very real break with earlier medieval practices in which the parish had a very minor role to play in the totality of welfare provisions¹¹.

We are fairly certain that parliamentary legislation was consistently using local models of welfare-provisioning that had been locally tested before the introduction of the 1598 and 1601 Acts. Indeed, it might be claimed that we have here a form of 'institutional path dependency', in the sense that parish-based revenue raising became 'locked in' as a mechanism for funding local welfare needs, although it could not have been so securely embedded without a strong central government or a state with responsive and reliable representatives or law officers resident in the localities, in the persons of the JPs. For instance, although statutorily separate, Tudor and Stuart dearth or famine policies (principally the 'Book of Orders', on which see Section 4, below) did much to remedy deficiencies in the social distribution of scarce grain in grain-producing areas¹². It is also probable that the abandonment, particularly after 1630, of these interventions in favour of new practices aimed at increasing the cash in the hands of those whose vulnerability was exposed to high grain prices in bad years may have had beneficial commercial and economic consequences, effectively boosting the purchasing power of the poor.¹³

There has been much stimulating work on the parish, indeed the politics of the early modern parish has been promoted to a research theme of justifiable significance by Keith Wrightson and many of his pupils in recent years, and has rightly assumed a position as important as that of the politics of the county and the nation¹⁴. This work has reminded us, in the elegant phrasing of Steve Hindle, that 'the early modern English parish, like all communities, had both *margins* and *boundaries*, and that becoming a member of, and belonging to, the parish community were transactions which entailed the negotiation of relativities of *status* and of *space*.' Indeed, as is frequently noted, the very existence of community also implies exclusion from membership.¹⁵ Such a notion seems incontrovertible, yet it remains unclear how far developments from the late 16th century constituted a major redrafting of the criteria for community membership resulting from the central role assumed by the parish as a provider of relief to the poor.

There seems good reason to suppose that, with the concentration of authority in the hands of parish officers, discretionary parochial relief provision was a noteworthy feature of day-to-day practice in the determination of welfare payments. There may have been a harder edge to the categorisation of eligibility, as well as a growing desire by elites to associate poverty's causes with human failings in conjunction with a clearer identification of a tripartite classification of the poor into the impotent, the thriftless and the labouring poor. There is, too, a sense in the writings of early modernists that the English parish begins to acquire a stronger spatial sense of itself, of its boundaries and of its inhabitants who

¹¹ Slack, P. (1988). *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*. London, UK: Longmans, 11-12; and Innes, J. (1997). 'The State and the Poor: Eighteenth-century England in European Perspective'. In Brewer, J. and Hellems, E. (Eds.). *Rethinking Leviathan*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

¹² Slack, P. (1980). 'Books of Orders: The Making of English Social Policy, 1577-1631'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., 30, 1-22.

¹³ Slack, P. (1992). 'Dearth and Social Policy in Early Modern England'. *Social History of Medicine*, 5, 1-17.

¹⁴ See Wrightson, K. (1996). 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England', and many other essays. In Griffiths, P., Fox, A. and Hindle, S. (Eds.). *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*. London, UK: Macmillan.

¹⁵ Hindle, S. (2000). 'A Sense of Place? Becoming and Belonging in the Rural Parish 1550-1650'. In Shepard, A. and Withington, P. (Eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 96-114.

have entitlements—with entitlements to relief being a major concern. This is reflected supposedly in a growing fear of strangers and the ‘unsettled’—a fear that culminates in the Settlement Laws of the late 17th century, which codify this notion of attachment to place and its associated entitlements. There is much to be said for this approach, which interrogates the community by focusing as much on who was excluded as on who was an acknowledged member or insider.

However, to characterise such features of the local social structure as ‘the unwelcoming, not to say unwelcome face of community’ is to focus on only one side of the coin¹⁶. A system of welfare funding that was so heavily dependent upon revenue-raising from a local property tax would be obliged, particularly in a society in which geographical movement was so common an experience, to set rules regarding those individuals for whom local rate-payers assumed a responsibility for support. Welfare systems have never been universal in their reach. Entitlements have almost invariably been restricted by ruling that ‘strangers’ are not eligible for support. Indeed, according to Michael Walzer, welfare systems, as expressions of distributive justice, necessarily require hard lines to be drawn between insiders and strangers. As he puts it, ‘the idea of distributive justice presupposes a bounded world of “citizenship” within which distribution takes place: within a group of people committed to dividing, exchanging and sharing social goals, first of all among themselves’¹⁷.

It might be helpful to introduce into this debate notions from collective action theory and from the perspective of the donor—the welfare funder as well as the welfare beneficiary. If not, we may be in danger of losing sight of how revenue for welfare purposes might be generated locally in adequate quantities to meet needs. Collective action theory would suggest that willingness to provide welfare funds would be forthcoming and persist only if one could trust one’s peers, not just in one’s parish of residence but in all other parishes, to be equally forthcoming in their revenue raising. If welfare is provided in one parish and not in another, the danger is that those in search of support will move to that parish in inordinate numbers, allowing potential rate- or tax-payers in other parishes to free-ride. Collective action theory takes it for granted that it is rational for a group member (i.e., in this case, a rate-payer) to want to enjoy the benefits of welfare provisioning for the poor without paying the costs, thereby creating the paradoxical situation that a good does not come into existence or functions only sub-optimally, although its proper functioning is beneficial to all members of the group.

Mancur Olson provides the widely exploited theoretical framework for the importance of the free-rider problem in the resourcing of collective goods, since the non-excludability of the good implies that a member of a group profits, even if he or she makes no contribution to it.¹⁸ Such a position takes it for granted that it is rational for a group member to want to enjoy the benefits of an arrangement without paying the costs. Abram de Swaan, in his *In the Care of the State*, has considered early modern European charity and welfare provisionings in these terms and sees the English Elizabethan poor law as one means by which the free-rider problem is effectively tackled. For de Swaan, the poor law of 1601, by requiring the parish to levy an adequate poor rate from its property owners, enabled the replacement of an unstable pre-Reformation local equilibrium of voluntary collective charity by a system of obligatory

¹⁶ Ibid., 101

¹⁷ Walzer, M. (1983). *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 31

¹⁸ Olson, M. (1965). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

taxation¹⁹. Thereby the task of collection, co-ordination and disbursement is shifted from voluntary church agencies to appointed or elected overseers of the poor and, more importantly, the care of persons without means of subsistence was assigned to their community of legal 'settlement'. By conceptualising the problem in these terms it becomes easier to see how the increasing formalisation of the subsequent Settlement Laws, which accompanied and buttressed the Poor Laws and the sustained growth in the sums raised and dispensed (even though real incomes were rising in the century after 1650), were intimately interconnected and mutually reinforcing developments²⁰.

The law of settlement and removal introduced in 1662 definitively removed any idea that paupers had a secure claim to relief simply on the basis of residence in a parish (although it is doubtful whether such a right ever existed). However, England was in possession of a particularly mobile population, as anyone who has ever attempted to undertake nominative linkage of individuals appearing in a parish register will testify. Rarely do 50 percent of those born in an early modern English parish go on to marry and or die in that same parish. This feature of the social structure further highlights the need for a welfare system based upon more than 10,000 separate funding units to have rules relating to place-based entitlements to relief.

The Law that dealt with these matters was not a single piece of legislation, but a complex collection of statutes and legal precedents. Two provisions constituted the root of the 1662 legislation. First, anyone able to rent a tenement for £10 per annum was exempt from its provisions and all those who were unable to meet those conditions had to reside in a parish for 40 days or more to acquire a 'settlement' (right to poor relief) there. This was not easy, since to gain a settlement a migrant had to give notice in writing of his or her arrival and this in turn had to be read in church and entered into the poor law account book of the parish.

Such a procedure made it easy for objections to be raised. By the beginning of the 18th century there were various routes through which migrants were able to establish a new entitlement to relief that overrode the 40-day rule. A settlement could be obtained by someone being hired for and fulfilling one year's service, and upon marriage a wife acquired her husband's settlement. Apprenticeship, service and marriage were contracts to which the poor law remained subservient. Likewise, anyone living on their own freehold acquired a settlement and those performing a parochial office automatically gained a settlement. Those who had not acquired a settlement in this way were at risk of removal if they were suspected of needing relief prior to 1795. But even in this respect the force of the law was mitigated somewhat by various measures. For instance, departing migrants could obtain certificates from the parochial officials in the parish where they were legally settled, recognising that parish's obligation to provide relief if they were to become chargeable elsewhere. A significant amount of non-resident relief was moved across space from parish to parish, and was a means by which urban parishes maintained relatively low expenditure, notwithstanding the presence in them of recent migrants lacking a local settlement (this is discussed in greater depth in Section 3 below).²¹

¹⁹ De Swaan, A. (1988). *In Care of the State: Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 21-36.

²⁰ Slack, P. (1990). *The English Poor Law 1531-1782*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 45-48; and Smith, R.M. (1996). 'Charity, Self-interest and Welfare Reflections from Demographic and Family History'. In Daunton, M. (Ed.), *Charity, Self-interest and Welfare in the English Pas*. London, UK: UCL Press, 38-39.

²¹ Of course, it did lead to litigation between conflicting parishes regarding their obligations to provide relief to individuals. Also, as the poor law was English it did not extend to Scotland and Ireland; paupers from these areas could be removed from the country, since they had no legal settlement if recently arrived and if they had not

At the heart of many of the difficulties arising from this system was the smallness of the parish unit as a source of and dispenser of welfare funds²². Welfare theory provides a powerful argument that small demographic units of welfare provisioning based upon local revenue raising may be particularly susceptible to problems that stem from risk covariance. The theory is that 'insurance' is generally most efficiently supplied if the income of the person being insured is not positively correlated with the income of those providing the insurance. Thus, if a community falls on bad times it should look for support from *outside* the community. Obviously, had early modern English poor relief been provided in geographical units larger than the parish an incentive problem associated with risk covariance may have been reduced and attitudes towards in-comers and the 'unsettled' may have been less fraught.²³ However, as the units of risk-pooling increase in size problems associated with the elicitation of accurate information about the needs of potential beneficiaries become greater, and the willingness to contribute to the welfare fund on the part of the property holders may diminish. The small size of most parochial communities may have helped in the elicitation of information about individual needs, reducing but not eradicating the adverse selection effects that bedevil social security systems, although leaving beneficiaries susceptible to the discriminatory actions on the part of parish officers.²⁴

3. The agrarian roots of English poor relief in comparative context

A noteworthy feature of historians' work on early modern English poor relief, in the period during which parliament strove to establish the laws embodied in the later Tudor statutes of 1598 and 1601, is that they possessed a decided urban emphasis or preoccupation. In fact, the notion that poverty and the procedures for tackling it were heavily focused on towns gave to the literature on early modern England an attribute which it certainly shared with the early modern European historiography of poverty and

acquired it through the various routes outlined previously (See Feldman, D. (2003), 'Migration, immigration and Welfare from the Old Poor Law to the Welfare State'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 13, 79-104. This was especially difficult for temporary harvest workers, for instance, and became a major issue under the New Poor Law in the 19th century, especially in the industrial North and around and after the Irish Famine.

²² For an especially balanced, insightful but generally positive assessment of the efficacy of the Settlement Laws under the Old Poor Law see Snell, K.D.M. (2006). 'Settlement, Parochial Belonging and Entitlement', *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales 1700-1950* (Chapter 5). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 81-161.

²³ Platteau, J.-P. (1991). 'Traditional Systems of Social Security and Hunger Insurance: Past Achievements and Modern Challenges'. In Ahmad, E., Drèze, J., Hills, J. and Sen, A. (Eds.). *Social Security in Developing Countries*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 139-140; Newberry, D. (1989). 'Agricultural Institutions for Insurance and Stabilization'. In Bardhan, P. (Ed.). *The Economic Theory of Agrarian Institutions*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²⁴ It is a moot question how far what emerged in the 17th century constituted a manageable and effective trade-off between incentive and co-variance problems in the delivery of welfare. These are issues that are sometimes not fully confronted by students of 16th and 17th century poor relief, but must loom large in any serious attempt to review the equity issues at the core of an emerging parochially focused form of welfare provisioning from the late 14th century onwards. While the risk pool in the 13th and early 14th century may have been broader and very loosely structured, by dint of its greater diversity in the matter of forms of charitable provision, it is not at all clear that it was more inclusive in its capacity to deliver assistance to those in need, and particularly in its ability to deal with severe dislocation associated with harvest failure. In a thought-provoking essay in which he asks the fundamental question (Dyer, C. (1998). 'Did the Peasants Really Starve in Medieval England?' In Carlin, M. and Rosenthal, J (Eds.), *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe*. London, UK: Hambledon Press, 53-72), Chris Dyer is inclined to say that for the most part after 1375 the answer must be a very definite no. This may well prove to be a more meaningful chronological break-point and one from which an increasingly parochially circumscribed system of revenue-raising and revenue redistribution brings significant equity advances over large tracts of southern Britain.

welfare.²⁵ However, where the English historiographical tradition diverged from that of much of Europe was that by the 18th century, and especially its latter half, the emphasis was much more heavily directed towards poverty as a rural problem, and deeply rooted in the functioning of the agrarian economy²⁶. In contrast, considerations of poverty in much of 18th-century Europe retained an urban-centric emphasis that suggested a continuity of concepts and sources with the European situation two centuries earlier.

A particularly suggestive indication of this distinctively rural 'tradition' of thinking and emphasis can be identified as early as 1792 in the *Annals of Agriculture*.²⁷ In that year, Arthur Young had brought the reports of the French Committee of Mendicity that had appeared over 1790-1791 to the attention of John Howlett, that astute contemporary observer of 18th-century English poor relief practices, enclosure and population (to name but a few of his interests). Those involved in France in the drafting of these committee reports were of course much interested in procedures relating to poor relief as practised in England. It had been noted with incredulity by contemporary French commentators that Howlett himself had reported that 'the number of our poor occasionally relieved are frequently a third part of the total of paupers assisted'. Furthermore, they had observed that it was reported that 'in a certain parish fifty or sixty miles from London are annually no less than a third of its total population [relieved] and that, extraordinary cases excepted, the proportional number of poor is greater in country parishes than in manufacturing towns'. French expectations were clearly that rural areas would have few relief recipients and that towns, particularly those with industry, would expend more resources in relief, and higher proportions of their populations would be recipients there than in rural areas.

It is a commonplace to stress that in 17th- and 18th-century France, unlike England, revenue for poor relief was in general not raised by compulsory rating or taxation. Many villages and towns had so-called *bureaux de charité* which were a pool of alms primarily from voluntary (albeit very diffuse) sources, which did provide outdoor relief, often in case or kind. But this provision was supplemented and often surpassed in absolute amounts in the largest towns by the more ambitious and certainly more ostentatious *hôpital général* as an institution for the employment of the idle, relief of the sick and orphaned and the punishment of the rogue or vagrant. To these providers of welfare we should add the *Hotel-Dieu*, an older institution theoretically serving the sick poor and primarily, indeed almost exclusively, urban-located. It embodied certain attributes of the English workhouse or house of correction, but did much more besides and usually contained in excess of 100, and in the larger provincial centres could house over 1,000 inmates.²⁸ In France, the most striking embodiment of formal relief was the large urban-located institution; in England, it was the parish-based rate that was collected in both town and countryside with equal efficacy and, as Table 2 shows, in the late 18th century, Howlett provided evidence to show that it was siphoned off with a higher intensity in rural than in urban settings,

²⁵ Slack, P. (1988). *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*, 8-14. London: Longman; Warde, P. (2007). 'The Origins and Development of Institutional Welfare Support in Early Modern Württemberg c.1500-1700'. *Continuity and Change* 22, 480-482.

²⁶ For example, Schwartz, R. (1988). *Policing the Poor in 18th-Century France*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press; Adams, T.M. (1990). *Bureaucrats and Beggars: French Social Policy in the Age of the Enlightenment*. New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁷ Howlett, J. (1792). *Annals of Agriculture*, 76-85.

²⁸ A good overview is to be found in Woolf, S. (1986). *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. London: Methuen.

with a pound raised per 2.6 inhabitants in 320 county parishes, as against one pound per six inhabitants in nine large towns²⁹.

Table 2: Howlett’s evidence on the urban-rural differential in the Poor Law’s financial incidence (ratio of each £ raised per head of population)

	<i>No. of inhabitants</i>	<i>Poor’s rate</i>	<i>Proportion of £ to inhabitants</i>
Nine towns, chiefly manufacturing of the greatest magnitude in this kingdom, that is Norwich, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Sheffield, Exeter, Worcester, Leeds and Nottingham	193,158	49,296	about 1 to 6*
67 towns of inferior, none of them containing 10,000	130,000	36,844	1 to 3 ¼ (3.25)
320 county parishes	139,000	53,413	1 to 2 6/10 (2.6)

*In the cities of London and Westminster and borough of Southwark, the proportion is nearly the same
Source: Howlett, J. (1792). Annals of Agriculture.

It cannot be stressed too greatly that in France the resources, in theory available, for outdoor relief through *bureaux de charité* seem in practice to have been somewhat limited. In fact, these funds, when available, tended inexorably to gravitate to towns. Ecclesiastical tithe, for instance, usually hovering around one-twentieth of gross agricultural product, was frequently carried off to swell the store-houses of church dignitaries in the diocesan capitals, and so served as an urban levy on the countryside. The tendency for the nobility and *haute bourgeoisie* to be urban domiciled exacerbated the urban-focused character assumed by charitable funds.

The Committee of Mendicity surveyed each French *département’s* total resources supposedly available for the provision of outdoor relief. Assuming, as did Olwen Hufton when she pioneered consideration of this source, that c. 25 percent of the population was in need of welfare support, then the real extent of resources available to meet that need, and revealed by the Committee’s work, was evidently not very great. If allowance is made for the possibility that approximately 30-40 livres might meet the bread grain requirements for one individual over the course of the year, then some simple calculations can be made relating to the relief potential provided by these welfare funds across French regions. In the wealthiest *départments*³⁰, so distinguished on the basis of their available charitable funds, one to four livres per capita for the poor, or the equivalent of 10-40 days of bread, could be provided annually. Worse than this, in the geographically extensive belt running from the Basses-Pyrénées through Gascony, the Landes, Gironde, Lot-et-Garonne, and Lot through the Dordogne, Charente and the Corèze to the Creuse and Puy-de-Dôme, the total resources divided by the 25 percent assumed to have been in need would have been sufficient in any one year to buy a single pound of bread for each hungry person. These figures, even if exaggerated regarding the inadequacy of the support available, are striking in what they reveal

²⁹ For an exemplary study of a predominantly rural setting that demonstrates very clearly the central features of rural government and social policy in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, see: Eastwood, D. (1994). *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780-1840*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

³⁰ Seine-Inférieure, Flandre, Meuse, Cote-d’Or, Bouche-du-Rhone and Loiret.

when set against the rate-based relief in England. In the mid-1780s this was capable of supporting, primarily in the form of outdoor relief, 10 percent of the total population in bread for the whole of any calendar year³¹.

The extent to which the later 17th- and 18th-century Poor Law in England offered aid in the form of outdoor relief might at first glance seem surprising, given that the Elizabethan statutes, which provided the legal foundations on which the system of parochial relief rested, stressed four main functions, of which only one involved substantial expenditure on people in their own homes. These were:

- (i) to relieve in almshouses those unable to work—old, sick and disable persons;
- (ii) to provide work for those unable to find work but who were able-bodied;
- (iii) to apprentice children by redistributing them into households so situated that they could put them to work profitably; and
- (iv) to assist those who found themselves in ‘family circumstances’ that made them incapable of being self-supporting.

By some considerable margin, the emphasis on the Elizabethan legislation as it had progressed from the 1550s was on the first and second functions—indoor relief and work provision. These were very familiar themes in pan-European welfare aims and practices at the time and in no sense distinguished England from her continental neighbours. Furthermore, the significant physical size of indoor institutions, combined with punitive measures to deal with vagrants and the quasi-disciplinary attempts to give the unemployed work, were particularly prominent features of the markedly urban-oriented settings of welfare provisioning in the 16th century. This is not surprising in so far in an English context it was the towns that had lost most in terms of institutional support for the poor, as a result of the changes brought about in the 1530s.³²

To focus on outdoor relief without reference to the Tudor and early Stuart dearth or famine policies would be to tell only part of a far more complex story. There is not space to delve deeply into this matter, but it might be worth stressing the significance of the shift in dearth policy or practice after 1630 that Slack was perhaps the first to signify. The interventionist stances that had been crystallised in part through the Book of Orders moved more directly to one in which, rather than intervening in the market to requisition grain and to limit its free movement in periods of shortage, greater reliance was placed upon putting cash in the pockets of the poor to enable them to buy grain or bread. This was most definitely enabled by, and possibly a contributor to, the spread of rate-raising and the use of rate-based revenues for the provisioning of outdoor relief. It was in such processes that the spread of rate-based revenue to rural

³¹ This discussion of the evidence collected by the Committee of Mendicity is based on Hutton, O. (1974). *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, chapter V.

³² Neil Rushton's re-workings of the evidence created by the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535 shows that religious houses, broadly defined, may have been expending up to £13,000 on charitable activities. In so far as the wealthiest and most significant contributors to this sum were operating in the larger urban provincial setting, the loss of this source of charitable assistance removed a substantial element in welfare resources from urban populations. It should not be forgotten that the bulk of this income had been received from what might be regarded as an urban levy on the countryside in the form of rents and payments in kind for rural manors or farms. See: Rushton, N. (2001). 'Monastic Charitable Provision in Tudor England: Quantifying and Qualifying Poor Relief in the Early Sixteenth Century'. *Continuity and Change*, 16, 9-44.

settings acquired momentum and that in part helps to explain how the situation we observe so much more clearly in the 18th century had come into being.³³

In introducing this discussion, use has been made of John Howlett's comments on urban-rural contrasts. It is worth stressing how London and Middlesex stand out as a welfare 'desert' when funds derived from the rates are concerned, a feature that would add greatly to the disbelief of those French commentators from the early 1790s. There may be a mixture of explanations for this feature of poor relief geography. Low per capita expenditure might well reflect the large quantities of alternative charitable resources in London (although crowding-out effects in the relationship between rate-based and voluntary charitable expenditure are generally not a feature of welfare funding in early modern England); London's more diverse economy would have provided a multitude of opportunities to generate incomes; London would, unlike the nation in general, have had a population with a far higher proportion of its population between 15 and 35—the age groups least likely to be deemed eligible recipients of relief.³⁴

Many long-stay migrants would also have lacked a settlement in the city, but would have been eligible for support from rural areas from which they had migrated. In fact, the evidence assembled by Sokoll relating to the early 19th-century pauper letters written by those who were resident extra-parochially suggests a strong propensity for those settled in rural and market-town Essex to have relief sent from those rustic settings to support them in their London residences³⁵. Non-resident relief is a subject that is greatly in need of more thorough-going quantitative research, since it may be another factor at a broader inter-regional level that might account for lower expenditure in the northern urban and industrial regions in the 18th century. It is also another indicator of how far welfare revenue raising was so heavily grounded in the rural economy and the agrarian sector, and perhaps another reason for reflecting further on the large charge placed upon this sector in underpinning social and economic change over the two centuries prior to 1850. This was a charge that the French rural economy could not meet, and perhaps would not have been required to carry, given the dominance of the peasant farmer as opposed to *journalier* households in the majority of French regions.

³³ It might be wise not to overplay the speed with which these practices became so extensive over rural settings. Paul Slack was inclined, when writing in the 1980s on this subject, to suggest that as late as 1660 only a third of English parishes were raising rates (see Slack, P. (1988). *Poverty and Policy*, 179. London: Macmillan), although by 1700 a large majority were doing so. Steve Hindle (2004) (*On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England*, chapter 4. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press) has shown that Slack's diagnosis may have been too pessimistic regarding the speed with which rural overseers, in association with JPs, were able to establish a nationwide system of rate-based revenue raising.

³⁴ These observations are based on the findings from work in progress on the spatial patterning of relief expenditure revealed in the Board of Trade enquiry of 1696 and parliamentary enquiries of 1748-50, 1776, 1783-5 and 1802-3

³⁵ Sokoll, T. (Ed.) (2001). *Essex Pauper Letters 1731-1837*, Records of Social and Economic History New Series 30. London: British Academy. For a useful analysis of letters written by and settlement examinations of London-based persons seeking relief from rural and non-metropolitan parishes see Taylor, J.S. (1989). *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution: Sojourners' Narratives*. Palo Alto, CA: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship. Arguments are taken further in Taylor, J.S (1991). 'A Different Kind of Speenhemland: Non-resident Relief in the Industrial Revolution'. *Journal of British Studies* 21, 183-208.

4. Parochial relief practices and epidemiological consequences in England c. 1650- c. 1800: some further comparisons

In this section of the paper the focus is primarily on certain features of English and French mortality and epidemiological history in the 17th and 18th centuries that may be set against the background of welfare practices in those two historical settings. In what follows, the preoccupation is principally with possible demographic patterns that flow from the differences in the relative shares of relief that are provided in 'indoor' and 'outdoor' forms in different contexts, and the quantities of welfare funding available per capita in town and country. In particular, the focus is placed upon the role of the small parish unit as the administrative context within which funds were raised and disbursed in England, and the absence of such frameworks and practices in France.

In specifying 'indoor' and 'outdoor' relief, a distinction is being made in fairly generalised (some might claim crude) terms, between relief given as income substitutes or supplements to persons who did not live within the confines of larger institutions such as hospitals, workhouses or houses of corrections, and that given in the form of care, cash allowances and medical services to persons lodged within such institutions. Consequently, indoor relief is regarded as that which is obtained by persons on, or as a consequence of, entering such institutions. It must be acknowledged at the outset that one cannot be too categorical in the use of these terms, in so far as they were far from being 'non-communicating' sectors of welfare provisioning. Certainly, continental Europeans hospitals did give outdoor relief, although it proved to be an area of their overall activity that is difficult to quantify; where it has been studied, the focus has almost invariably been upon fairly substantial urban centres, in which a minority of the total populations resided.³⁶ However, the principal purpose here is to attempt to relate these welfare systems to the demographic and more specifically, the epidemiological regimes in which they were embedded. I would argue that it is the relative share of welfare in the respective sectors that is the key issue, in that distribution has considerable bearing upon both the way welfare was managed and the extent to which it reached those in need of assistance.

We have earlier in the paper noted how quickly use of indoor relief and its associated institutions—almshouses, hospitals, bridewells, houses of correction—became restricted elements in relief provision after c.1630, relative to the provision of outdoor relief in the form of cash payments to persons in their own homes. Another integral part of early modern English welfare provisioning, although statutorily separate, was the Tudor and early Stuart dearth or famine policy which was embodied in the Books of Orders, specifying a set of actions to be implemented in the event of harvest difficulties, food shortages and high prices³⁷. The key practices concerned government measures to ensure that, in times of dearth, corn supplies were to be kept in the country, carefully husbanded and distributed to those in need. These measures involved prohibition of grain exports when prices were high, public purchases of corn from

³⁶ Jutte, R. (1994). *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Henderson, J.(2006). *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

³⁷ Slack, P. (1980). 'Books of Orders: The Making of English Social Policy, 1577-1631'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser. 30; Outhwaite, R.B. (1981). 'Dearth and Government Intervention in Grain markets, 1590-1700', *Economic History Review* 2nd ser., 33, 389-406.

abroad, and searches and surveys of corn supplies undertaken by public authorities with a view to a regular and ordered provision of the open market. In practice, the policy of searches and market provision did more to remedy deficiencies in the social distribution of scarce grain in grain-producing areas than deficiencies in its geographical distribution, reflected in the continued vulnerability of the northern and north-western regions of England to famine well into the third or fourth decades of the 17th century, when most of the remainder of the country was not so affected³⁸.

Nonetheless, it was certainly a dearth policy that encouraged a sense of social responsibility among Justices of the Peace, who were increasingly expected to act by the general populace in the public interest. These same local men who were also agents of central government were simultaneously charged with monitoring the machinery for the implementation of a parish rate-funded relief³⁹. As previously noted, it was after 1630 that the 'dearth policy' was altered, as with a growth in relief practices financed from parish rates, strenuous efforts were made to expand the quantity of cash in the hands of those whose vulnerability was exposed to high prices in dearth years. On any scale of rating of public action and early responsiveness in the face of famine threats, English Tudor and especially early Stuart governments, both centrally and locally, would score highly. Central governments were well informed, in large measure because of the effective integration of parishes into the national administrative centre through the speedy reactions of the Justices of the Peace—those outwardly orientated, although provincially, indeed parochially domiciled, unpaid 'workhorses'. They, more than any other agency, came to determine a pattern of poor relief which was largely rendered in the form of cash placed in people's pockets. The move towards widespread raising of parish rates to fund these cash payments was by no means instantaneous.

Of course, the cash relief provided from the rate-based welfare funds, rather than food aid *per se*, may have been decidedly problematic. As Sen and Drèze remind us, cash aid can almost always help an individual to acquire food and avoid starvation⁴⁰. It is less clear, however, whether such practices are always good for collective security, in so far as one person's capacity to obtain food through cash can adversely affect the entitlements of others by placing an upward pressure on prices. Nonetheless, in the early modern English case, this potential outcome seems largely to have been avoided, since the enhanced purchasing power so provided appears to have stimulated interregional trade, effective grain storage and overall agricultural productivity. Wrigley has reminded us that even Malthus, who is generally perceived to be no friend of 'transfer incomes', had seen—in his neglected essay entitled *An investigation of the cause of the present high price of provisions*, published in 1800—the beneficial impact of income subsidies in dearth years in very similar terms in his diagnosis of different outcomes following from severe dearth conditions in England and Sweden in the late 1790s. Malthus judged the English case far more favourably, both in economic and demographic terms, notwithstanding the fact that less severe physical shortfalls of grain had provoked much higher price rises, in part because of the impact of wage subsidies which he saw as sustaining demand. In England there was no mortality surge, but in Sweden death rates rose sharply⁴¹.

³⁸ Appleby, A.B. (1978). *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England*. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press.

³⁹ Walter, J. and Wrightson, K. (1976). 'Dearth and the Social Order in Early Modern England'. *Past and Present* 71, 22-44.

⁴⁰ Drèze, J. and Sen, A. 'Public Action for Social Security: Foundations and Strategy'. In Ahmad, E., Drèze, J., Hills, J. and Sen, A. (Eds.) (1991). *Social Security in Developing Countries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1-40.

⁴¹ Wrigley, E.A. (1999), 'Corn and Crisis: Malthus and the High Price of Provisions'. *Population and Development Review* 25, 121-128.

What emerges as the striking feature of the Old Poor Law in England is that monetary relief was given in substantial quantities, both to the impotent, especially elderly poor, and to those indubitably able-bodied, most commonly young widows or women deserted by their husbands and left with young children. This relief was allocated to parishioners, primarily in their own homes. In addition, in the last half of the 18th century (although with considerable variation from place to place), able-bodied male heads of household increasingly received monetary relief in growing quantities⁴². This was provided when a combination of difficult economic conditions, such as arose through bad weather, high prices or slack seasonal labour demand, and the claims of more dependants than such male (frequently the sole income-providers in rural economies) could cater for, drove them to desperation. Such a set of welfare-provisioning characteristics came about, notwithstanding the 1722 Workhouse Act, which had sought to check applications for relief from the able-bodied by making entry into the workhouse a condition of receiving relief. While workhouses were built (which in the terms of this present discussion, may be categorised as indoor relief) they were to be found in only 15 or 16 percent of the English parishes by 1773, and few of those parishes apparently applied the workhouse test⁴³.

In 1802-03, the first date for which we can undertake such a calculation, about 75 percent of the Poor Law bill of c. £4,000,000 was spent on outdoor relief. Of the marginally more than 1,000,000 persons (approximately 11 percent of the population) receiving relief that year, 93 percent were relieved outdoors. While this almost certainly represents the pauperisation of a larger proportion of the able-bodied population than applied a century earlier, it would seem that no fundamental change of practice had occurred. Evidence from the Board of Trade returns for 1696 suggests that relief, largely of the outdoor kind, was available at the level of about £75 per annum for every 1,000 of the population or alternatively would at the prices then current have supplied about 5 percent of the population with basic food requirements for the whole of a year. In 1696 the value of parish charities, which also largely took the form of outdoor relief, was considerable and therefore would have to be added to the revenue raised by the parish rate. In what are justifiably considered to be controversial assessments,⁴⁴ Jordan estimated that in 1660 the total income from charities was c. £100,000, roughly the same, perhaps, as the income from poor rates at that date.⁴⁵ The number of charitable trusts probably doubled in the next century and a parliamentary enquiry estimated their income in 1788 at £258,700 (the returns are known to be incomplete). Paul Slack has recently gone so far as to suggest that in the 1780s (before the huge rise in rate-based poor-relief expenditure took place) income from charities was contributing as much as the rates and in the towns with hospitals and subscriptions, charity may have been the dominant partner alongside rate-based income, although it too made considerable contributions to outdoor relief⁴⁶.

In section 3 we have already drawn some comparisons with the situation in France and commented on the patterns evident in the data collected by the post-Revolutionary Committee of Mendicity. Additional evidence is also revealing. In a detailed, highly relevant case study, Colin Jones has considered this same body of evidence and finds in 332 communities in the Montpellier region—containing 250,000 to 275,000 persons—that 150 (or 46 percent) had no forms of relief whatsoever. Jones is also able to

⁴² Slack, P. 'Dearth and Social Policy in Early Modern England', *op.cit.*

⁴³ Slack, P. (1990). *The English Poor Law 1531-1782*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Table 1, 22.

⁴⁵ Jordan, W.K. (1959). *Philanthropy in England 1480-1660*. London: Allen and Unwin; but see Hadwin, J.F. (1978). 'Deflating Philanthropy'. *Economic History Review* 2nd ser., 3, 105-117.

⁴⁶ Slack, P., *The English Poor Law 1531-1782*, *op. cit.*, 41-44; See too, Innes, J. 'The "Mixed Economy of Welfare" in Early Modern England: Assessments of the Options from Hale to Malthus' (c. 1683-1803)'. In Dauntton, M. (Ed.), *Charity, Self-interest and Welfare*, *op. cit.*, 139-180

estimate, albeit in a highly approximate fashion, the amounts of home relief available; 162 communities had nothing to dispense and 73 had less than 49 livres to distribute. Indeed, 72 percent of the 332 communities had either no relief or at best could support just one person for one year⁴⁷. Such evidence is entirely consistent with the expectations of those French commentators who found Howlett's observations so hard to believe regarding the relative relief expenditure levels in town and country in England.

In what follows, attention is directed to certain demographic implications of this uneven and thin spread of charitable resources in France—in particular, their tendency to concentrate in the towns. Take, first of all, the substantial sums expended on 18th-century English single-parent, female-headed households in general. Such transfers from collectivity to households or individuals were far less likely in France at a comparable point in time. One obvious concomitant of this was the tendency of both unmarried mothers and fatherless households to drift into towns or to jettison their marginal, insupportable, and in some cases, unwanted offspring in urban centres. While this matter could be assessed in far greater detail, for the purposes of this present discussion it is necessary only to sketch certain demographic patterns concerning illegitimacy that are highly characteristic of 18th-century French society.

In the second half of the 18th century it was not at all uncommon to find French urban and rural illegitimacy ratios that differed by a factor of 10 to 20. For example, Jean-Pierre Bardet's study of Rouen shows the illegitimacy ratio in the city⁴⁸ to have been around 20 percent, while in the surrounding Normandy countryside it was less than two percent. Bardet's estimates, partially based on the *déclarations de grossesse illégitimes*, suggest that over 70 percent of those births in Rouen concerned girls who had come into the city or were recent immigrants. The link between this form of behaviour and the exposure of the newborn is, of course, well known and in this matter, Rouen is no exception; in 1710, foundlings left with Rouen's *Hôpital Général* displayed a death rate of 580 per 1,000, rising over the subsequent 70 years to the sickening heights of 916 per 1,000 in 1780. Rates of foundling mortality varying from 600 to 900 per 1,000 are the norm in French urban communities throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The concentration of very large numbers of domestically insupportable infants and children within these overcrowded hospital premises had obvious repercussions for their wellbeing. Jones' study of the *Hopitaux Généraux* in Montpellier and Nimes shows how infants spent their early months with wet nurses. These wet nurses were for the most part some 70 kilometres distant from the towns, and resident within the impoverished welfare 'deserts' that were the villages of the Cévennes, the uplands forming the south-eastern fringe of the Massif Central. In part, this great distance was caused by the fact that wet nurses in the immediate surroundings of these two southern French towns were hired by the town's élite and were in receipt of wages that were three to four times greater than those accepted by their Cévenol equivalents. In 1779 an inquiry revealed that out of 610 children sent into the Cévennes in the period from 1767 to 1777, 71 percent had died prior to the date of their scheduled return⁴⁹. These figures would be swollen considerably if accurate data were available on the deaths occurring in the hospital prior to the journey to the mountain villages. While it would be simplistic in the extreme to see such patterns as

⁴⁷ Jones, C. (1982). *Charity and Bienfaisance in the Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier region 1740-1815*, part II, 45-94. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

⁴⁸ Bardet, J.-P. (1983). *Rouen aux XVII et XVIII siècles: Les mutations d'un espace social*, 337. Paris: SEDES.

⁴⁹ Jones, *Charity and Bienfaisance*, *op. cit.*, 106-107.

solely to do with the relative supplies of outdoor and indoor relief in country and town, the contrasts with England are revealing.⁵⁰

Outdoor relief in England seems to have been much more consistently and overtly employed to uphold the independence of the household *in situ*, whereas the French urban-based institutions provided more restricted domestic support or, in the case of the foundling and its mother, offered a highly dangerous alternative to the family or household environment⁵¹. Welfare, in the form of cash payments, fuel allowances and rent subsidies given in England to people in their homes may have proved to be a more effective way of maintaining relatively low levels of infant and child mortality than was achieved in the majority of French regions. In France we can observe the practice of irregular, unpredictable and certainly inadequate shows of gift-giving to rather small numbers of people or the transfer of infants from the less hazardous rural to the more hazardous urban environments in which the hospitals were located. From such institutions the foundlings were sent into the problematic care of their impoverished wet nurses, serving further to reduce their survival chances. Such features of welfare provision were characteristic practices in sizeable regions of 18th-century France.

By contrast, a more predictable and relatively generous level of outdoor relief to mother and infant offspring may indirectly have increased the fertility-reducing effects of breast-feeding that was surprisingly ubiquitous in English villages and small towns, by improving infant survival prospects and by lengthening the post-partum non-susceptible period that is noteworthy at 12-14 months for being comparatively much longer in England than in many, although not all, parts of France⁵². While the regional differences in breastfeeding in both France and other parts of continental Europe are in need of explanations that have to do with complex cultural histories, it is far too simple-minded to equate areas of low infant mortality with areas that show such feeding practices to be ubiquitous, for there were many

⁵⁰ We may stress this contrast, cognisant of Adrian Wilson's attempt to estimate illegitimacy ratios in mid-18th century London through concentration upon the foundlings taken into the newly established London Foundling Hospital during the period of the so-called General Reception between 1756 and 1760. (Wilson, A. (1989). 'Illegitimacy and its Implications in Mid-18th Century London: The Evidence of the Foundling Hospital'. *Continuity and Change* 4, 103-64.) Wilson estimated that the majority of those received were illegitimate and that they constituted a ratio of 10-12 percent of London births (50 percent by women who had come to the capital specifically to give birth). Alysa Levene has very recently shown that Wilson's work has produced a significant overestimation of metropolitan illegitimacy and suggests that illegitimate foundlings may have accounted for 50 rather than 80-90 percent of the London Foundling Hospital intake, as argued by Wilson. Her findings suggest a significant downgrading of the incidence of metropolitan illegitimacy. (Levene, A. (2003). 'The Origins of the Children of the London Foundling Hospital 1741-60: A Reconsideration'. *Continuity and Change* 18, 201-235.) Even if we were to allow Wilson's initial estimate to stand, the drawing power of that massive metropolitan centre, with 10-12 percent of the nation's population, seems muted compared with proportionally far larger flows of mothers and offspring to the much smaller French urban centres. If, as Wilson suggests, a true ratio of illegitimacy in London in the mid-18th century was closer to five percent, compared with three to four percent in the provinces, it could still be argued that London was not an environment that specifically encouraged illegitimacy or the immigration of unmarried mothers to it. The proportion of London's unmarried female population at risk to give birth to bastards was much higher than in the provinces, so an illegitimacy ratio in excess of those in the countryside by a margin of a couple of percent most likely implies an illegitimacy rate (per 1,000 unmarried females) that was actually lower than in rural areas, as in fact applies when we have access to the first returns from the Registrar General in the 19th century.

⁵¹ Rates of mortality among foundlings could range from 700-900 per 1,000. See Jones, *Charity and Bienfaisance*, *op. cit.*; Bardet, *Rouen aux XVII et XVIII siècles*, *op. cit.*, 337.

⁵² Wilson, C. (1986). 'The Proximate Determinants of Marital Fertility in England 1600-1799'. In Bonfield, L., Smith, R.M. and Wrightson, K. (Eds.). *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 203-230.

rural areas in which breastfeeding was the norm, but in which infant mortality rates far exceeded 200 or 250 per 1,000.⁵³

The child mortality rates are commensurately higher in the French parish data sets and the contrast between the two 'national' experiences emerges strikingly when survivors to exact age 10 are considered in the two populations; for every 1,000 individuals born in early 18th-century England, 700-725 survived to age 10, whereas in France only 500 of the original cohort of 1,000 would live. Even in the most favourable French region, the south-west, the survival rate to age 10 was 580. Mortality rates from the rural parishes of Devon, which are among the most favoured communities with regard to their life expectancy so far analysed, would suggest that they experienced levels of survival rates to age 10 in the 17th and 18th centuries in excess of 800.⁵⁴

The welfare practices of the English Old Poor Law and its associated institutions narrowed down the obligations that individuals owed to their wider kin, enabling the parental generation within the simple family household to enlarge *pari passu* its capacity to help, care and offer guidance to the infant and young child. One obvious area of restricted kin support consequent upon communal care provision is that provided by the lineal family to the elderly.⁵⁵ While not denying a significant amount of intra-familial care,

⁵³ As is well known, the study of infant mortality in 17th- and 18th-century France is not straightforward because of the difficulties associated with the under-registration of infant and child deaths. French historical demographers have developed methods to correct these shortcomings, which now offer us reasonably robust data sets that may be regarded with considerable confidence. The most comprehensive sample is that reported by Jacques Houdaille, who notes an overall improvement in infant mortality rates from 1690 to 1780, but notwithstanding the decline, the rates revealed make for fairly depressing reading when set alongside the equivalent English evidence. (See Houdaille, J. (1980). 'La mortalité des enfants dans la France rurale de 1690 à 1779'. *Population* 39, 77-106.) Even in the French region with the lowest infant mortality, the south-west, where breastfeeding is thought to have been almost ubiquitous, infant mortality rates in the 1690s were close to 200 per 1,000. Rates of 275 to 350 per 1,000 are encountered in the eastern and north-eastern France, where breastfeeding was less common or of a shorter duration. In fact, Houdaille's national estimates range from 350 per 1,000 in 1690-1719 to 320 in 1720-1749, and fall to 263 in the period 1750-1779. Parish family reconstitutions prepared by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure from a reasonably large sample of English registers suggest that infant mortality rates in the 1690s and early 1700s may have reached c.195 per 1,000, but thereafter fell, so that in the period 1720-1749 rates were approximately 180 per 1,000 and by the third quarter of the century had fallen to 150, when those in France were still in excess of 260 per 1,000. See Wrigley, E.A., Davies, R., Oeppen, J. and Schofield, R. (1997). *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 214-248.

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that historians, when confronted with differences of the order of magnitude displayed by these data sets, have reacted in various ways. French historical demographers have tended to doubt the accuracy of English registers and regard the low rates as an 'under-registration' effect; others resort to arguments that seek an explanation squarely within the differences in basic productivity of the French and English agrarian systems. Of course, such an explanation is deserving of serious consideration and the evidence relating to substantial superiority of English over French levels of agricultural productivity is indeed compelling. Nonetheless, it is not at all clear that nutritional factors should be regarded as decisive in determining these differences. It is doubtful whether patterns of breastfeeding in the first six months of life varied as much as they did after the first six months of life, but nonetheless we find contrasts between France and England that stand out in the early as well as the latter parts of the first year and the subsequent years one to four and five to nine, pointing, it would seem, to the importance of factors to do with the quality of the domestic environment and other features and procedures connected with childcare and household income (Compare infant and child mortality rates reported in Houdaille, 'La mortalité des enfants', *ibid*, with those reported in Wrigley et al *English Population History from Family Reconstitutions*, *ibid*.)

⁵⁵ Laslett, P. (1987). 'Family, Kinship and Collectivity as Systems of Support in Pre-industrial Europe: A Consideration of the "Nuclear Hardship Hypotheses"'. *Continuity and Change* 3, 153-175; Smith, R.M. (1984). 'The Structured Dependency of the Elderly as a Recent Development: Some Skeptical Thoughts'. *Ageing and Society* 4, 409-428; Smith, R.M. (1999). 'Ageing and Well-being in Early Modern England: Pension Trends and Gender Preferences under the English Old Poor Law c.1650-1800'. In Johnson, P. and Thane, P. (Eds.). *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*. London: Routledge, 64-93.

the parish in rural England played a key role, consequently diminishing the obligation heaped upon married children who might at that very phase when assistance to elderly parents was needed, have dependent children and infants of their own. The long-birth- interval-breast-feeding-low-infant-mortality areas (with infant mortality rates 100-150 per 1,000) may be, in certain circumstances, reflecting the consequences of injections of income subsidies into household economies that ensured the survival of both mother and child. The limited family provision for the elderly, the departure from their natal hearth of older children as parochially funded servants-in-husbandry or as pauper apprentices contracted to work or placed by poor-law officers in the households of non-kin may have been other additional influences reducing pressures on English household economies, with tangible benefits accruing to the youngest dependants⁵⁶.

It would seem that a good deal of the outdoor relief provided through the English Old Poor Law was concerned with remedying income losses brought on by contingencies such as sickness, death, decrepitude, indeed ameliorating a fall in living standards at times of *relative scarcity*. The identification of likely beneficiaries of such a system does not have to be in the form of strict means-testing or income testing. Regular life-cycle contingencies, such as maternity, sickness, disability, unemployment, and old age, can be used as fairly straightforward tests of the probability of being in need. The effectiveness of this type of system depends, as Tony Atkinson and John Hills note, on the extent to which those covered by these contingencies are the poor in a society⁵⁷. It also depends on the administrative costs of identifying entitlement to what might be regarded as 'categorical' benefits. The administrative problem that such a system is obliged to solve are not to be underestimated, and above all concern the elicitation of the correct information concerning who has fallen into the relevant categories. It might be proposed that the English Old Poor Law, especially in the agricultural regions of southern Britain, was reasonably successful in eliciting appropriate information and rendering the effective reactions. Both cash subsidies and the provision of grain through systems of communally administered and funded welfare—along with an administrative machinery that intervened in grain markets to minimise the dislocational effects of variable harvest quality—all helped to minimise short-term rises in mortality in periods of inflated food prices.

In Section 2 we noted that Galloway found that 46 percent of the fluctuations of deaths over age five in France in the period 1677-1734 were associated with fluctuations in grain prices.⁵⁸ In England from 1675-1755 the comparable figure was only 24 percent; in France the response in the year of high prices and that following were 30 and 29 percent, respectively, whereas in England the comparable percentages were only 11 and 19. Furthermore, Galloway discovered that in France and not in England runs of years of high prices had an extra effect in raising mortality⁵⁹. Somehow it does seem that the propertied classes in early modern England solved the problem of collective action with regard to their dealings with the poor by their administration of a system of regular rate-based relief and irregular but very necessary voluntary

⁵⁶ Wrigley, E.A. (1987). 'No Death without Birth: The Implications of English Mortality in the Early Modern Period'. In Porter, R. and Wear, A. (Eds.). *Problems and Methods in the History of Medicine*. London: Croom Helm, 133-150.

⁵⁷ Atkinson, A.B. and Hills, J. (1991). 'Social Security in Developed Countries: Are There Any Lessons for Developing Countries?' In Ahmad, E., Drèze, J., Hills, J. and Sen, A. (Eds.). *Social Security in Developing Countries*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 89-90.

⁵⁸ For the 17th and early 18th centuries the French mortality series are plagued by the under-recording of infant and young child deaths, so the comparison between France and England has to be based on deaths relating to the population above age five.

⁵⁹ Galloway, 'Basic Patterns in Annual Variations', *op.cit.*, 280-291.

redistributions that depended on the vast majority of benefactors trusting that their peers would do likewise.

One suspects in this respect that English systems, unlike those in France, were only minimally bedevilled by the free-rider problem where the generation of reasonably adequate welfare funds was concerned. Such success did, however, depend on a particular kind of face-to-face relationship between benefactor and beneficiary. In some senses the system most likely limited the frantic townward migration of impoverished families in periods of dearth, if not of adolescents and young adults, who were not yet 'settled' or who were not deemed to be a deserving age-category. It may have indirectly limited the extent to which disease was spread during periods of crisis. Such an interpretation is sustainable, notwithstanding some suggestive findings from John Landers and Patrick Galloway that London may have attracted during years of dearth in the late 17th and 18th centuries increased numbers of persons in the age groups 15-24, who may, in terms of the 'welfare-beneficiary' model to which we referred earlier, not have been deemed socially acceptable beneficiaries of poor relief in rural communities, but perished as urban immigrants who were exposed to diseases to which they had no acquired immunity—smallpox is the most obvious cause of death impacting upon this group⁶⁰.

A comparable effect has also been identified by Patrick Galloway working on 18th-century Rouen, where high food prices were associated with mortality surges in the town but not in rural areas. What is more, the mortality surges in Rouen were equally characteristic of all social classes, suggesting that hunger *per se* was not the proximate cause of death. The preferred interpretation of this pattern is that social mechanisms designed to reduce hunger among urban populations, such as price controls and the distribution of grain to the poor, which did not operate in rural districts, could induce mortality surges if starving people of all ages flooded into the urban centres from the countryside bearing disease with them, rather than becoming exposed for the first time to those diseases endemic within the towns on their arrival.⁶¹

5. Conclusion

Can we go so far as Ron Lesthaeghe and claim that the extent of risk-sharing across both social class boundaries, economic sectors and across regions is a good measure of a society's social and political integration, and that a high degree of such integration corresponds with a greater preponderance of 'preventive checks' over 'positive checks' in the demographic system?⁶² In so far as the system of

⁶⁰ Landers, J. (1985). *Death and the Metropolis: Studies in the Demographic History of London 1670-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 115-140; and Galloway, P. (1985), 'Annual Variations in Death by Age, Deaths by Cause, Prices and Weather in London 1670-1830', *Population Studies* 39, 487-505.

⁶¹ Galloway, P. (1986). 'Differentials in Demographic Responses to Annual Price Variations in Pre-revolutionary France: A Comparison of Rich and Poor Areas in Rouen, 1680-1787'. *European Journal of Population*, 2, 269-273. This is a subject evidently needing further comparative assessment, involving work on English and French urban centres of the 17th and 18th centuries. It would be valuable to know whether the 'urban effect' during periods of high food prices was more marked in France than in England, therefore reflecting the greater spatial unevenness of welfare provision, and social and political intervention in the latter than the former society. It would also be interesting to know whether the mortality enhancements were as socially undifferentiated in one urban system as in the other.

⁶² Lesthaeghe, R. (1980). 'On the Social Control of Human Reproduction'. *Population and Development Review*, 6, 522-548.

welfare, such as that produced by the English Old Poor Law, was one that ensured that the effects of the demographic actions of individuals would be spread over politically constituted *parish units*, Lesthaeghe is correct in his judgement. This issue is of broader significance, since in making sense of the character of the early modern English demographic regime it is vital to be cognisant of the fact that the purchase which fertility had on the demographic growth rate depended heavily on the underlying high rates of survivorship that held throughout the whole of the early modern period, notwithstanding the tendency of life expectancy to go through a long cycle of deterioration and improvement⁶³.

Similarly, did the face-to-face nature of the relationships between the rate-payer, the welfare administrator or overseer, who might himself or whose family might one day be a recipient of welfare, and the welfare beneficiary, create the cohesiveness to which Lesthaeghe refers? If it was achieved, was it only effectively secured in highly specific regional contexts and was it anchored by means that infringed personal liberties with adverse equity implications? Some might respond that the parochial framework, which in the vast majority of cases involved relatively small populations, facilitated a close face-to-face relationship between overseer of the poor and beneficiary, thereby helping to minimise, if not to eradicate the adverse selection effect that bedevils social security systems. Furthermore, the small-group context created by the parish, within which the bulk of relief was provided, may have served to reduce many of the transaction costs associated with administration and information that are frequently assumed to create incentive problems that worked against the successful implementation of welfare schemes in pre-industrial settings. In modest-sized parochial units the costs of information collection, contract enforcement and entitlement awareness may have been reduced to manageable levels.

Abram de Swaan viewed the English Old Poor Law as having secured a favourable resolution of the problems of risk-covariance and free-riding, through imposing a strong dose of central control.⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, a powerful state would seem to be a necessary condition, but so is an equally vibrant and functionally effective local community in the form of the parish, along with a relatively muted role for the wider kin group as a welfare provider. This paper, given the constraints of space, has devoted insufficient attention to the roles played by a host of voluntary and formally corporate institutions that complemented the Old Poor Law in the provision of welfare, and which unambiguously linked early modern England with many of her European neighbours. However, as Paul Slack reminds us in the conclusion of his Ford Lectures, in the case of early modern England we have an intriguing paradox since⁶⁵ 'England seems to have been able more easily than other countries to enjoy the benefits of both a flourishing corporate and voluntary sector and a powerful central authority and legal system, without the second smothering the first'. In fact, Slack regards the Old Poor Law as 'the most striking example of the state and the community interacting creatively without one crowding out the other'. The *crowding in* that this enabled, it might be suggested, had significant advantages for early modern England in generating more resource redistribution across classes and between agrarian and industrial sectors, as well as enhancing demographic survivorship probabilities which were an important pre-requisite in enabling the variable operation of the preventive check to have had so much of a purchase on English population growth rates, especially after 1650.

⁶³ The technical basis of this claim is to be found in Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England*, *op. cit.*, 236-240.

⁶⁴ De Swaan, *In Care of the State*, *op. cit.*, 37-41.

⁶⁵ Slack, P. (1998). *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England*, 161. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

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