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Références bibliographiques

- [\[anonyme ou collectif\] Journal of the history of medicine](#)
- [Rosen, Economic and Social Policy in Public Health, in Journal of the History of Medicine, 1953](#)

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peasant laborer and undermined whatever traditional social security he had. At the same time the settlement laws tied him to his parish, so that some form of social assistance was required to relieve the unemployed or underemployed rural worker. The various forms of poor relief employed for this purpose helped to maintain a reserve of rural labor and to prevent it from moving into the towns.

Naturally, such stagnant pools of labor and the system that produced them were anathema to the new industrial middle class and to those who voiced its interests and ideals. Since the system of poor relief was alleged to be the chief obstacle to the attainment of a perfectly elastic supply of labor for industry, the remedy proposed was to do away with assistance to the able-bodied poor, and thus to free labor for the play of economic self-interest. This approach was firmly rooted in specific theoretical tenets, namely, the doctrine of philosophical necessity, the political economy of Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo, and the Benthamite philosophy of administration.

The doctrine of philosophical necessity was based on faith in a natural order of society. The world of man was believed to be as ordered and regular as the Newtonian universe. Consequently, any effort to tamper with social processes was contrary to nature. The sharpest formulation of this doctrine in relation to the poor is to be found in the social ideas of Joseph Priestley. In his opinion, "individuals when left to themselves are, in general, sufficiently provident and will daily better their circumstances."²⁴ Poverty and idleness ought to be governed by reason and necessity, and not by any legal provision for the poor which could act only as an incitement to idleness. If government held aloof and permitted necessity to operate unchecked, material progress would result in decreased poverty and increased education, which in turn would lead to moral improvement. Consequently, any attempt to provide relief through the Poor Law was actually an obstacle to self-help, a sin against philosophical necessity, and an impediment to progress. Instead, the poor should be compelled to fend for themselves and stimulated to help themselves by being provident.

The second strain of doctrine derived from the economic theoreticians of the new order. Political economy developed with the industrial age as the science that established and expounded the laws by which the new economic system operated. According

²⁴ Joseph Priestley, *Lectures on history and general policy*, p. 305, cited in Anthony Lincoln, *Some political and social ideas of English dissent 1763-1800*. Cambridge, University Press, 1938, p. 175.



