

*The genesis and structure of moral  
universalism: social justice in Victorian  
Britain, 1834–1901*

**Michael Strand**

**Theory and Society**

Renewal and Critique in Social Theory

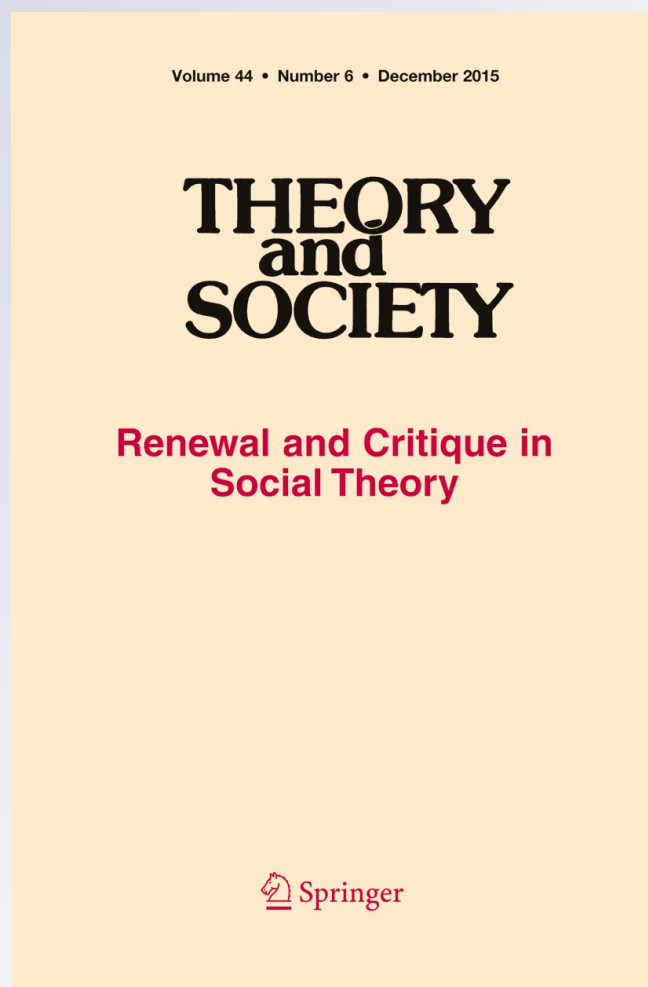
ISSN 0304-2421

Volume 44

Number 6

Theor Soc (2015) 44:537-573

DOI 10.1007/s11186-015-9261-8



**Your article is protected by copyright and all rights are held exclusively by Springer Science +Business Media Dordrecht. This e-offprint is for personal use only and shall not be self-archived in electronic repositories. If you wish to self-archive your article, please use the accepted manuscript version for posting on your own website. You may further deposit the accepted manuscript version in any repository, provided it is only made publicly available 12 months after official publication or later and provided acknowledgement is given to the original source of publication and a link is inserted to the published article on Springer's website. The link must be accompanied by the following text: "The final publication is available at [link.springer.com](http://link.springer.com)".**

# The genesis and structure of moral universalism: social justice in Victorian Britain, 1834–1901

Michael Strand<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 16 October 2015

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2015

**Abstract** Sociologists generally agree that history affects or conditions moral belief, but the relationship is still only vaguely understood. Using a case study of the appearance of social justice beliefs in Victorian-era Britain, this article develops an explanation of the link between history and morality by applying field theory to capture the historical genesis of a field. A moral way of evaluating poverty and inequality developed slowly over the course of the nineteenth century in Britain, with a trajectory extending back to Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* and moving forward to the Fabians, the Settlement Movement, and other social reformers at the end of the nineteenth century. Drawing from field theory, I argue that social justice beliefs emerged during this time through the genesis of moral universalism as a distinct mode of experience. Several recognizable moral beliefs appeared in the process, including “equality of opportunity,” “equality of reward,” “character,” and “effort,” “ability,” and “duty” as forms of merit (among others). I argue for treating moral beliefs as historical and relational entities that are situated and dated by the conditions marking their appearance in a field. As I conclude, this lends the sociology of morality to a critical moral reflexivity instead of moral relativism or moral realism.

**Keywords** Bourdieu · Field theory · Sociology of morality · History of morality · Social inequality · Poverty

At the core of the sociology of morality is the effort to uncover the structure and origin of moral beliefs (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013; Tavory 2011; Abend 2008; Alexander 2006). With few exceptions, however, the genesis of morality as a *historical* process has been neglected (though see Abend 2014; McCall 2013). While most would agree that we do not make our moral beliefs just as we please, but under circumstances “found, given and transmitted from the past,” how history matters in this specific respect is not immediately clear.

---

✉ Michael Strand  
mstrand@brandeis.edu

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, Brandeis University, 201 Pearlman Hall, MS 071, Waltham, MA 02454-9110, USA

This article helps to fill that void by providing a historical account of the genesis of moral beliefs about social justice. The case study is an extended process of moral belief-formation that took place during a period that approximately corresponds to the Victorian period in British history (1834–1901). During this time, poverty and social inequality acquired moral meanings that in many ways are strikingly contemporary. The trajectory starts with Malthus's initial claims that poverty is a sign of individual moral failure. Charity organization would appear in the 1870s based on revision of Malthusian principles, before giving way to a host of claims in the 1880s and 1890s that focused on different standards of individual merit, including “duty,” “service,” “ability,” “effort,” and “labor.” By the time of Queen Victoria's death in 1901, social reformers used principles like “equality of opportunity” and “equality of reward” to evaluate the justness of social inequalities.

To explain how this happened, however, I do not focus on the specific content of those beliefs, or what they meant as “world images.” This is often the approach taken by those who apply the concept of “tradition” to develop an intellectual history of moral beliefs (Bellah et al. 1985; Taylor 1989: 39). That type of analysis is invaluable for adding hermeneutic clarity to ideas, but it remains limited in what it can tell us about the factors that generate moral beliefs across time. To capture that, it is more useful to focus on the orientation and ambition evident in moral beliefs that transcends their status as discrete concepts or ideas.

What we see over the course of the Victorian period is the development of moral principles expressing a distinct imperative to reorder social relations according to *universalistic* standards. Universalism refers to an elementary demand for the impartiality of moral claims, not reflecting contextual determinants like class, culture, gender, race, or nationality. Contrary to the predominant treatment of moral universalism as resting (or not) in discursive or rational *principles*, I claim that phenomenology provides the more accurate description of moral universalism as a distinct mode of *experience*. Moral beliefs here become fully historical, relational entities. Rather than stand-alone principles (“abstractions”), they are “bundles of relations” that are generated and structured by historically emergent social fields.

The argument that follows concentrates on two stages in the appearance of universalistic orientations to moral principles in Victorian Britain: first, the genesis of a transcendent moral stance toward the world (particularly poverty); second, the intersection of sets of social relations that generated a social field centered around an ethical problematic involving social inequality. Ultimately, the effort is to bring a genesis story into the present by reaching a critical understanding of moral universalism that does not rest on a commitment to philosophical principles. This does not mean, however, that I try to remove or relativize moral beliefs. Rather, I seek to strengthen and ultimately to liberate processes of moral belief-formation by using this analysis to generate a type of *reflexive* reason rooted in a critical understanding of moral presuppositions resting at the horizon of modernity.

## Field theory and moral belief

### Universals and universalism

Kant's (1990[1784]) famous essay—“Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”—takes an ambitious perspective to human history. As individuals and nations

“pursue their own ends” in their own time, little do they imagine that they are part of a great cosmic drama involving “human will on a large-scale” and its search for principles that will finally ensure a “just civil constitution” and “universal cosmopolitan existence” for all (pp. 46, 51). This is surprising given the fact that so much of history is consumed by “folly and childish vanity.” How, in this sense, can the history of humankind yield something as sacred and reverential as a universal moral principle? If philosophers cannot assume that humankind “follows any rational purpose of its own,” then it is up to philosophers “to discover a *purpose in nature* behind this senseless course of human events” (p. 42). What they witness is a “germ of enlightenment” slowly developing throughout the “aggregate human actions” of history (p. 52). Universal moral principles come to fruition, though they remain the philosopher’s possession.

Kant’s argument has been in equal measure influential and wildly controversial in the many separate fields concerned with modernity. In sociology, Durkheim and Weber both drew from Kant’s analysis to theorize the “cult of the individual” and rationalization in modern morality (respectively). Parsons (1951; see also Turner 1993), meanwhile, gave Kant’s cosmopolitan history a functionalist spin, tracing the emergence of “universalistic value-orientations” to the differentiation of economy and polity from kinship relations. Parsons argued that these orientations were necessary to reconcile increasingly individualistic human beings with a complex and increasingly differentiated set of social institutions. Hence, universal moral standards functioned as a source of solidarity in modernizing societies fractured by individualism and difference. This kind of “heightened universalism” also had implications for stratification and social inequality. Drawing from Parsons, Blau and Duncan argued that, because of universalism, “superior status cannot any more be directly inherited but must be legitimated by actual achievements that are socially acknowledged” (1967, p. 430).

More recent sociological treatments of universalism have tended to move in two directions, both informed by Parsons, though less historical and less reflexive than Kant. First, Habermas (1998) adapts Weber’s rationalization argument to a proceduralist view of universalizability. Here, discourse ethics creates universalizability as the cognitive content of morality derived from deliberation. Moral universals are discovered when argumentation is allowed to “[point] beyond all particular forms of life” (p. 41). Alexander (2006, 1995), meanwhile, treats universalism as a distinctly cultural phenomenon. If the possibilities for justice have increased over the last two centuries, this is due to values and principles whose “immanent” content is universalistic. They provide “a fluent and provocative moral discourse” for a civil sphere that generates solidaristic commitments (2006, p. 38).

The problems of functionalist reasoning are well known, and so both of these recent approaches have enhanced the sociology of universalism by retaining the best parts of Parsons’s argument while losing the worst. Perhaps ironically, however, both perspectives also define universalism as the *absence* of the social (see Young 1990, p. 4). Universal principles are procedurally “removed from” or intrinsically “autonomous from” social structure, interests, or identities. Arguments that do incorporate the universal in the social are reductionist, relativist, even cynical (see Habermas 1971, p. 44; Alexander 1995, p. 137). Bourdieu in particular is criticized for locating universal principles in social interests and social class. His approach is therefore plagued by an especially virulent strain of sociological reductionism that makes it impossible to explain (or support) processes at work in a public or civil

sphere that depend on universalistic principles to create solidarity (Alexander 1995; see also Sayer 2005).<sup>1</sup>

In one sense, this article argues that Bourdieu cannot be dismissed so easily, though this is less because Bourdieu explicitly addressed moral universalism. As others (Lamont 1992; Sayer 2005) have noted, his scholarly concern for moral topics was minimal in comparison to the attention he paid to aesthetics and science. However, by taking an innovative approach to social relations, Bourdieu, and the type of relational sociology he developed as field theory, provide necessary resources for understanding and recovering the social dimensions of universality. The principal claim is that “symbolic systems claiming universal validity” possess universalizability *because* of social conditions not despite them. The universal validity of moral, aesthetic, or scientific principles cannot in this sense be disassociated from the social conditions that shape their history.

Understanding this without making reductionist or relativist claims, however, requires a radical reformulation of what universalism actually is. For Bourdieu, universalism is best understood as a mode of experience that does not depend primarily upon concepts with explicit meanings. It is instead immediately formed in relation to concepts as *objects* that are mainly responsive to the structuring effects of social relations in a field. In this sense, moral universalism does not consist of ideal principles, procedures, or cultural values. It consists rather of the “*lived experience* of certain cultivated men and women in certain historical societies” (Bourdieu 1990, p. 386).

### Bourdieu and universalism

Bourdieu has a tough needle to thread in making these claims. In what sense is universalism “an experience”? How can social relations play such an integral, non-reductive role? Mannheim’s (1936) classic approach to similar questions identified a unique social class—intellectuals—who, because they are somehow *free* from social conditions, are afforded epistemological privileges that enable universalizability. In his answer to these questions, Bourdieu agrees with this, at least in part: intellectuals are, crucially, the carrier group of universalism (1996). Their “scholastic condition” removes them from something, though Bourdieu emphatically denies that it is removal from the effects of thinking and reasoning in social conditions. It is instead a “privileged” removal from social conditions that allow for the exercise of only *practical* dispositions. In this sense, “social microcosms based on privilege” remain distant from practical orders. But for precisely this reason they allow for the cultivation of dispositions that can generate universalism as a “lived experience” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 77).

For most, such a claim presents an irresolvable paradox: Universalizability requires *transcendence* over particular points of view, yet here it is somehow social conditions themselves that feed this transcendence. To solve it, Bourdieu redefines the concept of transcendence away from interior mental states and a priori phenomena with fixed properties. He treats it instead as a cognitive disposition that grows organically in history:

The insistence that everything is historical, including the common cognitive dispositions which, resulting from the constraints that the regularities of the world

<sup>1</sup> Goldberg (2013) offers an important corrective to these arguments by showing how republican principles inform Bourdieu’s understanding of fields, making it possible to “transform interest into virtue.”

have brought to bear, for thousands of years, on a living being who was obliged to adapt to them in order to survive, make the world immediately knowable, does not mean, as is sometimes too hastily said, that one is professing a historicist or sociological reductionism. It means that one is refusing to replace God the creator of ‘eternal verities and values’... with the creative Subject, and giving back to history and to society what was given to a transcendence or a transcendent subject (Bourdieu 2000, p. 115).

With its “big history” perspective, Bourdieu’s claims bear a striking resemblance to Eisenstadt’s (1982; Silber 2011) sociological treatment of “transcendence” as the central ingredient of the Axial Age. As Eisenstadt argues, the token feature of the Axial revolutions that took place in the first millennium before Christ involved “the strain toward transcendence—a kind of standing back and looking beyond—a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and a new vision of what lies beyond” (Eisenstadt 1982, p. 295). The period witnessed the emergence of intellectuals as “autonomous articulators of [a] new order” of symbolic meanings.<sup>2</sup> Resolving the “tension between ... transcendental and mundane orders” subsequently marked the political and social “ordering of the world” (Eisenstadt 1982, p. 299).

Bourdieu agrees with Eisenstadt that intellectuals play a critically important role in generating transcendental orders of meaning that apply to society at large. Yet notice where he takes this next:

The experience of the transcendence of [scientific, moral, aesthetic] objects ... is the particular form of *illusio* which arises in the relationship between agents possessing the habitus socially required by the field and symbolic systems capable of imposing their demands on those who perceive them and operate them, and endowed with an autonomy closely linked to that of the field (Bourdieu 2000, pp. 113–114).

Transcendence is not simply a quality of principles here but a quality of *actors* with the capacity to experience transcendent things. Importantly, this capacity is a historically developed and acquired trait that depends on social conditions. Here, Bourdieu appears to borrow from Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Descartes’s *cogito*: transcendence is an active process of “throwing one’s life headlong into transcendent things” (Merleau-Ponty 2000[1962], p. 429). We “contract the world into a comprehensive grasp” when we take a transcendent stance; yet the “very experience of transcendent things” is socially conditioned and historically variable (Merleau-Ponty 2000[1962], p. 475).

While it is tempting to find universalism in principles, then, the claim here is that it only arises from a unique kind of subject-object relation. More specifically, this is the source of its *historicity*. Actors (subjects) who take a transcendent stance toward the world may encounter principles (objects) that, to them, possess the quality of universalizability. The influence of Kant’s universal history on Bourdieu is clearest at this point. In both scenarios, intellectuals, or those who cultivate and exercise transcendent dispositions,

<sup>2</sup> In this regard, the revealed form of transcendence is paradox or counterintuition relative to practice. For example, Weber mentions the “stupendous paradox” at the heart of the transcendent visions found in ancient Judaic prophecy: “a god does not only fail to protect his chosen people against its enemies but allows them to fall, or pushes them himself, into ignominy and enslavement, yet is worshipped only the more ardently” (1967: 364).

parse through history in order to identify what has universal significance. In both accounts, attention is cast toward the situation of intellectuals (subjects) as the source of universalizability, not principles (objects) that naturally possess it. However, Bourdieu seeks to avoid any trace of Kant's rationalism by making universalism instead a type of experience generated within distinct social fields (Bourdieu 1990, p. 386).

In this sense, as opposed to a rational or discursive understanding of universalism, the approach in this article is phenomenological. It does not aim at making claims about content (which is bracketed for the moment), but instead capturing the experiential process that applies to the development of moral claims in their historical specificity. Universalism thus refers to a subject-object relation that occurs in social conditions whose impact on both ends is *concrete*, i.e., material, tangible, embodied. If there is a critical failing in Bourdieu's scheme, it is that he pays little attention to what is undoubtedly the most important part of his revisionist claims: what the *experience* of universalism actually involves.

We can retrieve some of its general effect from Bourdieu's analysis of judgments of taste where it involves something like the perception or qualitative sense of an "ought-to-be." Here he describes universalism as taking form in "performative utterances" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 489). For instance, "fine art *must be* free art." This contains an "ought-to-be" equivalent to "We *demand* the poor be given equal opportunity" or "Social status *must be* achieved in order to be legitimate." Importantly, this means that universalism is not a kind of logical derivation *from* the meaning of principles. What is expressed here is rather an imperative found in the predicate of each of the statements: "free art," "equal opportunity," "achieved status." The universalizability of these, as principles, has less to do with their discursive or rational meaning. More accurately described, it is the account given for a certain kind of felt imperative ("necessity") generated in certain social conditions for a certain kind of actor.

### Genesis and structure as reflexive technique

In Bourdieu's (1990, p. 386) terms, then, only in "privileged social microcosms" does universalism of this kind become possible as a "cultivated lived experience." This begs an important question, however: how is this *not* an argument against a kind of "one-sided, hegemonic universality" that is indistinguishable from an exercise of power (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mehta 1990) Even as he makes claims about its social exclusivity, Bourdieu is not radically critical of universalism. He seeks rather to preserve (and reform) universals, while dedicating his efforts to highlighting their limitations. Importantly, however, this does not involve a theoretical proof that tries to establish how apparent universals are *actually* universal.<sup>3</sup> His focus, instead, involves a model for the *empirical* analysis of universalism—"genesis and structure" (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 309–312).<sup>4</sup>

The task of a genesis and structure analysis is to reveal the "social conditions of thought" as a way of critiquing it. History is used here as an alternative to pure critiques that identify transcendental categories. Very simply, a genetic description is concerned

<sup>3</sup> In this sense, he remains distant from moral realists and their focus on personhood (cf. Sayer 2005; Smith 2010).

<sup>4</sup> "Genesis and structure" is rooted in phenomenology, extending back to Husserl's efforts to find the "historical original" of positivistic sciences (like geometry) as a way of recovering their "loss of meaning for life." Bourdieu likely absorbed the categories as part of his "fieldwork in philosophy" in the 1950s; but he also likely remained critical of them for the same reason he was critical of all (existential) phenomenology: its "complacent appeal to 'lived experience'" (see Bourdieu 1990, pp. 4–5).



with how and why something comes about; a structural description tries to identify its essence or meaning as a closed system. This is a long-debated opposition in cultural theory, but Bourdieu does not believe the two can simply be opposed to each other. He locates “genesis” in concrete experience that develops historically. He combines this with “structure” that refers to relational oppositions and social conditions of possibility. The focus ultimately rests on the dual role played by social conditions: both creating the possibility for transcendence as a cognitive (subjective) disposition and providing the relational dimensions that give certain principles (as objects) the qualitative appeal of universalizability.

The goal of this kind of analysis is somewhat paradoxical, however, as it involves a combination of opposites. Genesis and structure tries to know something (aesthetic style, bureaucracy, moral principle) as both a mind-independent part of the world and also as an act of consciousness that is very much mind-*dependent*. Bringing the two together in this way is the basic source of reflexivity, which Bourdieu refers to in this instance as an act of *anamnesis* (“recovery from forgetting”) that allows for the freedom of thought from the conditions and categories that make it finite (see Wacquant 2004; Gorski 2013). In this case, the genesis of moral universalism as a unique “lived experience” is given to social history; while the structure of that experience is given to field theory and its effort to embed abstractions in “sets of relations” (Martin 2011; Spillman 1995; Swartz 1997; Gorski 2013). Social justice is treated in this sense as a “*historical movement* whereby [an] ‘ought-to-be’ advances through the emergence [of fields] capable of ... ethical and cognitive universality” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 123).

To trace that historical movement, I start with Thomas Robert Malthus and discuss the genesis of transcendence from his early nineteenth-century critique of poverty as individual moral failing. I then follow his “transcendental order” on its tumultuous path through the “mundane world” of the 1860s and 1870s. The main focus of the analysis comes with the genesis of universalism in the late-Victorian period as part of the emergence of a field that responded to specific problems in the Malthusian order. Here, actors embedded in multiple sets of social relations revamped the moral “ought-to-be” inherited from Malthus, transforming it into principles of equality that should apply universally. I conclude the article by discussing the implications of genesis and structure as a reflexive critique of moral universalism.

## Malthus versus the subsistence ethic

For field theorists, transcendence marks an opposition to practice, or what seems self-evidently realistic and necessary relative to the “regularities of the world.” The first evidence of transcendence in this specific case comes in the form of a critique of the moral economy as a *practical belief*.<sup>5</sup> With Malthus’s influential *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1992[1798–1834]) a transcendental order of meaning appeared that quite consciously split off from the “subsistence ethic” of the peasant moral economy

<sup>5</sup> As Bourdieu defines it: “Practical belief is not a ‘state of the mind,’ still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines (‘beliefs’), but rather a state of the body” (1990, p. 68). Somers and Block (2014: chapter 6) appeal to a similar opposition—“institutional pragmatism vs. theoretical realism”—to explain the impact of Malthus’s *Essay*.

(see Scott 1976, p. 5; Moore 1968, p. 471; Thompson 1971). The latter refers to moral expectations for a certain type of material relationship between peasants and local elites (nobles, lords) in the subsistence economies that preceded agrarian capitalism. Scott summarizes the mutual duties as follows:

The minimal formulation was that elites must not invade the subsistence reserve of poor people; its maximal formulation was that elites had a positive moral obligation to provide for the maintenance needs of their subjects in times of dearth (1976, p. 33).

While a violation of this ethic would readily provoke a “righteous anger,” resting on what Scott calls a “common notion of what is just,” the obligations of a moral economy were (are) seldom explicitly encoded (see Thompson 1993: 341, 350). In this sense, the subsistence ethic marks a practical belief in relation to conditions of existence very close to the subsistence margin, where the “threat of individual starvation” can only be overcome communally (Polanyi 1944, pp. 163–164). For the English peasantry, this meant access to land, traditional customs of land use and entitlement to its produce. This is very different from dependence on a market for access to food (Wood 2002). Even as commercial agriculture spread during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these obligations were only transformed into what E.P. Thompson (1993, p. 193) calls the “paternalist model” of market distribution, with the subsistence ethic remaining at the foundation.

By the late eighteenth century, however, the challenge presented by commercialism became more severe. Most forcefully expressed in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (particularly the brief section “Digression on the Corn Trade and Corn Laws”), the concept of a “natural and self-adjusting economy” both as a price-setting mechanism and a form of effective rationing recommended removing paternalist controls on the market (Thompson 1993, pp. 202–203). The significance of this transformation cannot be underestimated (see Appleby 1978, pp. 52 ff.). For our purposes, it is most important for how it inspired a new moral evaluation of the poor.

When Malthus published the first edition of his *Essay* (1798–1830[1992]), the context had become both hostile to the subsistence ethic yet still profoundly shaped by it. By this time, land signaled less a productive resource whose ownership created social privilege and obligation than a form of capital that compelled its owner to profit maximization. In spite of the rapidly growing influence of market logic and capitalist class relations, however, there remained a contradiction at the heart of the emergent agrarian capitalist system: “its economics were those of a market order [but] its politics were those of a self-styled aristocracy and squirearchy, exerting quite different and ‘traditional’ disciplines and controls” (Williams 1973, p. 182). This contradiction had many separate manifestations; most important were its effects on the Poor Laws.

The Poor Laws were an inheritance of the Elizabethan period, and they exemplify a paternalist application of the subsistence ethic. Passed in 1597 and 1601, they mandated that each local parish provide relief for the sick, the old, orphaned, and in some cases the unemployed if they had legal settlement in the parish.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the eighteenth

<sup>6</sup> This was part of a broader range of policies that, guided by physiocratic principles, sought to utilize the poor as a “productive resource” (Appleby 1978: chapter 6).

century, this kind of assistance had become a necessity for the rural poor (Snell 1985, pp. 112 ff.). Yet in 1795, war with France and a disastrous harvest made even basic subsistence difficult for many. The Speenhamland parish in southern England responded with the “Speenhamland system,” a policy known for having provided a “minimum of income ... to the poor irrespective of their earnings,” enabling them to buy bread, but which addressed the problem of rural unemployment and material dearth in a variety of ways—all meant to ensure subsistence (Somers and Block 2014, p. 127; Polanyi 1944, p. 82; Webb and Webb 1929). As had traditionally been the case, Speenhamland gave the poor “the ‘right to live’ by the mere fact of existence and membership ... in a local community” (Williams 1973, p. 182).

For Malthus, however, this was precisely the problem. His argument in the *Essay* is famous for its population principle: population grows much more rapidly than “the means of subsistence.” Because population invariably exceeds subsistence, periodic “checks” naturally bring population down to a sustainable level (see Malthus 1992, pp. 28–29). Much more than a scientific claim, however, the population principle directly undermines the subsistence ethic. Because the subsistence ethic (even when narrowly confined to the Poor Laws) makes it possible for a “man to marry with little or no prospect of being able to support a family,” it actually *creates* “the poor which [it must] maintain” (Malthus 1992, p. 100). In order to reduce poverty, then, the solution is the exact opposite of what the subsistence ethic recommends: refuse to help the poor, with the hopes of reducing their number.

This carries over into morality in a very important way. Traditionally, the poor had been a sociological classification ... that carried no moral judgment.” However, “by grafting the moral categories of desert, merit and self-sufficiency onto the structural conditions of poverty and a volatile labor market,” Malthus effectively engineered an “ideational change from poverty to perversity” (Somers and Block 2014, p. 176). Deservingness had remained as far removed from the subsistence ethic as had, for instance, the concept of exploitation. If it referred to anything prior to Malthus it was the right of “dependent” peasants to a subsistence reserve, something he clearly resisted (Fraser and Gordon 1994). Yet Malthus made it the principal focus in morally categorizing the poor. With claims like, “to marry without the prospect of being able to support a family ... is to commit an immoral act” (1992, p. 262) and “[the poor] are themselves the cause of their own poverty” because they avoid the “duty [of] moral restraint” (1992, pp. 228, 225), he used the question of *desert* to transform poverty from a brute condition carrying no moral judgment into an outward sign of individual moral failing (see Bendix 1958: 84ff).

In 1834 the Poor Laws were reformed. The New Poor Law significantly reduced the availability of relief to the poor—in Polanyi’s terms effectively “abolishing the right to live” (1944, p. 86). To receive aid, the new laws required that relief applicants submit to incarceration in a punitive institution: the workhouse. The goal was to institute a “self-acting *test* of the claim of the applicant” such that only in truly *deserving* situations would someone choose to enter a workhouse and receive subsistence (Poor Law Commissioners 1834, p. 148).

Even taking Malthus’s influence on the New Poor Law (see Somers and Block 2014, p. 176) into account, however, does not adequately capture his ultimate influence on the field or moral belief. This comes instead with his introduction of a transcendental order. Set in contrast to the subsistence ethic, Malthus makes extremely counterintuitive

claims about the poor (e.g., *refusing* to help them as a way of helping them) that only make sense inside a new context of meaning that stands opposed to practical belief. Malthus's treatment of the poor as, in this sense, an object of moral contemplation is evident in two primary ways.<sup>7</sup>

First, he defined a criterion for justice even though he did not apply it universally. In this case, the “hard law of necessity” determined the moral merit of the poor but not the rich. If the poor acted according to the “laws of population,” then their situation was just, because they were living out a deserved destiny. If they avoided this and received charity or poor relief while avoiding the “goad of necessity,” then they were paupers obtaining undeserved merit (see Stedman Jones 2004, p. 97). Second, Malthus posed this justice argument directly, and perhaps counter-intuitively, against the practice-based subsistence ethic. Malthus tries to subdue the “natural impulse” that provides charity to the poor by imploring elites not to do anything that would “remove ... the suffering [of the poor] from the laws of nature. ... They are deservedly at the bottom in the scale of society. ... [If] we raise them from this situation ... [we] commit a most glaring injustice” (1992, pp. 287–288). Thus, Malthus demands that elites reference his version of moral reason in order to *check* practices rationally that would otherwise keep the poor in subsistence. More than anything else, this reveals the presence of a transcendental order removed from practical belief.

### **The cotton famine and charity organization**

The Malthusian ethos more or less suffused class relations and treatment of the poor in the period following the passage of the New Poor Law in 1834 until the 1880s. It also remained wildly controversial throughout this period. Opposition to the New Poor Law helped galvanize the Chartist movement and their effort to reform Parliament. And yet the Poor Laws remained in place. Indeed, despite a wide variance between parishes, when the Poor Laws were reformed during this period, the tendency was to bring them closer to the Malthusian ideal: with more workhouses, more centralized control, more stringency on relief.

Much like what followed in the wake of the transcendent visions of Axial Age prophets, the mid- and late-Victorian periods were characterized by efforts to “[resolve] the tension between ... transcendental and mundane orders” (Eisenstadt 1982, p. 299). In this instance Malthus supplied the transcendental order; while the Lancashire Cotton Famine in 1861–1865 and “forceful” economic problems (unemployment, casual labor, economic crises) in the years thereafter provided the mundane, and often brutal, reality.

### **The Lancashire cotton famine, 1861–1865**

The Lancashire Cotton Famine that ravaged cotton mill towns in the northwest of England between 1861 and 1865 was caused by the dramatic and sudden decrease in

<sup>7</sup> Malthus was not alone in treating the poor as a moral problem. Comparable ideas from Burke, Bentham, Townsend, and Tocqueville all appeared around the same time (Losurdo 2011, pp. 193 ff.).

cotton imports from the southern states as a result of the Union blockade of Confederate ports during the American Civil War. The blockade took hold in the early months of 1862, but its effects on the mill towns were not felt until the fall, when the harvest ended and the spinning began. Almost immediately, however, claimants to the Poor Law in Lancashire and the surrounding counties increased dramatically, with places like Preston and Ashton-upon-Lyne seeing a forty-fold increase in applicants for relief between November 1861 and November 1862 (Watts 1866, p. 121). As northwest England's core industry at the time, the cotton industry's famine had an impact on the economy of the entire region.

Elites responded to the famine with what Malthus derisively labeled the “charitable impulse.” Entirely outside the strictures of the Poor Law at the time, the primary relief fund—the Lancashire and Cheshire Operative Relief Fund (or Mansion House Fund initiated through the Lord Mayor in London)—raised £528,336 between May 1862 and June 1865 (Henderson 1969, p. 79).<sup>8</sup> While the money was intended to fill holes in an overstretched Poor Law, it ended up addressing much of the need for relief through direct (outdoor, without a workhouse test) aid to the “able-bodied” (Shapely 2001).

However, this meant the Lancashire Cotton Famine put the moralized system created by the New Poor Law into turmoil. The unprecedented level of “compulsory idleness” (unemployment) marked the “most serious crisis with which the English Poor Law has ever had to grapple” (Mackay 1899, p. 388; Watts 1866, pp. 119–120). Counteracting this with more relief only introduced the Malthusian problem of the absent “goad of necessity,” even though it seemed practical and realistic. In this respect, famine conditions effectively removed the capacity of the “workhouse test” to deter the poor from receiving unmerited aid.

More generally, it undermined Malthus's transcendental order and its moralized meaning of “the poor.” Increasingly, it seemed, the poor could just as easily be unjust victims of economic circumstance as unjust paupers gaming the system. The arrival on the scene of an *external force*—an industrial capitalist economy with its own reality, a “force ... wild, blind, relentless, unbridled” (Hirschman 1982, p. 1470)—presented a mundane limit to a transcendental order.

### The rise of charity organization

In this mid-Victorian period, charity best exemplifies the tension between practical belief and transcendent moral meanings. Malthus had implored elites not to act on charitable impulses that would sustain the poor outside the marketplace or workhouse. Even so, charity became the focus in the wake of the Famine. By one estimate, the aggregate income of London charities in 1857 was £2,441,967 (Low 1862). In 1869, this same income was £4,079,262, with £7,368,862 coming in total expenditure on the poor (Hawksey 1869). In addition to the Cotton Famine, these high levels of charity can be attributed to sudden, smaller crises (economic and climatic) experienced in London between 1866 and 1869 (Ryan 1985, pp. 142–145; Boyer 2004, pp. 410–411). Charity met fierce resistance from Malthusians who claimed that excessiveness here undermined the

<sup>8</sup> For some perspective not that £528,336 in 1862 is equivalent to approximately £38.5 million today.

“natural distinction” between the deserving and undeserving poor who could now “choose mendicancy over work” (Stedman Jones 1971, p. 255).

It should come as no surprise, then, that a reaction (indeed, a “crusade”) arose in the late 1860s whose explicit goal was to “organize charity” and restore the operation of the New Poor Law (Rose 1966; Mackinnon 1987; Hurren 2007). George Goschen, then president of the Poor Law Board that oversaw the operation of the Poor Law, published the “Goschen minute” that criticized the persistence of indiscriminate giving and the lack of coordination between the Poor Law and the rapidly growing number of charitable organizations (1971[1869], pp. 227–228). His argument marked the birth of *charity organization* as a new tactic to deal with the poor. The London Society for the Prevention of Pauperism and Crime (e.g., the London Charity Organization Society or COS) took shape soon thereafter.

The goal of the COS was not to forbid charity but to “systematize the benevolence of the public” by developing a “scientific” or professional approach to charitable giving, both limiting and scrutinizing its availability (COS *First Annual Report* quoted in Owen 1964, p. 221). By 1872, there were thirty-six COS offices in London, and they pioneered the practice of casework (Mowat 1961, p. 22). COS offices were often located next to Poor Law offices and workhouses as a way of distributing relief applicants between them. Applicants were instructed to go first to the COS office where agents took down the details of their cases. COS agents also interviewed landlords, employers, and family members of the applicant. “Visitors” (primarily women) were sometimes assigned to visit the homes of applicants. The information gathered would go to advise a district COS committee on the “deservingness” of a case. That committee ultimately decided whether the applicant should receive charity or enter the Poor Law workhouse (Mowat 1961, p. 30).

Initially, the COS did not dispense relief. The “true work of the society [was] *investigation and organization*” (Hicks 1875, pp. 6–7; emphasis original). Indeed, Octavia Hill, the most prominent of the COS’s “visitors,” justified the casework approach for its ability to create “sympathetic” relationships between rich and poor; ultimately the goal was to teach lessons in “living very nobly” (Hill 1877, p. 17). Yet, importantly, this did not mean a return to the moral economy or subsistence ethic. Above all, charity organization sought to dispel the notion of a “right to relief” as a practical belief held by the poor (Goschen 1971[1869], pp. 227–228). Individual merit was still assessed according to principles congruent with Malthus. However, the evidence drawn from casework would now determine whether the destiny created by those problems (a broken leg, an absent husband, an opium addiction—examples commonly found in the COS’s district recordbooks) was really merited in specific cases.

### **The fall of charity organization**

The COS remained a dominant force in the treatment of the poor throughout the 1870s; but its fortunes, and the fortunes of charity organization more generally, drastically declined in the early 1880s. This was particularly true in London. Concentrated poverty, slum conditions, and a vast casual labor market created a volatile economic situation for the poor in London’s East End. Decades of residential segregation

combined with London's financial (not industrial) economy meant that wealthy urban elites had little contact with the poor, creating the sense of a dangerous social gulf dividing the two classes (Stedman Jones 1971, p. 239; see also Hobsbawm 1968, p. 69).<sup>9</sup> Compounding this were severe cyclical depressions and a decline of the city's older industries in the early 1880s.

Not surprisingly, social turmoil would plague London throughout the 1880s (see Keller 2010, pp. 109–133). Several riots and demonstrations of the unemployed occurred, most notably the Black Monday riots in 1886 and Bloody Sunday riots in 1887. Meanwhile, shocking exposes of East End poverty and crime—like Andrew Mearns's *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) and G.R. Sims's *How the Poor Live, or Horrible London* (1885–1887)—helped dissolve “the whole stock of assumptions upon which the work of moralizing” the poor had been based since the 1870s (Ginn 2006).

In these circumstances, charity once again came to dictate the practice of elites. Emergency funds were created giving outdoor relief during wintertime lulls in employment. In 1886, the Lord Mayor launched the Mansion House Fund for the first time since the Cotton Famine, this time in response to the “Black Monday” riots. Soon thereafter Parliament supplanted the Poor Law (temporarily) with the “Chamberlain Circular,” which advised municipal authorities to set up relief projects for unemployed workers (Chamberlain 1886 [1971], pp. 258–260).

Despite the fact that charity was so frequently drawn upon, the limits of charity became increasingly obvious during the late 1870s and early 1880s, particularly in London. Again it seemed as if the poor merited something other than the destiny that economic crises forcibly imposed on them. The ethical aspects of poverty in these circumstances did less to impugn the morality of paupers than reveal the suffering of people victimized by “wild, blind, relentless” economic processes. Yet charity, and charity organization combined with the Poor Law, could not meet these demands. It could not provide moral certainty about the status of the poor, which Malthus's transcendental order had introduced. Hence, the late-Victorian period would find social reformers “struggling for a foothold in the swirl and wreckage of new ideas and old beliefs” (Young 1936, p. 165).

### Passage to the late-Victorian field

The appearance of transcendent order is the first stage in the genesis of moral universalism; the second stage involves the appearance of the field. The Malthusian order was not universalistic. In one sense, it was impartial because it drew from a “law of nature” to make a moral evaluation. Yet social justice was questionable only for the poor, the rich remained immune from such evaluations and tests.<sup>10</sup> Starting early in the 1880s, this changed. Questions about social justice became questions of *social inequality*.

<sup>9</sup> As Walkowitz (1992, p. 17) notes, the London poor were a *terra incognita* for London elites (comparable to “darkest Africa”). This helped make the investigatory work of the COS appealing.

<sup>10</sup> Marx (1973, pp. 605 ff.) and Somers and Block (2014) allude in different ways to the anomalies of Malthus's very selective application of the “laws of population.”

How did that happen? The solution does not involve a change in principles, introducing new meanings, although on the surface this appeared to be what happened. Instead, a change in *orientation* toward moral principles—what they could and *should* do—was the primary catalyst. If principles alone could prompt actors to adopt a universalistic orientation, then Malthus would not have been so selectively applied. The universalizability of moral principles, which was missing from Malthus, extends instead from a historically specific relational context, one that finds actors with transcendent orientations very different from that of Malthus developing principles that served a very different purpose.

Field theory provides the best way of capturing this, because it can capture the historical specificity of the conditions that, at this point in time, generated moral universalism. To recall, that involves normative principles whose imperative (“should be,” “must be”) in relation to an ethical problematic is experienced as independent from personal inclination. Moral universalism is not a derivation from those principles, but involves an endorsement that is separate from their explicit meaning. Exactly to what those principles apply remains to be explained; the important point, however, is that the ambition of late-Victorian social reformers was to apply them universally, across social categories and classifications, to both rich and poor alike in this case, as a form of moral judgment. A holistic focus is required to explain how moral universalism originated thereby, involving not only the cohort of actors in the 1880s and 1890s but the social environment of late-Victorian Britain, extending to structural transformations, political changes, and economic shifts, and particularly to those “sets of relations” whose contingent combination would ultimately generate the historically distinct moral field that appeared at this time.

### Changes to British society

The factors that hastened the collapse of the COS formed part of a conjuncture of changes during the late-Victorian period that fundamentally reshaped British society. Among the most important was the “Great Depression” that persisted in the British economy between 1873 and 1896 (Saul 1969; Hobsbawn 1968, pp. 103 ff.; Polanyi 1944, pp. 207–214) and that reflected Britain’s dwindling hegemony in the world system (Arrighi 1994, pp. 170–178). The most significant effect was a worldwide collapse in agricultural prices, particularly in the late 1870s (Hobsbawn 1968, p. 169). This undermined the “whole territorial basis [of] patrician society” (Cannadine 1999, pp. 25–35), driving an intensive period of urban population growth and setting in motion the gradual eclipse of the aristocracy as the leading political and economic force in British society (Stone and Stone 1995, pp. 424–426).

Meanwhile, new elites were on the rise. Professionals, business magnates, financiers, civil servants, and university elites formed the core of an increasingly distinctive middle class. The working class, meanwhile, whose relative quiescence during the mid-Victorian period was in part attributable to the Trades Unions (legalized in 1871) entered a new period of militancy with the rise of “New Unionism” in the late 1880s (Stedman Jones 1971). There was also turmoil in the late-Victorian political field as the voting coalitions that supported the Liberal and Conservative parties, built up over the previous half century, were fundamentally reorganized as a result of the 1884 Reform Bill, which gave suffrage to a substantial proportion of working class males (Hanagan 1996; Hall 1984).



## Genesis of the field

This provides a summary of the major changes to late-Victorian British society that most affected the genesis of the field. But to capture how they had that precise effect requires a more specific focus. In particular, what were the sets of relations that gave the field its multipolar organization, thus making it a “field of force” capable of lending a sense of imperative to principles? There were three principal ones.

The first involves a class struggle at the top of British society, in the “field of power,” between rising middle class fractions and an aristocracy (rural gentry in particular) with dwindling authority. As Bourdieu claims, a “contest among dominants” can have the unintended effect of “advancing the universal” when defense of an elite class makes universalization a “symbolically effective weapon.” The emergence of competing elite class fractions creates a “differentiation of forms of power.” This situation becomes susceptible to *tyranny* as one dominant group pushes its form of power (type of capital, form of merit) onto others. One response is to give rival traits the “legitimation” and symbolic appeal that challenges the dominant form. In this scenario, arguments often appear about how a form of power (wealth, skills, knowledge, military force) benefits the common good, therefore (directly or indirectly) supporting an elite class as having the *most* legitimate authority (Bourdieu 1998, p. 389).

A variety of specific indicators suggest that such a conflict of dominants actually occurred in late-Victorian Britain. Civil service reform in the 1870s opened administrative positions in the imperial system and Whitehall placement up to competitive examinations for the first time (Gowan 1987; Rubinstein 1983). Meanwhile, the Cardwell Reforms (1870–1884) professionalized the British military (Tucker 1963). Oxford and Cambridge were also reformed around this time (particularly by utilitarian-minded reformers prompted by the “Tests agitation”) and forced to redefine the “ancient prerogatives” that gave religious and political support to the nobility (Sanderson 1975; Jenks 1977).

In all of these instances, the aristocracy’s power over various institutions gave way to reform. The reforms were “rational” to the extent that they remodeled these institutions on criteria removed from the aristocratic imprint. Members of middle-class status groups almost always led these reforms, and the institutions reemerged as sociopolitical power bases for their own forms of capital. This is just one indication of the “contest of dominants” created by the aristocracy’s dwindling hegemony that took place in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Others include challenges to the power of the unelected House of Lords in Parliament and the defensive reassertion of aristocratic order evidenced by Lord Curzon’s rule as Viceroy in British India (Cannadine 1994, chapter 4).

The second set of relations is drawn from the political field. When the 1884 Reform Act gave suffrage to a significant proportion of working class males, this triggered “a period of rapidly changing political opportunities” in Britain, involving (most importantly) the reconfiguration of the Conservative and Liberal parties as both “sought to win the loyalty of the newly-enfranchised by promoting social reforms and by invoking the cause of the working classes” (Hanagan 1996, p. 451). The working classes became a targeted voting bloc.

This had a palpable effect on late-Victorian intellectuals. “Policy intellectuals” played an increasingly distinctive role as British domestic politics focused on social reform (Katznelson 1996; Collini 1991). Harris (1992) calls this the late-Victorian “triumph of high politics” given the ambition shown in political circles not only for social reform, but reform of government more generally. Piecemeal social reforms had been advocated by the

British Social Science Association since 1851, yet the scope of intellectuals' influence on policy became more expansive following the 1884 Reform Act (Hanagan 1996; Hall 1984). The new ambitious political focus involved “restructuring the patterns and rules of transaction linking states and markets within capitalist economies as well as those connecting states and citizens in civil society.” Most importantly, this had the effect of “[constituting] the provinces of a new social knowledge” (Katznelson 1996, p. 25).

By the 1880s, then, the entire political order was undergoing a transformation that, in many respects, changed the definition of what politics (not just the state) could be. This had a variety of effects for the moral field, including making the position on politics and its desired role in social reform an important structuring force. A political dimension was given to poverty and inequality that they did not already possess. Political parties and constituencies changed as a result. In doing so, they helped create the potential for a multipolar organization in the moral field. In field-theoretic terms, a contested space is highly generative of sets of relations that are transposable. As the moral field partially emerged from the intersection these two sets of relations, distinct positions appeared as the combination of different, competing poles. However, accounting for this only gets us half way to the genesis of the field. Who were the actors susceptible to it?

In nearly every case, the most important players in the field had some prior affiliation with the COS. Beatrice Webb (*nee* Potter) and Samuel and Henrietta Barnett were all frontline COS workers in the late 1870s and early 1880s. They experienced firsthand its shortcomings (Webb 1982, pp. 85–86; Barnett 1919, pp. 230–231). John Hobson was briefly involved with the COS during his “intellectual tour” of several reformist groups in the late 1870s (Cain 2002, chapter1). William Morris and H.M. Hyndman were both patrons of the COS in the 1870s (Tsuzuki 1961). Meanwhile, Bernard and Helen Bosanquet and Charles Stuart Loch joined the COS in the late 1870s and remained with it despite the formative chaos of the 1880s and 1890s.

In nearly every case, the key players were also drawn from privileged social backgrounds that were not, however, defined by *aristocratic* privilege. Beatrice Webb was the daughter of a wealthy businessman who, like many bourgeoisie, bought into the lifestyle of the nobility but owed nothing to them. Inspired by Herbert Spencer, a close family friend, she sought from an early age to be a social scientist. Her husband Sidney Webb, meanwhile, was the son of a London accountant. He took night classes in law at Birkbeck College London before qualifying for the civil service. John Hobson was born to a prosperous newspaper publisher in the midlands city of Derby. After graduating from Oxford, he became an influential writer, economist, and foreign correspondent. Samuel Barnett was the son of a wealthy bedframe manufacturer. Leaving Oxford in 1866, he was ordained deacon of St. Mary's Church, London. William Morris was born to an upper middle-class family that was a fixture in London financial circles. After studying classics at Oxford, he became among the most successful artists and designers of the Victorian period. H. M. Hyndman was the son of a prominent barrister. His mother's family had deep economic interests in the Empire. After graduating from Oxford, Hyndman worked as a journalist and stockbroker before becoming a politician in the 1880s. Bernard Bosanquet was the only true scion of the aristocracy in the field, but even here the connection was minor. He was a philosopher at Oxford before becoming a leading figure in the COS in the early 1880s.

The goal here is not to attempt (weakly) a prosopography. These details are important because they add a central ingredient to the field: creating a cohort of actors

susceptible to its “potential.” The most important traits this cohort shared were an interest in the COS, which in turn evidenced an interest in “transcendental order,” and a social background that tied them to the “contest of dominants.” This also adds a third relational layer to the field as the actors contributed different forms of embodied capital.

### “Progress and poverty”

While these social traits are important for defining the cohort, their true defining feature, the factor that best captures their motivation to participate in the field, is revealed by the phrase “progress and poverty.” This is often found in the literature of the period. Two quotations help us understand its meaning. First from the American Henry George, whose wildly popular lecture tours in the early 1880s galvanized British reformers:

Our primary social adjustment is a denial of justice.... It is this that turns the blessings of material progress into a curse. ... It is something grander than Benevolence, something more August than Charity—it is Justice herself that demands of us to right this wrong. Justice that will not be denied; that cannot be put off—Justice that with the scales carries the sword (George 1879, pp. 493–494).

Second, from Arnold Toynbee, who delivered a similar argument at a public lecture shortly before his untimely death in 1883:

We—the middle classes, I mean, not merely the very rich—we have neglected you; instead of justice we have offered you charity; and instead of sympathy, we have offered you hard and unreal advice; but I think we are changing. If you would only believe it and trust us, I think that many of us would spend our lives in your service. You have—I say it clearly and advisedly—you have to forgive us, for we have wronged you; we have sinned against you grievously—not knowingly always, but still we have sinned, and let us confess it; but if you will forgive us or not—we will serve you, we will devote our lives to your service, and we cannot do more (Toynbee 1883, p. 54).

Both statements draw a clear opposition between charity and justice. Both redefine the relationship between rich and poor as one of *responsibility*. Both statements also appeal to would-be members of the COS by emphasizing the shortcomings of charity. For those like the Webbs, Barnetts, Hobson, Morris, and Hyndman, the once settled issue of dealing with the poor through charity became unsettled in the social turmoil of the 1880s. Many believed the shortcomings of the COS and the New Poor Law were to blame for this turmoil. Thus, both George and Toynbee focus their criticism on charity as a now woefully inadequate solution for addressing the socioethical and political problem presented by the poor. By contrast, the elite had new practical responsibilities that, vaguely defined, involved creating “justice.”

Given the integral relationship of charity to Malthus’s transcendent order, such a strict departure required taking a *new* transcendent stance. No longer could the “critical, reflective questioning of the actual” rely on the moral recitation of Malthus’s law of population. Instead, it became increasingly informed

by a different problem of class *guilt*. As Williams (1993, p. 94) argues, “modern morality” often foregrounds the “primacy of guilt, its significance in turning us toward victims.” To feel guilty I must “feel that victims have a claim on me and that their anger and suffering *looks towards* me.” The contradiction evident in “progress and poverty” suggests the formative presence of guilt as part of a new transcendent moral order.

“The actual,” in this case, refers to the material effects of industrial capitalism, or what stands for *progress* in “progress and poverty.” By most available measures improvements in quality of life over the course of Victorian period were real but unequal (see Griffen 2010, chapter 9). At the very least it was clear to late-Victorians that most of the population had cleared the subsistence hurdle. And yet ostentatious spending at the top, even among a declining aristocracy, suggested the uneven benefits of progress (see Tuchman 1994, p. chapter 1; Cannadine 1994, chapter 2). Meanwhile, the collective labor required to enjoy a quality of life above subsistence was fundamentally altered as industrialization continued to substitute “inorganic raw materials and mechanical means of production for organic raw materials and labor force” (Weber 1946, p. 364). Servants were less necessary to accomplish what industrial technology and collective labor had transformed into basic tasks. In practical terms, this meant that social inequality no longer seemed like “a condition of civilization” (Piketty 2014, pp. 415 ff.).

For the middle and upper classes to have “wronged” the poor and working class, the benefits of this industrial “progress” must *seem* undeserved in the same way the “poverty” of it seemed undeserved. Toynbee (1883, pp. 44 ff.) in particular emphasizes how the industrial revolution is enough to make the lasting presence of poverty unjust. The message behind his claim of “sinfulness” is not personal sin but *class* sin. Not only did arbitrary contingencies seem to determine the fates of the poor in these circumstances, they also seemed to determine the fates of elites. Their immunity from the worst effects of industrial capitalism, not to mention their accumulation of wealth and power, did not rest on something that was morally defensible.

Thus, the paradox of this transcendental order, that is, the kind of *impractical* reasoning it presented against the mundane world, involved a sense of responsibility whose causation was negative, for suffering that was *distant* (see Boltanski 1999, pp. 11 ff.). In this sense, the poor had a moral claim on elites despite the fact that most elites did not believe themselves (as individuals) to have specifically or deliberately wronged the poor. However, having (as a class) unjustly benefited from “progress” while the poor suffered “poverty,” the experience of class guilt extended to social inequality. While certainly not a universal phenomenon, the experience was broad enough and appealed to a diverse enough core of the elite (particularly in London) to mark the late-Victorian period by an unusually intense concern for “the social problem”. It is in this context that we can appreciate Beatrice Webb’s claim that a “class-consciousness of sin” (1926, p. 182) triggered the “ferment” of the 1880s and 1890s. “Progress and poverty” gets us somewhere close to the deeply felt ethical problematic that, first “arousing the slumbering consciences” of elites from the nostrums of the COS, provided a constant and compelling source of motivation to participate in the late-Victorian moral field (see Carpenter 1916, p. 115). As Toynbee and George both suggest, in the unique social circumstances that characterized the 1880s and 1890s, *social justice* presented itself unambiguously as a new moral imperative.

## The late-Victorian moral field

Historians often point to the 1880s and 1890s in Britain as distinctive, a kind of departure from both past and future forms of practice, for the attention elites paid, and the extent they seemed willing to go, to achieve social justice. As Yeo argues, the period was marked by a “self-conscious class fusion.” The “late-Victorian revolt of the middle classes [involved] deeply felt moral imperatives and an actual social agency which by its very nature would carry into existence a soon-to-be-realized social order” (1977, pp. 8–9). A “new phrasing of social problems” combined with an “effort to find new paths to their solution” appeared during this time (Lynd 1945, p. 18). The period was uniquely marked by “humanitarianism, public duty and social service” (Bevir 2011, p. 251; see also Himmelfarb 1991, p. 367). In certain cases, this involved holistic lifestyle changes and utopian schemes, giving rise to a counterculture. George Orwell would later satirize late-Victorian “socialism” as a “magnetic field” that pulled in “every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, ‘Nature-cure’ quack, pacifist and feminist in England” (quoted in Gandhi 2007, p. 178).

In one respect my discussion reveals some of the motive force behind this action, and I take Orwell’s metaphor of “magnetic field” seriously. Beatrice Webb also uses the metaphor to describe what happened in the 1880s and 1890s as a “field of controversy.” However, modeling this colloquial “field” as a *field* requires that we capture its “ecological invariants” (Martin 2011, p. 337). As mentioned, three layers of relations were responsible for generating the field: the contest of dominants, reorganization of the political field, and capital composition of the actors. Together, these sets of relations constructed what we can treat as ecological landmarks, positions in the field whose organization facilitated both theory and practice.

Although we cannot directly observe a position, we can recognize its resonant force by what clusters around it. Thus, principles—“duty,” “ability,” “service,” “effort,” and “labor”—and practices are retrievable from specific areas of the field and remain associated together on that basis. Moreover, we can understand more holistically what it means for an actor to “take” a position using Bourdieu’s concept of “formula.” This is a phrase quoted verbatim from an actor situated in the field that allows us a degree of “re-creative understanding” because here we find the “transformed form [of the] properties of the position” they occupy (Bourdieu 1996, p. 79).

Table 1 lists the different features drawn from the discourse of each group. The goal here is not to identify an elaborated belief system. The claim is that the clustering apparent here, the sense that the causes identified for poverty/inequality, the practices that each group favored to correct the “poverty/progress” problem, the status group that supplied a new basis for merit, all intuitively seemed to *go together*, is because of the logic of the field, not the (deductive) logic of ideas. In this sense, actors making claims from a position in the field “rationalized” or theorized its objects as enmeshed in social relations that lent a qualitative appeal irreducible to their explicit content.

The following analysis models the space of the field by concentrating on five reformist or revolutionary groups: the post-1880s COS, the Settlement House Movement, the Fabian Society, the New Liberals, and the Social Democratic Federation/Socialist League. Each of these groups is mentioned in Beatrice Webb’s memory of the “field of controversy.” However, my target here is more indirect: to analyze these groups

**Table 1** Moral beliefs in the late-Victorian moral field, 1880s and 1890s

Group	Cause of Poverty/ Inequality	Formula	Merit Standard	Status group	Practices
COS	Individual character	“character is the condition of conditions”	Duty	Aristocracy	Casework/Social Investigation
Settlement Movement	Individual deprivation	“make the best the most common”	Service	University Liberals	Cultural Activities/ Education
Fabian Society	Rent-seeking	“equality of reward”	Ability	Professionals	Science/Poverty Knowledge/ Policy/Politics
New Liberals	Market Dysfunction	“equality of opportunity”	Effort	Businessmen	Politics/Policy
Revolutionary SDF/SL/Ethical	Capitalism	“change of position”	Labor	Workers	Collective Action/ Prefiguration

individually as part of the more general task to reveal the relational *composition of the field*. In this sense, these actors effectively *used* the logic of the field to craft their own solutions for “progress and poverty.” Not only developing explanations for the paradox of distant suffering, they provided different moral responses in the form of practices that could directly address the problem of class guilt.

### Charity organization society

For the 1880s COS, the solution to “progress and poverty” involved “character” and the claim that because character was equally attainable, the material differences between social classes did not matter. While progress had benefited some, and while others had experienced only poverty, ultimately the problem of inequality concerned a different, non-material problem. Thus, the formula that gives us access to this position: “*character is the condition of conditions*” (Bosanquet 1895, pp., vii–viii).

This was posed against the more material arguments for social reform that involved types of equality more concerned with resource allocation and economic inequality. In opposition to other positions in the field (and to Malthus), Bosanquet claims that: “A moral point of view does not to us mean a point of view which holds a question as solved by apportioning blame to the unfortunate; it does mean a point of view which treats men not as economic abstractions, but as living selves with a history and ideas and a character of their own” (1895, p. 105).

How was character to be achieved? According to the COS, character is attainable in any class situation, and this resolves the problem of class guilt. More specifically, however, the problem of unjust fates presented by “progress and poverty” is resolved here by making character an *achievement* that is socially legitimated. *Duty* serves as the standard of merit in this aspect. Duty is defined here as the “recognition of the obligation of social purpose and [acting] in obedience to it” (Loch 1887, p. 61). Importantly, this meant that performance of a social “duty” was a universal obligation. Rich and poor alike could be judged immoral for neglecting it. Individuals could lose character by not doing what “social purpose” requires

of them: not being thrifty when they should be, leaving a spouse after childbirth, quitting a job for non-essential reasons. The COS focused on the practice of individual casework in order to encourage “duty” in its “[struggle] against inclination” among the poor (Bosanquet 1893, p. 175).

Thus, with class a signal not of material wealth but of character, defined in this case as “individual character ... [in an] ethical context” (Bosanquet 1890, pp. 290, 296), the COS defends a purely individual, subjective explanation for poverty and inequality. Objective factors (like a “forceful” economy) are still not involved. This is not because the late-COS cannot recognize them, but because character is effectively *all* that matters as a form of equality. Contrary to Toynbee and George, elites' responsibility for the poor has not shifted away from charity. It remains the focus, because it does not do anything that will “shake any one's [sic] sense of duty” (Loch 1904a; b, p. 125). Hence the COS reacted against the intrusion of politics into social reform from a position in the field defined, uniquely, by the absence of political capital.

### Settlement movement

The Settlement House movement began in earnest when Samuel Barnett, frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the COS, founded Toynbee Hall in East London during the brutal winter of 1884. Eventually, it would feature an extensive educational agenda, concerts, lectures, art instruction, sports clubs, travel clubs, and a library (Barnett 1909). Toynbee Hall facilitated interaction between the poor and the elite “settlers” who lived there and organized these activities (Urwick 1902, p. 123; Abel 1979).

This might seem like a strange approach to take to the poor, especially given the turmoil of the 1880s in the East End, and a strange solution to “progress and poverty.” The formula for the position helps account for it: “*making the best the most common*” (Barnett 1888b, p. 108). The claim here is that inequality is a matter of quality of life, not material resources. Henrietta Barnett gives expression to this in recounting the following experience:

which of us, having once seen a Whitechapel alley at five o'clock on an August afternoon, and realizing all it means, besides physical discomfort, could go and enjoy our afternoon tea, daintily spread on the shady lawn, and not ask himself difficult questions about his own *responsibility*—while one man has so much and another so little? (1888a, p. 169).

In many respects, this is similar to the COS position on social inequality. But the settlement approach was, in fact, based on a critique of the old COS position on charity. Individuals seeking charity “might require no relief which the COS can give [but] the relief which comes through books and patience-preaching pictures, the relief which follows the introduction to singing class leading the choir, or which comes through the hand-grasp of the wiser friend when the road is unusually drear” (Barnett 1888a, p. 168). In this view, charity should be “organized to remove some of the social conditions which stand as barriers to prevent [people from living] the highest, fullest, richest life” (p. 168). While the proximate causes of poverty remain individual, and essentially rooted in character failures, individual *deprivation* is the primary cause (Barnett 1907, p. 146).

Hence, the settlement movement takes a position against the character-driven individual “erected in honour of thrift” by the COS. “His brains, which might have

shown the world how to save men, have been spent in saving pennies; his life, which might have been happy and full, has been dulled and saddened by taking “thought for tomorrow” (Barnett 1888c, pp. 242–243). Affording the poor “a measure of present comfort and enjoyment” gives them an opportunity to achieve character (Meacham 1987, p. 73). In this sense, the Settlement Movement’s merit standard is identical to the COS. However, this places an extra burden on the achieved merit of the wealthy or non-poor. The settlement movement transformed charity into *service* as both a practice and form of achievable merit available to elites. In this view, service rests in “the equal capacity of all [even the poor] to enjoy the best” (Barnett and Barnett 1888, p. v). Like the COS, the Settlement Movement reacted against the intrusion of politics into social reform by developing an anti-political solution.

### Fabian society

For the Fabians, the argument was very different. The kind of equality they sought from the unequal situation of “progress and poverty” was not individual or character-based. It was very material, indeed the *most* material. The formula here is stated as “*equality of reward* ... which alone satisfies the demands of justice” (Webb 1884–1885, p. 31). On the one hand, the Fabians express an opposition to all forms of achieved status in this claim. On the other hand, this suggests that inequalities and poverty are far from individually produced, but rather almost fully determined by processes outside of individual control. Only by putting people on an equal material basis, something that would not naturally occur (but should), could justice be achieved.

Sidney Webb demonstrates the application of this kind of claim in the following:

If my labor today sells for more than that of the bricklayer, is it due to thee alone, or to the growing pressure of the population in the past, of which thou art the fortunate exceptional outcome? To produce that outcome, hundred less fortunate, have succumbed in the struggle, contributing their mite to the future glory of the world, not by their lives but in their deaths, whereby the way is left clear for the more fit. Nay, perchance the very bricklayer today is the descendant of the man thy ancestor robbed or left to starve, and thy advantages would have been his, but for that selfish stroke. Let us constantly recognize the share in the work of the world done by those who *fail* in life’s battle, both by their efforts and by their very failure (Webb 1884–1885, pp. 30–31; emphasis original).

Here, merit is defined not through character, involving duty or service, but rather as *ability*. Individuals who have ability are justifiably allowed to achieve a higher status. Importantly, however, this also creates a form of equality, by giving merit to the people “who fail in life’s battle.” In this sense, the “special ability or energy which some persons are born [is] due to the influence of the struggle for existence upon their ancestors, and ... produced by Society” (Webb 1882, pp. 25–26). An individual with ability is an “accident of birth.” The “able” person does not therefore merit a destiny that is better than others (Townsend 1911, p. 17).

The Fabians were likely the prototypical example of policy intellectuals during the late-Victorian period. In their use of statistics, they pioneered an initial form of “poverty knowledge” (O’Connor 2002). Their focus on policy positioned them against the



individualized (anti-political) solutions of the COS and Settlement Movement and the revolutionary solutions of the SDF and Socialist League. Their most famous policy recommendation called for a “National Minimum ... below which the individual, whether he likes it or not, cannot, in the interests of the well-being of the whole, ever be allowed to fall” (Webb 1911, p. 8; Webb and Webb 1897, pp. 671–688).

### New liberals

The formula for the New Liberal position, meanwhile, is “an *equality of opportunity* which shall rightly adjust effort to satisfaction” (Hobson 1909a; [1896], p. 216; Hobson 1909b; emphasis mine). There is a lot built into this statement, as it also includes the merit standard for the New Liberal position: “effort.” Class guilt is here resolved by giving everyone the opportunity for achievement. However, achievement is socially legitimated only when it results from effort, which is morally approved of as an individual trait.

Whatever factors might limit the link between effort and achievement, these become the focus of the New Liberal argument about the sources of poverty and inequality. In this sense, it is not a matter of individual character failings or deprivation; but neither is it a matter of differences in an *ascribed* trait—ability or talent—as it was for the Fabians. For Hobson, rather, poverty is structurally caused by a *dysfunctional market* as “a process of economic bargain where the poor are taken at a disadvantage” (Freeden 1976, p. 221). This is same cause that Hobson identifies for poverty (1902a, p. 361), and social inequality (1909, p. 103).

This should not be the case, however. Whatever unequal material differences are present between individuals or classes in society, they are socially legitimate only as “just rewards for ... ‘real’ effort” (Hobson quoted in Emy 1973, pp. 294–295). This is the root of Hobson’s defense of the market, which ideally would express the “moral force of the community” (Hobson 1909a[1896], p. 217) and “[put] the right man or right woman in the right place” (Hobson 1902b, pp. 165–166). As the formula suggests, when effort alone creates inequalities, this produces “satisfaction” with social destiny because it is not inconsistent with equality (Hobson 1909a [1896], p. 216).

Like the Fabians, the New Liberals occupied a position with high political capital. Indeed, the New Liberals themselves originated as a political group, and they (Hobson included) would play an instrumental role in leading the Liberal Party’s takeover of Parliament in the early twentieth century. Their entry into the moral field, and the use to which they put many of the claims they forged there, showed the value of transferring claims and practices from the moral field into the rapidly transforming political field.

### The revolutionary position

The formula of the revolutionary position involves what William Morris referred to, in explicit opposition to the liberals, Fabians and charity and service workers, as “not the improvement of condition but the *change in position*” of marginalized groups in society (Morris 1894, p. 13). A loose amalgam of revolutionary organizations, including the Social Democratic Federation (led by H. M. Hyndman), the Socialist League (led by Morris), and a host of others known collectively as “ethical socialists,” clustered around this formula and its position in the field.

The explanation of poverty and inequality were both structural. Rather than a liberal or positivist understanding of what that meant (as was true of the New Liberals and Fabians, respectively), however, a reading of Marx shaped the revolutionary understanding of the structural causes of poverty and inequality (Willis 1977). Thus, capitalism and “bourgeois oppression” became the focus. The most important point, however, is that regardless of how the structural causes of poverty/inequality were conceptually understood, the problem of class guilt was resolved by giving merit to the “dominated” classes while taking it away from elite classes. Thus, because workers *labor*, labor is a form of merit that takes moral worth from elites and gives it to the poor. As Morris would argue: a “test of success of the society in which we now live is does each due his share of *labor*, does what each have result from that labor, and is the labor of persons not generally wasted?” (1888, pp. 4–5). Edward Carpenter discussed the merit of labor as ensuring “the righteous distribution in society of the fruits of your own and other men’s *labor*, the return to Honesty as the sole possible basis of national life and national safety” (1887, p. 19). Other marginalized social groups were sometimes found in the role, including the “residuum” poor, colonial subjects, homosexuals, and women.

While their arguments were motivated by “progress and poverty,” equality was not the primary concern for those situated in the revolutionary position, at least not for resolving the problem of class guilt. A revolutionary transformation of society that would reverse roles was the preferred solution, though this took shape in different ways. For Hyndman, a radical change did not mean gaining Parliamentary seats or proposing policy. It meant collective action on the model of storming the Bastille: “it is the immediate duty of every Social-Democrat to neglect political action. ... We have much more chance of getting revolutionary change through vehement social agitation” than through Parliamentary elections (*Justice* 1/1/1887). For Morris, the solution lay in prefiguration of the desired changes to society through different ways of living, making socialists in the process: “It is a new Society that we are working to realize, not a cleaning up of our present tyrannical muddle into an improved smoothly-working form of that same ‘order’. ... The work that lies before us at present is to make Socialists, to cover the country with a network of associations composed of men who feel their antagonism to the dominant classes, and have no temptation to waste their time in the thousand follies of party politics” (*Commonweal* July 1885). For ethical socialists, prefiguration meant living differently, not necessarily as socialists, but as individuals freed from the strictures of the normative Victorian lifestyle. Homosexuality, vegetarianism, free love, zoophilia, and spiritualisms of various kinds were all practiced (Yeo 1977; Gandhi 2007, chapter 7). As Carpenter put it, these “individual efforts... [were] envelopes of freedom” that provided the “vital principle [or] seed of social progress.” A prefiguration involved “[taking] your stand and [letting] the world come round to you” (1887, p. 61).

### Formulas for social justice

The purpose of concentrating this analysis on formulas is that they allow some way to “condense a whole [moral] program” into a manageable chunk, offering a “re-creative understanding” of actors based not on empathy but on implicit and explicit positioning (“position-takings”) in a relational context (Bourdieu 1996, p. 79). Much like Gustave Flaubert and his paradoxical modernist literary aesthetic—condensed as “write the

mediocre well”—formulas for social justice are often marked by an effort to “reconcile contraries.” In this case, “character as the condition of conditions,” “ability of all to enjoy the best,” “equality of reward,” “equality of opportunity,” and “change of position” all in some way attempt to reconcile the opposite tendencies expressed by “progress and poverty”. In some way, all of them are pronouncements for *equality*. This is expressed very differently from each position, but equality as a kind of “sacrilege of the mixture” between contraries is similar among them. In the context shaped by Malthus, the New Poor Law, and the pre-1880s COS, it was unthinkable to put elites and the poor on the same moral plane, whether this involved their equal capacity to have character, to enjoy a high quality of life, their equal right to certain material resources, or their equal chance to realize interests and ambitions. The exception of the revolutionary position only proves the rule: it committed the supreme sacrilege by putting the poor and the marginalized *above* elites on the moral scale.

Yet there is something puzzling about the standards of merit present in the field. Character, service, ability, effort, and labor all function as merit standards associated with a position. They are objective criteria of evaluation that define the scope of legitimate inequalities. But where do they come from? They seem to have a clear relational significance in the field, though it is more assumed by these actors than explained. The suggestion here is that character is different from service (to take one example) just as the *aristocracy* are different from *university liberals*. The latter refers to members of the high cultural-capital status group (Benjamin Jowett is a prime example) who took control of Oxford and Cambridge in the 1860s and helped steer the ancient universities away from their religious function and toward the training of elites and testing admission into the elite (Sanderson 1975; Jenks 1977). More than simply an opposition to this group, however, the appeal of “character” as merit expresses the *relational distinction* the aristocracy draws with all other elite status groups (see Collini 1985), just as service does for the university liberals.

In the same manner, effort involves the relational distinction (source of status) of *businessmen*. A clue to the provenance of this argument is found in Alfred Marshall’s (1907) championing of the “chivalrous” qualities of the businessman as an “antidote to social evils.” For him, a “Code of Honour” is immanent to business practice. Success is only achieved through “pains of self-compulsion and self-repression” (Marshall 1907: 25ff).

With ability, *professionals* provide the status group model. Professionals (barristers, doctors, teachers, architects, dentists) became much more visible and powerful in Britain between 1861 and 1901. Instead of constituting a “forgotten middle class,” they were increasingly vital for the management of a complex society (Perkin 1990). Yet professionals themselves embodied a form of merit unfamiliar to a society dominated by aristocrats. Where birth and character marked the latter, expertise and skill marked the former. The Fabians translated this opposition as professionals’ “greater ability” and treated it as an *ascribed* trait that must be socially legitimated. The just society would be a “paradise for the able” (Shaw 1912, pp. 43 ff.) where “a career in which ability tells” would be open to everyone (Webb 1982, p. 322).

Labor, meanwhile, is in many ways the most interesting merit standard because it is *not* universally shared, at least not according to Morris, Hyndman, and Carpenter. However, it is a trait believed to give dominated groups (usually workers) a moral advantage over elite status groups. In this particular sense, labor expresses the relational

distinction of these groups. Like the others, it is a merit standard with a moral meaning because it is essentially a social opposition.

### Relational positioning in the field

It is very difficult to understand why these particular traits became merit standards by relying on rational, discursive, or “logical” logic alone. While they were used as concepts in moral reasoning, they were assumed not explained. Indeed, the kinds of belief systems they did construct seemed built around these merit standards, rather than vice versa.

To understand their use, we must account for a kind of imperative that is neither logical nor discursive. The solution, I claim, is to analyze these concepts as emplaced in a moral field generative of a unique force based on relations. Thus, it is necessary to reconstruct the position or “point of view” of each of these groups as types “ecological invariants” or landmarks with “intersubjective validity” (Martin 2011, p. 272). This maps out the space of possible positions to take in the moral field, but this does not mean to imply that the field was neutral. Rather, it had a distinct “causal texture” of quasi-magnetic pushes and pulls generated by the oppositional relations between these positions, and which guided actors toward one position and away from others. This is partially what Beatrice Webb meant by alluding to each group as part of a “field of controversy” (1926, p. 173). Each position developed in opposition to charity (including the revolutionary position [Carpenter 1887, p. 5]) as that marked the dominant position in the field inherited from the past, courtesy of the series of reactions against the Malthusian basis of the New Poor Law. But the Settlement Movement, Fabians, New Liberals, and those in the revolutionary position situated themselves still further by engaging in mutual critiques.

Thus, the Fabians and New Liberals both accused the Settlement Movement of “fathomless sympathy” and for piously “meddling” in the lives of the poor (Webb 1926, p. 181; Masterman 1901, p. 35). The Settlement Movement argued that Fabian and New Liberal policy have “plenty of sense but no passion,” as even social policy requires that individuals “have some motive” to act in the desired way, which requires “personal contact” (Barnett and Barnett 1909, p. 21). The New Liberals, meanwhile, critiqued the Fabians for sacrificing individual liberty to reach their ends. The Fabians do not allow for a “democratic emergence of wants,” but put instead the “dearest interests of men at the mercy of the inspector and the expert” (Hobhouse 1911, p. 143). The Fabians, on the other hand, accused the New Liberals of naïve understanding of the causes of poverty and inequality by implying that markets could be made the source of merit and justice. Indeed, the policy of a National Minimum is intended to act as a “primitive bulwark” against markets (Webb and Webb 1897, pp. 696–697). Against the New Liberal proposal to “distribute income in rewards to exertion” the Fabians argued that “effort” is imprecise. On the Fabian model, a level of income should be guaranteed as part of a “national minimum.” From the revolutionary standpoint, meanwhile, all of these efforts are evidence of complacency and hypocrisy. They only act to make “a system tolerable which is designed for the benefit of the privileged classes” (Morris 1894, p. 13; Carpenter 1887, pp. 8–10).

This sketches only the broadest contours of the debates that took place in the field, but this is important, because it gives us the best chance to understand the relative perception of each position and what it signified in situ, within its own relational context. The main

claim is that while we can understand each of the different features of each position independently, they only make sense *together* as expressions of the same position, relationally defined. Each position is formed through several layers of relational distinction, meaning that the different features associated with each position are “social objects” or “bundles of relations” whose qualitative properties make them appear to actors as good/bad, worthy/corrupt, or, particularly in this case, imperative/misguided (Martin 2011, p. 227).

To give just three examples: the significance of effort over ability, for example, speaks to the social opposition between professionals and business, between high political versus high cultural capital, between the favoring of policy versus the tasks of science. Meanwhile, to favor service over ability means to favor university elites over professionals, high cultural capital over high economic capital, the practice of service over the practice of science, and voluntarism over policy. To take the revolutionary position means to champion socially marginal groups over all elite status groups, to reject voluntarism and policy in favor of transformative action, to have a common opposition to all forms of elite capital. The merit of labor, as a dominated trait that is moral because it is dominated, is intertwined with all of this.

In each of these examples, moral beliefs (“achieved status *must be* a matter of effort”; “elites *should* provide service to the poor”; “merit *requires* labor”) are not treated as expressing standalone principles. Presumably, this is not how they appeared to reformers in the field, based on the implicit way in which they used them. The beliefs are treated, rather, as imperatives located in the predicate of each of these statements (“effort,” “service,” “labor”). The same could be said of “*character* is the condition of condition,” “make the *best* the most *common*,” “equality of *opportunity*,” “equality of *reward*,” and “not improvement but *change of position*.” Each of the statements expresses an imperative, particularly the italicized terms, which in this sense count as solutions to the ethical problematic of “progress and poverty.” However, we can understand very little about this by studying the terms themselves as stand-alone principles or concepts. For one thing, they were all present long before the field was around, but did not have the same specific significance. The claim, instead, is that their imperative was *acquired* (i.e., generated) by the quality of the *space* in which the terms were suspended at this time: in sets of social relations. This type of reasoning applies what Cassirer calls a “relation-concept” as opposed to a “thing-concept” to understand how these imperatives come into being (see Emirbayer 1997, p. 287). The goal is to capture their constitutive relations.

Doubtless there is a kind of “logical logic” involved here, drawing from differences between philosophical, scientific, ethical, and economic theories, not to mention the influence of classical liberalism, marginalist economics, Malthus, Arnold, Darwin, and Marx (to name just a few) more specifically. More importantly, however, and the principal reason why field theory is necessary in this case, is that deducing the meaning of these principles by placing them inside these systems of thought cannot capture what would otherwise drive us to utter frustration trying to explain: actors' endorsements of what were vital to their social justice beliefs, but on the surface very simple, even forgettable—merit standards and formulas.

These are most likely to appeal to contemporary eyes, but looks are deceiving. On no occasion did I find evidence that these actors used a chain of reasoning to derive these principles; neither did they appear to emerge from discursive deliberation. It is more accurate to say that they functioned as a priori-like categories that structured moral reasoning and moral deliberation processes, seeming logical without being explicitly logical and valid without being deliberative, while remaining historical through and through.

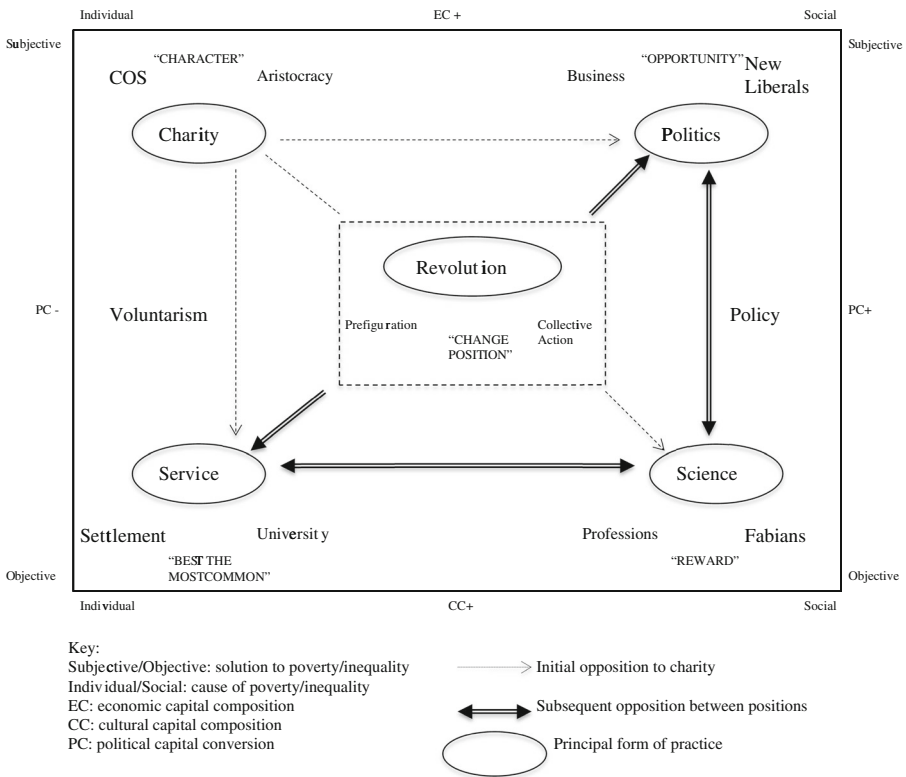
I claim that rather than concepts with explicit meanings, then, these terms and phrases best qualify as *abstractions*, that is, ideational or discursive entities whose meaningful use lacks an explicit justification. The puzzle is to understand how they were meaningful without being primarily discursively or rationally meaningful. This is where the analogy with concrete objects comes into play. To understand why these concepts, terms, and phrases were meaningful, indeed, why they expressed an *imperative* while absent a discursive or rational meaning, it is necessary to recover their qualitative properties as *concrete* objects.<sup>11</sup>

This is what a field analysis attempts to do in making their concreteness accessible to us as part of the concreteness of social relations. The presumption is that an actor entering the field would be drawn toward or pushed away from these principles because of their status as an object with qualities. This is not random or arbitrary; there is a logic at work here. Yet it remains independent of whatever logical differences we can derive by treating these principles as elements of highly codified belief systems. In this case, those qualities are the combined expression of the relational distinctions that constitute each position in the field. Their association with status group relations, class relations, and forms of political action gave these principles the concrete, perceivable qualities (“phenomenological properties”) that made them either appealing or unappealing to actors as forms of moral imperative.

## Mapping the field

Figure 1 provides an analytic construct of the space of the field that tries to capture the totality of these relations. The positions are relational locations in the field. Each position corresponds to a different “capital composition” among actors: economic, cultural, and political capital. This is detailed on the perimeter. The point here is not to essentialize the positions, but to depict elite-held capital as a relational component structuring the field. The opposition between actors with mostly cultural capital and actors with mostly economic is one polar arrangement, while the opposition between actors with political capital and those without political capital is another. The revolutionary position sits in the middle because of the mutual opposition between its type of political capital (transformative) and both voluntarism and policy. Around the perimeter

<sup>11</sup> The distinction between the abstract and concrete has deep roots in Marxian thought, extending to the conception of “things as relations,” or the claim that what a thing (commodity) *is* is not simply conditioned by its relation to other things, but is constituted by those relations, having no “substance” outside of them (see Ollman 1973, pp. 26–27; Marx 1973, pp. 100 ff.). In this instance, concrete social relations are the “internal relations” of abstract principles. The best critical discussion of the concrete and its relationship to universals is found in Marcuse (1964, pp. 213–214).



**Fig. 1** The late-Victorian moral field, 1880s and 1890s

of the map are general traits of the social theory generated from each each position. Subjective/objective applies to the solution to “progress and poverty,” while individual/social applies to the cause of poverty/inequality.

On these dimensions, the following summaries apply:

(1) The COS

Beliefs: *subjective-individual*, with the causes of poverty and inequality being both defined from the perspective of the individual, as wholly within the power of the individual to create and change despite material differences and “objective” factors and, therefore, not requiring significant social changes to address “progress and poverty.”

Position: high economic capital/low political capital.

(2) Settlement Movement

Beliefs: *objective-individual*, with the causes of poverty and inequality being a partial function of an objective (or non-individual) kind of deprivation that does require a kind of social change to resolve “progress and poverty.”

Position: high cultural capital/low political capital

## (3) Fabians

Beliefs: *objective-social*, with the causes of poverty and inequality being entirely non-individual (including even apparently individual traits like ability) and the solution to “progress and poverty” a matter of altering the objective mechanisms that cause unjust individual differences.

Position: high cultural capital/high political capital

## (4) New Liberals

Beliefs: *subjective-social*, with the causes of poverty and inequality being structural, as rooted in dysfunctional markets, but the solution resting ultimately with the individual, given changes to markets that enhance opportunity.

Position: high economic capital/high political capital

## (5) Revolutionary Position

Beliefs: *relational-radical*, with the causes of poverty and inequality a matter of the relations between rich and poor, while the solution requires not an adjustment between individuals and structures (or subjective/objective relationships), but rather a radical transformation of social relationships that brings merit to marginalized social groups.

Position: social/political/cultural marginality.

Each trait is made dimensional in order to capture an overall form. This involves setting these discursive meanings in relation to each other and placing this alongside further relations between relations in the field (elite status groups, politics, embodied capital). It could be that these sets of relations are accidental, that an important set is missing, or that a set is included here that should not be. This would diminish the empirical substance of these claims but would not, however, diminish the “intuitive accessibility” generated by the formal representation itself.

As Cassirer argues, all field theories (in sociology, physics, psychology) seek to “restore *intuition* to its full scope and independence” (see Martin 2011, p. 275). A formal examination of the field (like this one) tries to give “full scope” to intuition by grasping these principles and practices as objects in a relational space. In this sense, merit standards and formulas, practices and theories of poverty and inequality become actors' creative responses to the relations in which they find themselves. They are abstractions from the “bundle of relations” that situate actors in a position in a field.

Untying that bundle is the task of field theory, but the intention here is neither to demonstrate how social relations cause cultural meanings nor to make the latter reducible to the former.<sup>12</sup> Rather, by capturing the concrete qualities of something abstract, by taking a phenomenological instead of rational or discursive approach to moral universalism, the goal of this analysis is less to understand what a specific principle means than what it *feels like*, or at least *felt* like for those situated within this relational context (see Merleau-Ponty

<sup>12</sup> The relation between abstractions and what is concrete (social relations) is not reductive but dialectical. As Marx argues: “relations can be established as existing only by being *thought*, as distinct from the subjects which are in these relations with each other” (1973, p. 143; emphasis original).



2000[1962], pp. 66–67). The intention, then, is not to contradict actors by making third-person claims about their moral beliefs. It is to retrieve the conditions that they inhabit in order to understand the factors immediately present to them that generate their experience.

## Conclusion

This article has treated moral universalism as a distinctively historical and social phenomenon that is rooted in experience. To restate the main claims: moral universalism appeared in the 1880s and 1890s in Britain from a convergence among social conditions of inequality, multiple sets of social relations involving conflict, and a transcendent stance that created collective guilt. The changing role of the state, a power vacuum among the elite, the appearance of rival elite status groups, and the “progress and poverty” of industrial capitalism all played a role in expanding the moral purview from poverty, where it had been since Malthus, toward social inequality. A cohort of actors during this time critically questioned the presence of “progress and poverty” and the failures of charity to manage the relationship between rich and poor. The intersection of sets of conflictive relations from the political field, elite status groups and types of embodied capital provided the relational context (“the field”) inside of which moral principles acquired universalizability in the form of imperatives for social justice.

A critical limitation of this analysis is that it remains case-specific. Similar concerns and debates about “the social problem” of poverty and social inequality appeared elsewhere at this time (see Schwartz 1997). Did similar conditions apply in these other cases? A comparative study would help to answer this, in particular by determining whether it was sufficient for an inherited moralized orientation to the poor combined with the material effects of industrial capitalism and an interventionist state to generate moral universalism and, if so, whether this also meant the formation of equality criteria applying to distributive issues of social justice. An important area of inquiry would be whether (and how) elite class conflict shaped the formation of those principles in a field, and whether social reformers themselves were similarly motivated by a transcendent moral stance based on distant suffering and collective guilt.

Altogether, this describes the social conditions of possibility for moral universalism. Yet the task here has been to account for moral universalism as an *experience*. It is useful, then, to recount briefly what happened in the years following the 1880s and 1890s. After the Liberal Party definitively won the contest with the Conservatives (eventually would lose to Labor) during the general election of 1906, they introduced a series of welfare reforms, among them old age pensions, education, health insurance, and an income tax. The Liberals did not just draw from one position in the field to develop these proposals, but integrated separate parts of many of them. Moreover, several reformers involved in drafting and implementing the reforms (Hobson, the Barnettts, and the Webbs all did so in some capacity) participated in the moral field, though not all from one position.<sup>13</sup> This was the foundation for a “modernist welfare state,” and yet it coincided with the disappearance of the “humanitarianism” so

<sup>13</sup> This includes William Beveridge who joined the Settlement Movement in 1903 and was later a prominent member of the Fabian Society. As a civil servant, he would draft the document (*Social Insurance and Allied Services*) that served as the blueprint for the welfare state in Britain following World War II.

characteristic of the late-Victorian period (Bevir 2011, p. 21). While the principles forged in the 1880s and 1890s remained, something was absent that suggests a diminished moral *imperative* among elites during the subsequent period (Harris 1992, p. 126). The implication, then, is that the principal effects of the field were *temporary*.

I have argued here that a field appeared during the late-Victorian period because of the intersection of multiple sets of social relations. Thus, the absence of these relations should lead to a decline of the field. Two pieces of evidence suggest that it did: first, the declining significance of elite class conflict as the aristocracy accepted a lesser role in British society, culminating with a major reform of the House of Lords in 1909 (Cannadine 1999, p. 25). Second, with welfare policy defining the practices that applied to poverty and inequality, the opportunity structure of the 1880s and 1890s closed, effectively ending major conflicts over the definition of political action with respect to poverty and inequality (Hall 1984; Hanagan 1996). In both instances, a set of relations disappeared. Consequently, the field itself was diminished.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, however, the presence of the field remains, if only in the terms, phrases and practices it left behind for defining the meaning of social justice and acting to achieve it (see McCall 2013; Hadley 1997; Himmelfarb 1991). What implications can we draw from this analysis for contemporary debates on moral universalism? I want to mention three. First, it may lead us to dismiss moral universalism, having identified it as historical and social. Second, we may acknowledge that moral universalism is, in fact, a *transcendent* phenomenon whose presence rests largely on the efforts of intellectuals, or those situated in social fields that afford a privileged removal from practical orders, allowing for the cultivation and exercise of transcendence as a disposition (see Bourdieu 1996, p. 344). Finally, we may agree with the second point, but ask what limits this imposes on universalism.

The first structures most contemporary debates over universalism, where the question is whether moral principles are capable of being universalizable while remaining inclusive of difference and independent of power (Young 1990). Most theorists in this camp recognize the social limits on universal validity, pointing to gender, race, class, imperialism and the role that universalism plays in maintaining forms of domination and exclusion (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mehta 1990). My analysis suggests a limitation to that critique: the effects of social relations on universalism operate as conditions for experience and less as identities or interests that make universalism impossible, undesirable or immoral. In Bourdieu's terms (1990, p. 386) "lived experience" is capable of universalism even if principles that are immune from the "particular circumstances of social life" are not (see Young 1990, p. 4; Mills 2005, p. 178).

In one sense, the second point corrects shortcomings in the first by recognizing that the experience of universalism is possible among those in the privileged conditions of intellectual fields. This is consistent with the critical insight of Kant's (1990) universal history: the philosopher does not discover the universal in history but identifies "universalizable" things that stand out against its multitudinous backdrop. This implies that universals are the philosopher's possession; they would not exist if philosophers were not around to "produce and reproduce" them. Bourdieu (2000, p. 126; 1996, p.

<sup>14</sup> Further evidence may be found by comparing the moral perspective of the Bloomsbury Group, Virginia Woolf to be specific, and how significantly this differed from the moral field, particularly her slightly older friend Beatrice Webb (Holroyd 1985).

344) supports this perspective, arguing that a defense of universalism is necessarily a defense of intellectual fields. Thus, he agrees with Habermas (1998) that “justification and critique” give moral principles a claim on universalizability as a kind of *cognitive* content. This permits a critical perspective; however, the required dispositions are socially conditioned and depend ultimately on the genesis and structure of a field. They are not universally shared, in this sense, and any broader presence they have is due to the extension of an intellectual field (into education or politics, say).

Perhaps, then, the narrative of total emancipation promised by universalism was doomed from the start.<sup>15</sup> Not because universalism is inherently impossible or undesirable, however, but because such a perspective, given these social conditions, may never be easily *universalized*. For Bourdieu, this did not mean that universalism should be dismissed out of hand. A critical approach to universalism, anchored in the sociology of morality, can help actors discover internally imposed limits in how they articulate the “ought-to-be,” just as practice theory helps them discover the limits of their practices (see Bourdieu 1990, pp. 69 ff.). While reflexive sociology may come across as counterproductive navel-gazing, this is only because its role as a critical theory is overlooked. Alongside every other branch of critical theory, the task of reflexive sociology is to reveal limits (“necessities”) in order, ultimately, to enhance freedom (see Bourdieu 1992, p. 125; Horkheimer 1972, pp. 230 ff.).<sup>16</sup>

This article reveals one important limit in this sense: moral abstractions that seem impervious to deliberation because they are neither cognitive nor discursive. Abstractions are defined as “bundles of relations” that generate the experience of universalism as a sense of imperative. Whatever rational or discursive meaning may be attached to them, they synthesize experiential contents into transcendent ideas. As remote symbols, in this sense, they often motivate efforts to eliminate injustice. In the same manner, however, the obviousness with which we use them suggests that instead of “thinking with them,” we are vulnerable to “*being thought* by them” (Wacquant 2004, p. 101). The passive voice is important here, as it reveals a limit placed on moral belief-formation that persists despite discursive deliberation, not to mention a limit on furthering social transformations consistent with our moral intuitions concerning social justice and human flourishing. The most effective way to reveal and remove that limitation, I claim, is through a reflexive analysis of the social conditions that generate and structure our experience of universalism, like the kind demonstrated here. This means that reason (*aufklärung*) can be generated by reflexive sociology as an empirical (and often historical) form of critique, even if reason is not reducible to it, finding full expression instead in the engagements that define a civil society.

**Acknowledgments** Lyn Spillman, Omar Lizardo, and Erin Anders provided invaluable feedback at different stages of this research. A version of this article was presented to the Culture Workshop at the Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame. I thank Terry McDonnell, Erin McDonnell, Melissa Pirkey, and the other participants for their comments and criticisms. Finally, I thank the *Theory and Society* Editors and reviewers for their criticisms, suggestions and patience.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of these emancipatory tendencies, see Yack (1986).

<sup>16</sup> The influence of Bachelard’s philosophy of science cannot be overlooked here either, particularly his claim that scientists generate knowledge only when they “rupture” with scientific categories and then “recast” them (1984: 13).

## References

- Abel, E. (1979). Toynbee hall, 1884–1914. *Social Service Review*, 53, 606–632.
- Abend, G. (2008). Two main problems in the sociology of morality. *Theory and Society*, 37, 87–125.
- Abend, G. (2014). *The Moral Background: An Inquiry into the History of Business Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Alexander, J. (1995). “The Reality of Reduction: The Failed Synthesis of Pierre Bourdieu.” Pp. 128–218 in *Fin de Siecle Social Theory*. London: Verso.
- Alexander, J. (2006). *The civil sphere*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Appleby, J. (1978). *Economic thought and ideology in seventeenth century England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Arrighi, G. (1994). *The long twentieth century*. London: Verso.
- Bachelard, G. (1984). *The new scientific spirit*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Barnett, H. (1888a). “What has the COS to do with social reform?”. In *Practicable Socialism* (pp. 157–173). London: Longmans and Green.
- Barnett, H. (1909). The Beginning of Toynbee Hall. In *Towards Social Reform*. (pp. 239–254). London: T. Fisher Unwin.
- Barnett, S. (1888b). Settlements of University Men in the Great Towns. In *Practicable Socialism* (pp. 96–107). London: Longmans and Green.
- Barnett, S. (1888c). “Practicable Socialism.”. In *Practicable Socialism* (pp. 235–259). London: Longmans and Green.
- Barnett, H. (1919). *Canon Barnett: His Life, Work and Friends, Volume I*. London: John Murray.
- Barnett, S., & Barnett, H. (1888). *Introduction*. Longmans and Green: Pp. v-xii in *Practicable Socialism*. London.
- Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. (1985). *Habits of the heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bendix, R. (1958). *Work and Authority in Industry*. New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Bevir, M. (2011). *The making of British socialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blau, P., & Duncan, O. (1967). *The American occupational structure*. Chicago: The Free Press.
- Boltanski, L. (1999). *Distant suffering*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bosanquet, B. (1890). *The philosophical theory of the state*. London: MacMillan.
- Bosanquet, B. (1895). *Aspects of the social problem*. London: Unwin.
- Bosanquet, H. (1893). “The Meaning and Methods of True Charity.” Pp. 262–280 in *The Standard of Life and Other Reprinted Essays*. London: Macmillan.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Sociology in question*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *The state nobility*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian meditations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Boyer, G. (2004). The evolution of unemployment relief in Great Britain. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 34, 393–433.
- Cain, P. (2002). *Hobson and Imperialism: Radicalism, New Liberalism and Finance, 1887–1938*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cannadine, D. (1994). *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Cannadine, D. (1999). *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*. New York: Vintage.
- Carpenter, E. (1887). *England's Ideal and Other Papers on Social Subjects*. London: Swan Sonnenschein.
- Carpenter, E. (1916). *My Days and Dreams, Being Autobiographical Notes*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Chamberlain, J. (1886[1971]). “The Chamberlain Circular.” Pp. 258–260 in *The English Poor Law, 1780–1930*. Edited by M. Rose. New York: Barnes & Noble.
- Collini, S. (1985). The idea of character in Victorian political thought. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 35, 29–50.
- Collini, S. (1991). *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Eisenstadt, S. (1982). The axial age: the emergence of transcendental visions and the rise of clerics. *European Journal of Sociology*, 23, 294–314.

- Emirbayer, M. (1997). Manifesto for a relational sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103, 281–317.
- Emy, H. (1973). *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics: 1892–1914*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fraser, N. & Gordon, L. (1994). A genealogy of dependency: tracing a keyword of the U.S. welfare state. *Signs*, 19, 309–336.
- Freedren, M. (1976). *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gandhi, L. (2007). *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siecle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- George, H. (1879). *Progress and poverty*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Ginn, G. (2006). Answering the ‘bitter cry’: urban description and social reform in the late-Victorian East End. *The London Journal*, 31, 179–200.
- Goldberg, C. (2013). Struggle and solidarity: civic republican elements in Pierre Bourdieu’s political sociology. *Theory and Society*, 42, 369–394.
- Gorski, P. (2013). “Bourdieuian Theory and Historical Analysis: Maps, Mechanisms and Methods.” Pp. 327–367 In: Philip Gorski(ed) Bourdieu and Historical Analysis. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Goschen, G. (1971[1869]). “The Goschen Minute.” Pp. 225–228 In: Michael Rose(ed) The English Poor Law. London: Barnes and Noble.
- Gowan, P. (1987). The origins of the administrative elite. *New Left Review*, 162, 35–67.
- Griffen, E. (2010). *A short history of the British industrial revolution*. London: Palgrave.
- Habermas, J. (1971). *Knowledge and human interests*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1998). *Inclusion of the other*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Hadley, E. (1997). The past is a foreign country: the Neo-conservative romance with Victorian liberalism. *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 10, 7–38.
- Hall, S. (1984). “The Rise of the Representative/Interventionist State, 1880s–1920s.” Pp. 17–45 in *State and Society in Contemporary Britain*. Edited by Stuart Hall. New York: Bantam.
- Hanagan, M. (1996). Citizenship, claims-making and the right to work: Britain, 1884–1911. *Theory and Society*, 26, 449–474.
- Harris, J. (1992). Political thought and the welfare state, 1870–1940: the intellectual framework for British social policy. *Past and Present*, 135, 116–141.
- Hawksey, T. (1869). “The Charities of London and Some Errors of their Administration: with Suggestions for an Improved System of Private and Official Charitable Relief.” (University College London Special Collections Library).
- Henderson, W. (1969). *The Lancashire Cotton Famine, 1861–1865*. New York: August M. Kelley.
- Hicks, G. (1875). “A Contribution towards the History of the Origins of the Charity Organisation Society, with Suggestions on the Reports, Balance Sheet, and Audit Reports.” (University College London Special Collections Library).
- Hill, O. (1877). *Our common land*. London: MacMillan.
- Himmelfarb, G. (1991). *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*. New York: Knopf.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1982). Rival interpretations of market society: civilizing, destructive or feeble? *Journal of Economic Literature*, 20, 1463–1484.
- Hitlin, S., & Vaisey, S. (2013). The new sociology of morality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 39, 51–68.
- Hobhouse, L. T. (1911). *Liberalism*. London: Macmillan.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1968). *Industry and empire*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- Hobson, J. (1902b). *The social problem*. London: Macmillan.
- Hobson, J. (1909a[1896]). “The Social Philosophy of Charity Organisation.” Pp. 192–218 in *The Crisis of Liberalism*. London: King and Son.
- Hobson, J. (1909b). “Equality of Opportunity.” Pp. 96–114 in *The Crisis of Liberalism*. London: King and Son.
- Holroyd, M. (1985). Mrs Webb and Mrs Woolf. *London Review of Books*, 7, 17–19.
- Horkheimer, M. (1972). “Traditional and Critical Theory.” Pp. 188–244 in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. New York: Continuum.
- Hurren, E. (2007). *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870–1900*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hyndman, H. (1887). “Another View.” *Justice* 1/1/1887.
- Jenks, C. (1977). T.H. Green, the oxford philosophy of duty and the English middle-class. *British Journal of Sociology*, 28, 134–156.
- Kant, I. (1784[1990]). “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose.” Pp. 41–54 In: Hans Reiss(ed) Kant: Political Writings. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Katznelson, I. (1996). "Knowledge about What? Policy Intellectuals and the New Liberalism." Pp. 17–48 In: Dietrich Rueschmeyer and Theda Skocpol(eds) *States, Social Knowledge and the Origins of Modern Social Policies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Keller, L. (2010). *Triumph of Order: Democracy and Public Space in New York and London*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy*. London: Verso.
- Lamont, M. (1992). *Money, Morals and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Loch, C. (1887). "Main Line of Thought in Sociology." c 1887. Family Welfare Association papers, box c, folder D9, folios 1–76 (London Metropolitan Archives).
- Loch, C. (1904a). "If Citizens Be Friends." c 1904. Family Welfare Association papers, box c, folder H6, folios 18–40. (London Metropolitan Archives).
- Loch, C. (1904b). *The economic and social study of London*. Tooke Professorship of Economic Science and Statistics: Inaugural Address.
- Losurdo, D. (2011). *Liberalism: A Counter-History*. London: Verso.
- Low, S. (1862). *The Charities of London in 1861*. London: Sampson Low, Son & Co.
- Lynd, H. (1945). *England in the eighteen-eighties*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- MacKay, T. (1899). *A History of the English Poor Law, Volume III*. London: P.S. King.
- Mackinnon, M. (1987). English poor law policy and the crusade against outrelief. *Journal of Economic History*, 47, 603–625.
- Malthus, T. (1798–1830[1992]). *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. All Editions. Donald Winch.(ed) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mannheim, K. (1936). *Ideology and utopia*. New York: Harvest Books.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional man*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Marshall, A. (1907). The social possibilities of economic chivalry. *The Economic Journal*, 17, 7–29.
- Martin, J. (2011). *The explanation of social action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, K. (1973). *Grundrisse*. London: Penguin.
- Masterman, C. (1901). *The Heart of the Empire*. London: Fisher Unwin.
- McCall, L. (2013). *The undeserving rich*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Meacham, S. (1987). *Toynbee hall and social reform*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Mehta, U. (1990). "Liberal strategies of exclusion." *Politics & Society*, 18, 427–454.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2000[1962]). *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Mills, C. (2005). 'Ideal theory' as ideology. *Hypatia*, 20, 165–184.
- Moore, B. (1968). *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Morris, W. (1894). *How I became a socialist*. London: Socialist League Office.
- Mowat, C. S. (1961). *The charity organisation society*. London: Longmans.
- O'Connor, A. (2002). *Poverty Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ollman, B. (1973). *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Owen, D. (1964). *English Philanthropy, 1660–1960*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. Chicago: The Free Press.
- Perkin, H. (1990). *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*. London: Routledge.
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Polanyi, K. (1944). *The great transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Rose, M. (1966). The allowance system under the new poor law. *The Economic History Review*, 19, 607–620.
- Rubinstein, W. (1983). The end of 'old corruption' in Britain, 1780–1860. *Past & Present*, 101, 55–86.
- Ryan, P. (1985). "Politics and relief: East London unions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." In M. Rose (Ed), *The Poor and the City: The English Poor Law in its Urban Context* (pp. 133–72). Leicester: University of Leicester Press.
- Sanderson, M. (1975). *The Universities in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Routledge.
- Saul, S. B. (1969). *The Myth of the Great Depression, 1873–1896*. London: Routledge.
- Sayer, A. (2005). *The moral significance of class*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Schwartz, H. (1997). "On the Origin of the Phrase 'Social Problems.'" *Social Problems* 44: 276–296.
- Scott, J. (1976). *The moral economy of the peasant*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Shapely, P. (2001). Urban charity, class relations, and social cohesion: charitable responses to the cotton famine. *Urban History*, 28, 46–64.
- Shaw, G. (1912). *Socialism and Superior Brains: A Reply to Mr Mallock*. New York: Oliver Press.
- Silber, I. (2011). Deciphering transcendence and the open code of modernity: S. N. Eisenstadt's comparative hermeneutics of civilization. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 11, 269–280.

- Smith, C. (2010). *What is a Person?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Snell, K. (1985). *Annals of the Laboring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Somers, M., & Block, F. (2014). *The power of market fundamentalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Spillman, L. (1995). Culture, social structure and discursive fields. *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, 15, 129–154.
- Stedman Jones, G. (1971). *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Stedman Jones, G. (2004). *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stone, L., & Stone, J. (1995). *An Open Elite? England, 1540–1880*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tavory, I. (2011). The question of moral action: a formalist position. *Sociological Theory*, 29, 272–293.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, E. P. (1993). *Customs in Common*. Chicago: The New Press.
- Townsend, M. (1911). The case against the charity organisation society. In *Fabian Tract 158*. London: Fabian Society.
- Toynbee, A. (1883). “Progress and Poverty: A Criticism of Mr Henry George.” In *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England* (pp. 45–76). London: P.S. King.
- Tsuzuki, C. (1961). *H.M. Hyndman and British socialism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tuchman, B. (1994). *The proud tower*. New York: Ballantine.
- Tucker, A. (1963). Army and society in England, 1870–1900: a reassessment of the Cardwell Reforms. *Journal of British Studies* 2, 110–141.
- Turner, B. (1993). Talcott parsons, universalism, and the educational revolution: democracy versus professionalism. *British Journal of Sociology*, 44, 1–24.
- Urwick, E. (1902). The settlement ideal. *Charity Organisation Review* 11, 119–127.
- Wacquant, L. (2004). Critical thought as solvent of doxa. *Constellations*, 11, 97–101.
- Walkowitz, J. (1992). *City of dreadful delight*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Watts, J. (1866). *The facts of the cotton famine*. London: Simpkin, Marshall and Company.
- Webb, B. (1926). *My apprenticeship*. London: Longmans.
- Webb, B. (1982). In Norman, & J. MacKenzie (Eds.), *The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Volume 1: 1873–1892*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Webb, B., & Webb, S. (1929). *English Poor Law History, Part II: The Last Hundred Years*. London: PS King & Sons.
- Webb, S. (1882). “Hereditas as a Factor in Psychology and Ethics: Lecture” c. 1882. Passfield Papers, box 6, folder 5, folios 25–26 (London School of Economics and Political Science).
- Webb, S. (1884–1885). “The Way Out” c. 1884 or 1885. Passfield Papers, box 6, folder 19, folios 1–56 (London School of Economics and Political Science).
- Webb, S. (1911). The necessary basis of society. In *Fabian Tracts 159*. London: Fabian Society.
- Webb, S., & Webb, B. (1897). *The prevention of destitution*. London: Heineman.
- Weber, M. (1967). *Ancient Judaism*. Chicago: The Free Press.
- Weber, Max. (1946). From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology. Edited by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, B. (1993). *Shame and necessity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, R. (1973). *The country and the city*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Willis, K. (1977). The introduction and critical reception of Marxist thought in Britain. *Historical Journal*, 20, 417–459.
- Wood, E. (2002). The question of market dependence. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 2, 50–87.
- Yack, B. (1986). *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Yeo, S. (1977). A new life: the religion of socialism in Britain, 1883–1896. *History Workshop Journal*, 4, 5–56.
- Young, G. M. (1936). *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

**Michael Strand** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Brandeis University. His recently published work includes articles on belief in action (*Sociological Theory*, 2015) and causality in sociology (*Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 2015). He is currently working on a book manuscript based on the research in this article.