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By Dint of History: Ways in which social work is (re)defined by historical and social events

Professor Dr Jonathan Parker, Universität Vechta, 19 June 2019

What we will discuss...

- The disputed historical beginnings of social work
- Historical sociology as method
- A model of analysis
- The turning wheels of history that leave some tracks...
 - Poor Laws
 - Political turmoil
 - The indigenous turn
 - Populism and politicisation
- Power analysis and tentative conclusions





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The disputed historical beginnings of social work

- Contested histories
- Change and continuity – a helix-like intertwining
- The confluence of compassion/the politics of care and control
- Social justice and human rights – the contested IFSW definition as a starting point





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Historical sociology as method

- the underpinning rationale of historical sociology is to lay bare the conditions that led to significant changes and developments in human history
- *Sociology... was created to explain the complex of disruptive and unprecedented changes that accompanied the advent of modern capitalist societies. But sociology can help us understand what is most significant and consequential about our contemporary world only when it is historical sociology.* (Lachmann, 2013, pp. 3-4)
- A contest between two schools





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A mode of analysis

- Charles Tilly:
 - Common group interests
 - Organisation with a specific structure
 - Mobilisation of group resources
 - Opportunities to be associated with specific situational constellations that are ready to be used
- Richard Lachmann:
 - It distinguishes between inconsequential everyday events and the rare moments when people transform the social structures
 - It explains why transformative events occur at particular times and places as opposed to others
 - It shows how events make subsequent events possible
- But... a need for the ideographic/biographic
- Subrt:
 - *Historical sociology today is a diverse discipline that makes an effort to elaborate general theory, has a number of special theories, ranges in specialised directions and develops research on the empirical level as well.*



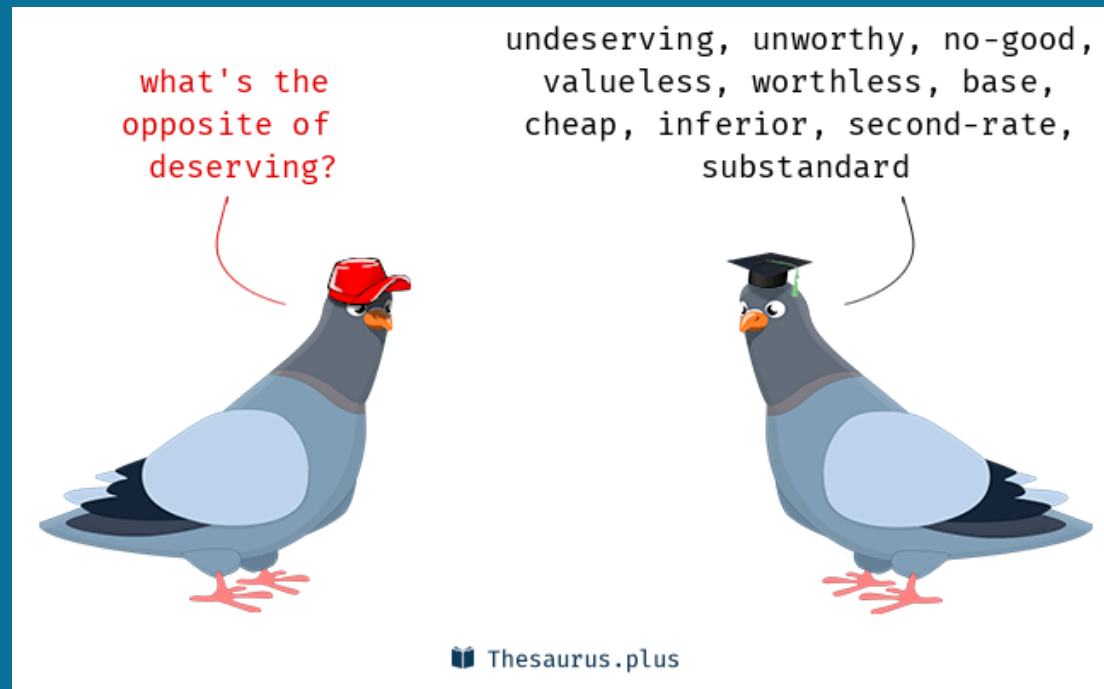
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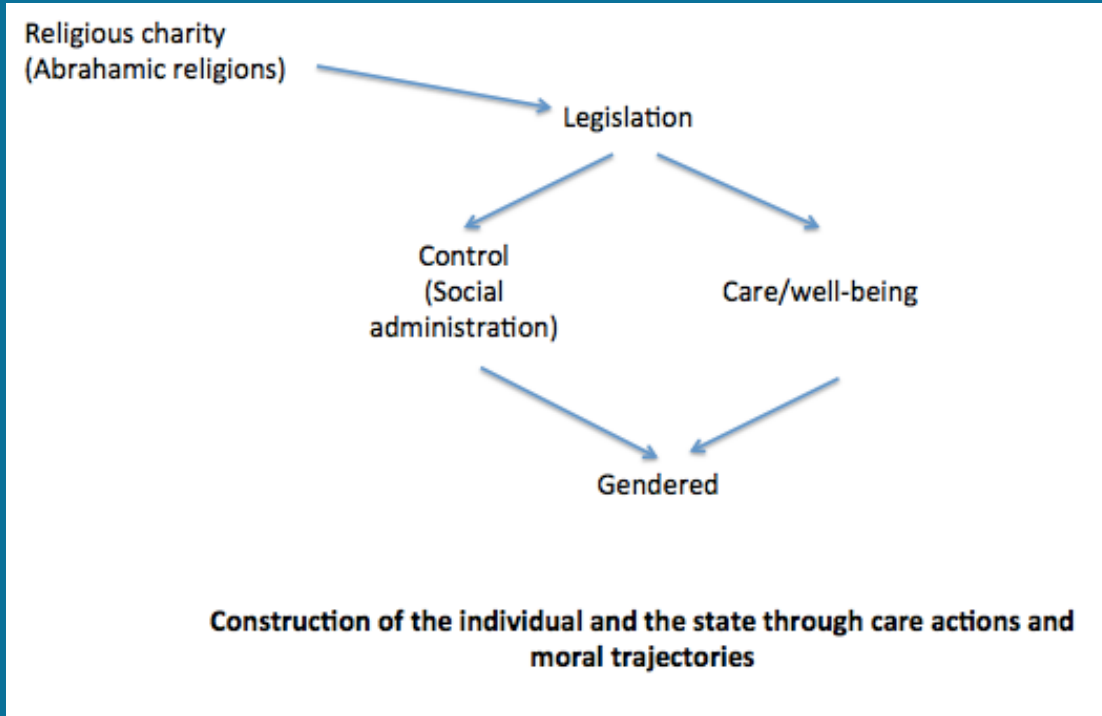
Turning wheels leave some tracks

- Functionalist and progressive or complex and indicative?



- Long history
- Elizabethan Poor Laws (43rd of Elizabeth 1601)
- Poor Law Amendment Act 1834
- Deserving and undeserving – constructing the individual and constructed state welfare





Historical connections between welfare systems in different times include:

Social administration, bureaucracy and professionalisation of services

The simplification of systems; macro vs micro; state vs parish

Universal credit

Parish and parish unions

Single systems and state standardisation

The punishment of the poor/deterrence and less eligibility

Stopping benefits

Criminalising the poor

Demonisation

Workfare

Individual and family responsibility – gendered assumptions

Minimum wage concerns, benefits and contested claims

Economic migration (settlement/parochialism)

- Developments towards International Association of Schools of Social Work
- Alice Salomon and Irena Sendler
- Social eugenics and social work under Hitler
- Learning and contemporary developments – reporting and PREVENT
- global elements of social work – a fraught and difficult concept
- recognition of the tightrope walked by social workers negotiating between care and control, person and State, fluid subjects and establishment norms
- ‘bite the hand that feeds’ – am Ast sägen, auf dem man sitzt



The indigenous turn

- Western privilege – coloniality and neo-colonialism
- Authentic, acceptable social work
- Finding common ground to share



- Global North – neoliberal marketisation of the world
- Rebuilding after Second World War – US dominance
- Increasing focus on safeguarding, regulation and control – Baby P (Peter Connelly)
- Moral binaries – deserving/undeserving Department for Education pronouncement after the Makin Report
- Structural responsibility deflections



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Analyses of power

- ‘We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production’ (Foucault 1991: 194).
- Disciplinary and bio-power
- Poor Laws
- Safeguarding
- Indigeneity



ANY QUESTIONS???

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