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Prologue: Victorian Social Science in a Twentieth-Century World


5. Katz makes this comment in In the Shadow of the Poorhouse, 364n38. He directs the reader to two analyses of Murray's statistics, both of them quite effective in demonstrating why Murray's figures do not prove what he says they do. Another good source on the subject is Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged, 16–18. Murray’s claim that there are no errors to fix is made in his introduction to the anniversary edition of Losing Ground, xx.


Chapter 1 Introduction to Victorian Poverty Studies

1. Throughout the nineteenth century Scotland had its own system of poor relief, separately administered by local authorities, which is outside the scope of this study.


3. For the full extent of this literature, see the bibliography at the end of this volume.


6. Ibid., 311. That this conclusion might be in direct conflict with their earlier assertion that allowances were generally inadequate they do not appear to have considered. “The Speenhamland counties” were the counties, mostly rural, in which child allowance in supplement of wages was granted by the local overseers under the Old Poor Law. The allowance was also granted on a per capita basis for the maintenance of illegitimate children. For more on how the system operated, see J.D. Marshall, The Old Poor Law, 1795–1834 or Ursula Henriques, “Bastardy and the New Poor Law.” Details of publication are contained in this book’s bibliography.
Chapter 2  Two Royal Commissions

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12. Ibid., 239.
15. Ibid., 19.
16. Ibid., 329.
23. Ironically, a tactical decision to alter the details of Settlement rather than take the controversial step of abolishing it meant that this impairment to labor mobility remained. In the long run, industrialization proceeded anyway.
28. Ibid., 420.
29. Ibid., 321.
33. Ibid., 183–4.
34. Ibid., 189.
36. Ibid., 192.
37. Ibid., 191.
39. Ibid., 25, 132.
41. Ibid., 63–5.
43. E. Moberly Bell, *Octavia Hill, a Biography* (London: Constable and Co., 1942), 113, 205. The National Trust is the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty.
Chapter 3  Protestant Paradigms in Victorian Poverty Studies


7. The one Catholic member of the Edwardian Royal Commission, Irish Bishop Denis Kelly, was as we have seen neither active nor influential in its proceedings.


20. Parsons, “From Dissenters to Free Churchmen,” 73.


25. *Ibid*.


30. Nassau William Senior, *A Letter to Lord Howick on a Legal Provision for the Irish Poor; Commutation of Tithes, and a Provision for the Irish Roman*
Catholic Clergy, 3rd edition with a Preface, containing Suggestions as to the Measures to be adopted in the Present Emergency (London: John Murray, 1832), 57.


33. Checkland and Checkland, The Poor Law Report of 1834, 173. No claims about the gossip and drinking habits of people who are not paupers were offered or requested.

34. Ibid., 170.

35. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Local Government, Vol. 8, 84.


37. Ibid., 251.

38. Jeremy Bentham, Essays on the subject of the Poor Laws CLIII(a) Folder 1, Bentham Archives, University College, London; 2.

39. Ibid.


41. Ibid., 113.

42. Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 3d ser., Vol. 22 (1834), col. 877.

43. Ibid., cols. 877–8.


45. Ibid., 4.


50. James, Population Malthus, 100.

51. Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty, 156.


58. Bunyan, Pilgrim’s Progress, 23.


60. Helen Dendy Bosanquet, Rich and Poor, 137.
71. This attitude was particularly evident in the career of Octavia Hill.
85. George Orwell’s experience among tramps led him to reject the notion that they are “atavistic” wanderers; in his view “A tramp tramps, not because he likes it, but for the same reason as a car keeps to the left; because there happens to be a law compelling him to do so.” *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986). The work was first published in 1933.
95. Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion, 151.
98. Ibid., 104.
100. Digby, “Malthus and Reform of the Poor Law,” 100.
102. Ibid.
103. Lewis, Women and Social Action, 147.
104. Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion, 248.
105. Ibid.
110. Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, 300. The appeal of Puritan asceticism to a sensual man would undoubtedly be rather limited.
116. Ibid., 268. Smiles apparently has not considered the full theological import of his argument, which could easily be taken to imply that the expulsion from the Garden of Eden in penalty for Adam’s sin was a very good thing.
118. Bosanquet, Strength of the People, 36.
119. Bell, Octavia Hill, 204.
121. C.S. Loch, Cheap Dinners for Poor School Children (London: about 1885) [edition made from bound galleys, most pages unnumbered] cataloged B.885, Goldsmith’s Library, University of London.
122. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Break-Up of the Poor Law, 203.

Chapter 4 Political Economy and the New Poor Law

2. Digby, “Malthus and Reform of the Poor Law”: 106.
4. Ibid., 16.
11. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, 101. The latter assumption reflects the “wage fund theory” commonly accepted by political economists of the era. This theory held that the amount of circulating capital available for wages was fixed; therefore individual wages would be governed entirely by the laws of supply and demand, with more laborers inevitably meaning lower wages for each. For a fuller history and explication, see *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, ed. by John Eatwell, Murray Milgate and Peter Newman, Vol. 4 (New York: Stockton Press, 1987), 835–7.
29. Item 18, Circular from the Poor Law Commissioners, 20 January 1835, Chadwick Papers, University College, London.
36. Ibid.
41. Item 18, Chadwick Papers, University College, London.
44. Ibid., 156–7.
46. Ibid., 201.
47. Royal Commission (1834), Appendix C, 126.
48. Ibid., 127.
49. Ibid., 128.
50. Royal Commission (1834), Appendix A, 8.
54. Ibid., 127.
56. Ibid., 272. This testimony was attached to the Report of the Royal Commission as an appendix.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., col. 529.
61. Ibid., col. 530.
62. Ibid., col. 533.
63. Ibid., col. 536–7.
66. Ibid., col. 597.
67. Ibid., col. 784.
68. Ibid., col. 248.
73. The assertion of complete rationality, of course, is in keeping not only with political economy but also with the viewpoint of the widely accepted Lockean psychology of pleasure and pain. In this as in so many aspects of Victorian thought, many streams led to the same river, each adding force to the others.
74. Consider, for example, Charles Murray, who seems quite comfortable in confining the decision-making process of “Harold and Phyllis” to economic incentives.

76. Ibid., col. 531.
79. James, Population Malthus, 56.

Chapter 5  From Political Economy to Social Science

2. Fraser, The Evolution of the British Welfare State, 54. Cholera, Fraser comments, caused more public concern than the endemic diseases that claimed far more victims but affected primarily the poor.
3. Dr Southwood Smith, as it happens, was the grandfather of Octavia Hill, a member of the Edwardian Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. He therefore represents, in human form, an element of continuity between the two Commissions.
5. Ibid., 157.
11. Ibid.
13. Poovey, Making a Social Body, 64.
16. Bosanquet, Rich and Poor, 73.
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24. Ibid.
27. Edwin Chadwick to Nassau William Senior, 30 July 1834, Item 1782, Chadwick Papers, University College, London.
28. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 118.
35. As we shall see, much the same might be said about many twentieth-century poverty studies as well.
39. Helen Dendy [Bosanquet], “The Meaning and Methods of True Charity,” in *Aspects of the Social Problem*, 176 (Italics in the original.)
45. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 120.
47. Reproduced in Poovey, “Figures of Arithmetic”, 270.
49. Ibid., 288.
51. Ibid., 44.
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54. Ibid., 45.
57. Ibid.
58. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 120.
64. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, 270.
68. Bell, *Octavia Hill*, 203.
71. Ibid., 113.
73. Ibid., 163.
75. Ibid., 132.
76. Ibid.
77. As Humphreys notes, institutional turf wars undoubtedly played a role, as well.
79. Ibid., 185.
82. Ibid., 708.
85. Ibid., 36.
86. Ibid., 27.
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91. Ibid., 114.
92. Ibid., 114–15.
93. Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion, 248.
94. Ibid.
95. Vytautas Kavolis, Moralizing Cultures (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 103.
96. Ibid., 109.
100. Lewis, Women and Social Action, 184.
103. Humphreys, Sin, Organized Charity, and the Poor Law, 12.

Chapter 6  Ignoble Savages on Relief: Social Darwinism in Late Victorian Poverty Studies

2. Ibid.
4. Henrika Kuklick sums up both the vastness and the chaos of the phenomenon in saying that it would be extremely difficult to catalogue fully all of the ways in which the ideas of anthropology influenced social policy precisely because “evolutionist notions suffused Victorian culture.” The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 77–8.
11. Ibid., 114.
12. Ibid.
17. *Ibid*.
21. Interestingly enough, anthropologist Oscar Lewis later explicitly argued that these same characteristics are present, not in primitive peoples, but in the poor of a “class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society.” See “The Culture of Poverty,” in D.P. Moynihan, ed., *On Understanding Poverty*: 187–8.
30. *Ibid*.
32. *Ibid*.
33. Therefore Christopher Herbert is more inclined to see the central preoccupation of nineteenth-century social thought, “the myth of a state of ungoverned human desire,” as derived from “the Wesleyan mythology of sin.” *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 29, 32.
45. *Ibid*., 137.
Chapter 7  Science and Pseudoscience in Victorian and Edwardian Poverty Studies

2. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 87–8.
7. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 119.
12. Smiles, Character, 168.
18. Ibid., 61.
25. Ibid.
27. H. Bosanquet, Rich and Poor, 27.
29. H. Bosanquet, Rich and Poor, 92. The coroner had enumerated several recent cases that were, in his opinion, the result of inappropriate feeding.
30. Ibid., 93–4.
31. Maud Pember Reeves, Round About a Pound A Week (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1980), 87. This is a reprint of the 1913 edition.
32. Reeves does, by the way, draw an environmentalist conclusion from her anecdote; immediately after the last sentence of the passage quoted above, she adds: “The rent is far too low for healthy rooms.”
37. Poovey, Making a Social Body, 133.
42. Katz, The Undeserving Poor, 170.
44. Ibid., 223–4.


53. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 120.


60. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 98. Beatrice Webb, then Beatrice Potter, had taken a serious interest in the methodology of the survey and participated in some of the earliest phases of it.


64. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick*, 59.


83. Linda Gordon has described a similar process in the workings of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children from its founding in 1878; in their studies “single mothers are consistently over-represented as neglectful parents,” as are the very poor and especially the immigrant poor, whose cultural traditions the largely Anglo-Saxon Protestants of the MSPCC made no attempt to understand. “Single Mothers and Child Neglect, 1880–1920,” American Quarterly, 37 (Summer 1985), 174, 177–8.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 124.
89. Ibid.
92. Reeves, Round About a Pound a Week, 75.
94. Ibid.
96. H. Bosanquet, The Strength of the People, 1; the Cromwell quotation is taken from Morley’s Life.
97. Ibid., 6.
98. Ibid., 18.
99. Ibid., 18–19.
100. Ibid., 155.
101. It also reminds us that male social thinkers don’t have a monopoly on misogyny.
102. H. Bosanquet, The Strength of the People, 150.
103. Ibid., 154.
106. Ibid.
108. It should be noted that this multiplication of Christmas dinners represents precisely the type of unscientific, unsystematic distribution of charity so deplored by the COS, although it is harder for this reader than for COS members to interpret it as a product of chicanery rather than of desperation.


114. At the time, ill health was often seen as well within the control of the poor, as we have seen in our survey of the Public Health Movement.

115. In other contexts Booth was more open to environmentalist considerations, commenting, for example, that the condition of the disreputable denizens of Class A, who “degrade whatever they touch,” is affected by the economic condition of the classes above them. They are depraved, in other words, but are unavoidably harmed by economic currents beyond their control. *Life and Labour*, First Series, Vol. 1, 38.


135. The decision to raise the upper limit of income after two years’ study is a case in point.


156. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 299.
172. Easily the most detailed study is Brian Harrison’s *Drink and the Victorians*.
181. This inquiry was undertaken in response to the large number of recruits who failed Army induction physicals during the Boer War.
Chapter 8 Three Case Studies in *a priori* Social Science

1. Ross, *Love and Toil*, 201. The contemporary French debate on infant and child welfare paid little attention to this issue, concerning itself instead with nursing and maternal employment.
5. *Ibid.*, 85. This seems an unlikely error for a shopper who can “choose and buy as skilfully as any one,” of course, but it is in keeping with the assumption of primitive ignorance.
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid.*, 83. Italics in original text. The use of the male pronoun here is anomalous, not only because Bosanquet generally criticizes the household management of women, but because pawning and shopping on credit, as Bosanquet clearly knew, were generally the province of the housewife. Elsewhere Bosanquet consistently discusses shopping as the province of women. It seems probable that she uses the male pronoun here purely because of grammatical convention, since she is contrasting the slum resident to Economic *Man*.
13. Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week*, 78.
15. Robert Roberts has left us a rich account of the grocery shop that his parents owned in Edwardian Salford, Manchester’s worst slum. He recalls that his father disdained to sell extremely small quantities of food but that his mother and sister were more accommodating to their poorest customers, knowing that these tiny amounts were all they could afford. *The Classic Slum*, 105–6.
37. Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week*, 76.
42. Smiles, *Character*, 52.
45. Jeremy Bentham, *Essays on the subject of the Poor Laws* CLIV (b) Folder 13, Bentham Archives, University College, London; 533 (Probable date 1797) Segregation by sex in the workhouse would also, of course, limit reproduction by the destitute.
50. H. Bosanquet, *Strength of the People*, 64.
63. Ibid. On the basis of numerous memoirs of working-class London, Ellen Ross gives a similar list of objections to the practicality of oatmeal, concluding that it “was a food that middle-class officials of various kinds attempted literally to stuff down the throats of the workers, a nauseating reminder of their social status.” Ross, Love and Toil, 37.

64. Harrison, Drink and the Victorians, 38.
66. Reeves, Round About a Pound a Week, 99.
67. Ibid.
68. Lewis, Politics of Motherhood, 89.
70. Ibid., 125.
72. Bosanquet, Rich and Poor, 27. This anecdote was discussed in detail in the previous chapter.
74. Lewis, Women and Social Action, 177.
76. Ibid., 134–5.
79. Ibid.

85. Ibid., 180–1.
87. Lewis, Politics of Motherhood, 61, 77.
93. Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress, 47.


104. Bosanquet, *Strength of the People*, 103–4. For sheer naked misogyny this passage would be difficult to match in the writings of male social theorists, although it does acknowledge that the behavior attributed to poor women is not unique to their class.


106. W. Booth, *In Darkest England*, 165 (The odd punctuation is in the original.)


127. Ibid., 156.


130. Ibid.


132. Ibid.


137. Ibid., 562.

138. Ibid., 562, 563.

139. Ibid.

140. Smiles, Self-Help, 247.

141. Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion, 233.


143. Rowntree, Poverty, 142.

144. Reeves, Round About a Pound a Week, 66.

145. Ibid., 67–8.

146. Johnson, Saving and Spending, 43.

147. Ibid., 45. Most of the very poor were unlikely to have the vote in this period, so disenfranchisement, while stigmatizing, would not carry a practical penalty.


149. Johnson, Saving and Spending, 45.


151. Johnson, Saving and Spending, 25.


156. Ross, Love and Toil, 192.

157. Ibid.

158. Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class, 45.

159. Reeves, Round About a Pound a Week, 69.

160. Ibid., 73.

Chapter 9  Unanswered Questions, Unasked Questions, and an Experimental Counter-Hypothesis

2. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 120.
7. *Ibid.*, 269. William Beveridge (1879–1963), later to become the architect of the British welfare state, did not play a major role in the work of the Royal Commission. He was at this time affiliated with Toynbee Hall, where he met the Webbs. A minor official at the Board of Trade engaged in the planning of labor exchanges, he was pressed into service by Beatrice Webb for expert testimony on the subject of unemployment.
18. This is what Linda Gordon found to be true in the slums of Boston in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. “Single Mothers and Child Neglect”: 80–1.
27. G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act V.
33. Harrison, Drink and the Victorians, 372. Harrison is speaking of temperance societies, but he might just as well be speaking of the COS.
34. Cecil Driver, Tory Radical: The Life of Richard Oastler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 282 Oastler (1789–1861) was a Tory radical who strongly supported the Established Church and opposed the laissez-faire policies of political economy on paternalistic grounds.
35. Kavolis, Moralizing Cultures, 51.
37. Hazlitt asserted that the policy amounted to “starving the children of the poor to feed the horses of the rich.” James, Population Malthus, 349.
39. Sydney Checkland, British Public Policy, 93.
41. Lees, The Solidarities of Strangers, 84.
43. Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 3d ser., Vol. 24 (1834), col. 318 comments of Poulett Scrope, MP.
44. Robert, The Classic Slum, 92.
45. Piven and Cloward, Regulating the Poor, 346.
48. Ibid.
49. Nor, of course, was it uniformly enforced, especially in the northern manufacturing districts least suited to its provisions, because of cyclical unemployment. Resistance to centralized bureaucratic control had ensured that the local guardians enjoyed some margin of discretion in meeting local conditions.
52. Ibid., 51.
54. Piven and Cloward, Regulating the Poor, 177.
55. Ibid., 345.
57. G.B. Shaw, Pygmalion Act II.
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60. Devine, Misery and Its Causes, 3.
62. Ibid., 208. Lerner’s experimental subjects did, in fact, construct explanations for the suffering of the electric-shock victim based on some presumed malfeasance on his part.
63. Goffman, Stigma, 5.
64. Ibid.
67. Webb, Harriet Martineau, 82.
68. Simey, Charles Booth, 41, 131.
69. Ibid., 176.
70. Lansbury, My Life, 186.
71. Ibid., 153.

Chapter 10  Why Critique the Victorian Social Science of Poverty?

1. For a look at what a “modern” social science approach to poverty looks like, try the work of William Julius Wilson, Herbert Gans, and Joel F. Handler and Yeheskel Hasenfeld.
2. Quoted in Gertrude Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion, 235.
3. For an enlightening look at just how significant these structural changes were, see William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged.
5. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 54.
8. See his self-contradictory comments on the recklessness of casual laborers in Chapter 6.
9. Banfield, The Unheavenly City Revisited, 62. The lower-class individual’s probable lack of health insurance is, of course, not discussed as a possible factor in this behavior.
10. Ibid., 61.
11. Ibid., 62.
12. Ibid., 54.
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