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The Unknown Titmuss

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Abstract

Recent writing in social policy on the role of agency has made important assumptions about social administration in the post-war period. In particular it is suggested that interpretations of the causes of poverty, and the thinking of Richard Titmuss, were characterised by a 'denial' of agency and almost total emphasis on structural factors. The implications were that this left the Titmuss paradigm vulnerable to more individualistic interpretations in the 1980s. In this article we look more closely at Titmuss's work and thought in the three decades of the 1940s, the 1950s, and the 1960s, aiming to produce a fuller and more nuanced analysis. We argue that the distinctive position adopted by Titmuss was in large part his response to earlier and on-going debates about social pathology. What he was trying to do was to make others aware of the broader context in which behaviour had to be analysed. But Titmuss himself became constrained by the paradigm that he did more than anyone else to create. Thus debates about behaviour, structure, and poverty have been marked as much by continuity as by change.

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed debates, among writers on social policy, on the role of agency. It has been suggested that the dominant paradigms in the study of social welfare have neglected the role of human agency in responding to threats of welfare across the life course (Titterton, 1992). Others have suggested that the relationship between welfare and behaviour is central to understanding the outcomes of welfare provision, and for modelling future demand (McLaughlin, 1996). This has led to a search for a new research paradigm that will bridge the dichotomy between agency and structure, and 'create a more multidimensional view of what poverty means in relation to the quality of life' (Williams and Pillinger, 1996: 27). Similarly, there has been a call for research that is more sensitive to the way that people's health and welfare needs are structured, their resources, support networks, opportunities and social relations (Williams, Popay and Oakley, 1999). It is argued that this new interest in agency creates an opportunity for a social science that is more sensitive to the activities of poor people while reflecting more fully the difference and diversity that characterises contemporary British society (Deacon and Mann, 1999).

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The argument that an interest in agency and behaviour is recent itself embodies important assumptions about the development of the academic discipline of social administration in the post-war period. It has long been recognised that the empiricist tradition was particularly strong in social administration at that time (Wilding, 1976: 162–3; Taylor-Gooby, 1981; Mishra, 1989: 66–8). In comparing British sociology with social policy and administration in this period, Martin Bulmer characterises the latter as being 'strong on application, moderate on empirical research, and extremely weak on theory' (1991: 163). Recent writers have been more concerned with the way in which social administration allegedly ignored the role of agency. It has been suggested that democratic socialists such as Marshall, Titmuss, and Crosland viewed the welfare state as 'one designed to be financed and operated by knights, for the benefit of pawns' (Le Grand, 1997: 157, 2003: 7). Professionals worked in the public interest, while individuals in receipt of the benefits of the welfare state were essentially passive. Frank Field has suggested in the same vein that the welfare state has developed no room for discussions of behaviour (1998: 53). Fiona Williams, Jennie Popay, and Ann Oakley have suggested that in the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of human agency was ignored (1999: 11). Particularly relevant to this article is the claim that fears that addressing agency would endorse a punitive and atavistic individualism constrained and confined the debate about welfare in the era of the classic welfare state. Agency was not merely neglected in academic studies of social policy, but was consciously dismissed (Deacon and Mann, 1999). It is suggested that this was both a reaction to the individualism of the Poor Law and of such bodies as the Charity Organisation Society, and to social casework in the 1940s and 1950s.

This debate has also incorporated important assumptions about the thinking of Richard Titmuss, arguably the dominant influence on social administration in the post-war period. Alan Deacon for instance, claims that the most striking aspect of Titmuss's writing was not his stance on the market but his total opposition to 'judgementalism' (1993a: 91). Titmuss was associated with the tradition in British social policy of 'egalitarian collectivism', and he neglected questions 'of personal responsibility and labour market behaviour'. This led to a position of 'almost total determinism and to a complete denial of personal responsibility' (1993b: 236). Robert Page argues that one of the great strengths of scholars such as Titmuss and Galbraith has been their focus on socio-economic inequalities rather than on the 'personal conduct of the disadvantaged' (1996: 141). Thus to Titmuss, 'arguments about problem families or cycles of deprivation were an irrelevance or worse' and those who could not understand that were 'simply beyond the pale' (Deacon and Mann, 1999: 418). Deacon argues further that Titmuss's faith in human nature, along with his neglect of behaviour, presented conservatives like Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead in the 1980s with an 'unnecessary weapon' (1993b: 241, 1996: 201).

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More recently, Deacon has shifted position somewhat, distinguishing between a 'Titmuss paradigm or school' and a 'quasi-Titmuss paradigm or school'. Because it was increasingly concerned with the growth of material inequalities, it was the latter that paid less attention to altruism, and the quality of social relationships. The distinction is made between the ideas of Titmuss himself, and later exponents, where Titmuss's alleged rejection of individualist or behavioural accounts of poverty hardened into an approach that precluded any discussion of such factors (Deacon, 2002: 14). Nonetheless despite this new distinction, many of the received interpretations of Titmuss remain. First, that he believed welfare could redistribute resources and lessen inequalities. Second, that it could bring about redistribution through processes and institutions that would contribute to social integration and encourage fellowship. Third, that Titmuss was committed to universalism, hostile to means tests, and insistent that welfare had to be non-judgemental. Fourth, that he was not overly interested in behaviour, because he was optimistic about both future economic performance, and human nature. Fifth, that he did discuss agency, because of the importance he attached to altruism. Sixth, that it was the 'quasi-Titmuss paradigm or school' that, in its hostility to explaining poverty by reference to the behaviour of the poor, created an intellectual void that was filled by neo-Conservative writers in the 1980s (Deacon, 2002: 13–30).

It is argued in this article that the analysis of Titmuss's role in these debates offered by these writers has concentrated on a very selective reading of his best-known publications, particularly the collected essays. For that reason, it presents an overly simplified and ahistorical view of Titmuss's thinking on questions of agency and behaviour. Here we look more closely at Titmuss's life and work, to draw on less well-known material and correspondence, aiming to produce a fuller and more nuanced analysis. By 'agency' we mean the capacity of the individual to act, although in the writing of Titmuss and others, there is an important elision with the idea of 'agency' as dysfunctional behaviour which was allegedly the cause of poverty and other problems. In seeking to locate Titmuss's ideas within their proper historical context, the approach taken is similar to Alice O'Connor's argument that 'poverty knowledge' has been historically constructed (2001: 8). While a complete treatment is not possible in the space available, we look at Titmuss's work and thought in the three decades of the 1940s, the 1950s, and the 1960s. We argue that the distinctive position adopted by Titmuss was in large part his response to earlier and on-going debates about social pathology. What he was trying to do was to make others aware of the broader context in which behaviour had to be analysed. But Titmuss himself became constrained by the paradigm that he did more than anyone else to create. Thus debates about behaviour, structure, and poverty have been marked as much by continuity as by change.

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From the 'social problem group' to 'problem families'

Along with the more recent work of Deacon, there is no shortage of secondary writing on Richard Titmuss, his thinking and his career (Marshall, 1973; Gowing, 1975; Reisman, 1977; Donnison, 1979; Rose, 1981; Vaizey, 1983; Kincaid, 1984; Wilding, 1995; Oakley, 1996; Alcock, Glennerster, Oakley and Sinfield, 2001). Robert Pinker, for instance, has written that 'social administration owes an incalculable debt to Richard Titmuss' (Pinker, 1977: xv). Other work has provided a more critical portrait, and has hinted at contradictions in Titmuss's stance on means testing and membership of the Supplementary Benefits Commission (Vaizey, 1983; Kincaid, 1984: 119–20). Nevertheless while this secondary literature provides an account of Titmuss's early career, it has been less successful in setting his ideas within their proper historical context. With the important exception of Ann Oakley's research on Titmuss and the Eugenics Society, the bulk of this work has concentrated on his later essays. Very little attention has been given to his thinking before 1960, and few attempts have been made to explain some of the obvious contradictions that his less well-known writings throw up. As long ago as 1978, Adrian Sinfield noted that 'a sound historical base is lacking, or is restricted to too short a scale, in much social policy analysis' (1978: 149). While this has been remedied in some social policy analyses, it is true of recent writing on Titmuss.

From an unpromising start, Titmuss was by the late 1930s in the process of becoming an important commentator on population issues and health and welfare. At the same time, he had also joined the Eugenics Society in 1937. Formed in 1907, the Eugenics Society was concerned with enhancing the quality of the race through improved knowledge of the laws of heredity. Its membership included middle-class professionals, including left-wing progressives. But, by the late 1940s, the eugenics movement was in difficulties, in part due to the Nazi experiments in sterilisation (Jones, 1986). Ann Oakley has argued that the Eugenics Society holds important clues to the emergence of the movement for social medicine and to Titmuss's later leadership in the field of social policy. Eugenics offered Titmuss an entrée into fashionable intellectual circles, while in return he provided the Society with a new type of social analysis that enabled it to move to a more acceptable ideological position in the debate about health, emphasising the social rather than the biological model (Oakley, 1991: 189, 1997: 88). It has been argued he was on the liberal wing of the movement and played a pivotal role in the attempt to get the Society to move away from the old behavioural and hereditarian arguments, and to encourage its members to emphasise the eugenic significance of nutrition and other environmental factors. Hilary Rose suggests that Titmuss's use of the language of national efficiency was 'euphenic rather than eugenic'. He was less concerned with fitness for breeding, than with providing the whole population with a healthy environment within which it could realise its potential (Rose, 1981: 486).

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Some of Titmuss's writing in the late 1930s and early 1940s bears out this interpretation. The Society sponsored the publication of his first book, *Poverty and Population* (1938), and there was evidence that Titmuss shared some eugenic preoccupations. While the main theme of his book was regional differentials in life chances, Titmuss wrote that those unable to migrate from the depressed regions, below average both mentally and physically, would inter-marry and form clusters of the 'social problem group'. In turn, this group was 'the source from which all too many of our criminals, paupers, degenerates, unemployables and defectives are recruited' (1938: 288). The theory of the 'social problem group' had been highlighted by the Wood Report on Mental Deficiency (1929) and was propagated by the Eugenics Society in the 1930s. By the early 1940s, Titmuss was heavily involved in the Society, including an evacuation scheme sponsored by its Canadian counterpart (Oakley, 1996: 176–7). Nevertheless in this period, Titmuss also joined Maurice Newfield, editor of the *Eugenics Review*, in stressing the role of nutrition and other structural factors (Oakley, 1991: 177–9). In a review of Rowntree's second survey of York for instance, Titmuss and François Lafitte wrote that nature and nurture were so entangled that 'no eugenist can afford to neglect the study of environmental factors – especially of economic and social conditions' (1942: 106). Subsequently in a paper to the Eugenics Society, delivered in November 1943, Titmuss argued that people should not be content with 'weeding out the demonstrably unfit', but should 'look equally to the improvement of the social environment' (1944: 57).

But Titmuss's thinking was more complex than a simple move from a biological to a social model of health, or from a behavioural to a structural interpretation of poverty, implies. Early hints of Titmuss's attitude to the role of parents are brought out well in his writing on the subject of juvenile delinquency. In November 1942, for example, Titmuss commented that 'faulty parental training is a factor in the causation of delinquency but Mannheim's work does not show it to be the most important agent'. He argued instead that 'overcrowding and bad housing conditions produce social misfits, frustration, petty delinquencies and so on'.[1] In his study of crime in interwar England, Hermann Mannheim, then Lecturer in Criminology at the London School of Economics, had listed some 53 possible causes of juvenile delinquency, based on an investigation of the records of a Borstal institution. Mannheim left out poverty, owing to a lack of data, although he conceded that it might be the real cause of ill-health and educational failure, family quarrels, the premature death of parents, poor housing, and unemployment (1940: 261). Overall he argued that both social factors, and physical and mental factors, were causes of juvenile delinquency. He discussed the role of parents, but also the influence of unemployment and housing conditions. Mannheim argued that unemployment was a direct cause of delinquency, especially when it coincided with 'unfavourable home conditions', but he was reluctant to go further, since there were no control groups in his

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study (1940: 282). Titmuss had been directed to Mannheim's work in January 1939 (Oakley 1996: 83) and his comment suggests he had some sympathy for the Mannheim position – that parental training was a factor, but not the most important one.

The early 1940s witnessed an important shift in thinking, away from the notion of the 'social problem group' that had been influential in the 1930s, to a new concept of the 'problem family'. The key survey in this respect was a report by the Women's Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns* (1943) that was written in response to the evacuation of schoolchildren in September 1939 (Welshman, 1999). The report had many recommendations that were more structural in nature, including ones for dealing with housing and overcrowding, and plans for widening the scope of health and welfare services. However it was the point about 'problem families' that was subsequently picked up by public health doctors and the voluntary Family Service Units as an essentially behavioural interpretation of the causes of poverty and deprivation (Macnicol, 1999). Titmuss himself had an opportunity to explore 'problem families' when, in 1944, he was appointed as a part-time statistical adviser to Luton, in Bedfordshire. A general Luton survey was published in 1945, but a second report focused on 'problem families' in particular – Titmuss organised a grant from the Eugenics Society and arranged for the town's Medical Officer of Health to be elected to the Society's Council (Oakley, 1991: 181, 1996: 277).

The later report argued that 'social problem families' were not a homogeneous group, and included at least four separate categories. The definition developed was of families who, for reasons other than 'old age, accident, misfortune, illness or pregnancy', required more supervision and help, and for longer periods, than was normally provided by social services (Tomlinson, 1946: 11). Others regarded as 'biological casualties' (such as older people), 'social casualties' and 'problem individuals' were excluded. Investigations of 167 such families suggested the 'causes' were subnormal mental capacity, adverse family influences during childhood, broken families, frequent pregnancies, chronic ill-health, husbands absent in the forces and alcoholism. The recommended solutions were education by health visitors, nursery schools and caseworkers who could rehabilitate families through manual work. Overall, the survey concluded that there was no 'static social problem group' in Luton, and relatively few 'problem families', but that a national survey was needed (Tomlinson, 1946: 37). In the methodology it adopted, the identified causes, and the recommended solutions, the Luton survey was very similar to other surveys carried out at this time. At the same time, the definition adopted was more careful, and the findings more optimistic, and this may reflect the involvement of Titmuss.

The extent of Titmuss's influence on the second Luton survey is unclear, though he and others were thanked for their 'encouragement, advice and helpful criticism' (Tomlinson, 1946: 5). Moreover his involvement led directly to his

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becoming one of the original members of the Problem Families Committee that was established by the Eugenics Society in July 1947. He attended its first meeting, along with other Society members that included Lord Horder, David Caradog Jones, C. P. Blacker (the Society's Secretary), and several public health doctors.[2] The plan was to carry out the national survey of 'problem families' that had been widely recommended. Ann Oakley comments that Titmuss appeared to share the eugenist view that 'a complex of social failures and psychological problems marked out in a distinctive way a subgroup of the population responsible for an overuse of the health and social services' (Oakley, 1991: 181). But there were signs that Titmuss was uneasy about the work of the Committee. In November 1947, it had agreed a 'problem family' definition that stressed '(i) intractable ineducability, (ii) instability or infirmity of character, (iii) the presentation by the family of multiple social problems, and (iv) a squalid home'.[3] But Titmuss suggested in a letter that not enough emphasis was being given to prevention and rehabilitation.[4] In fact, he played little part in subsequent meetings, and resigned from the Committee altogether in November 1950, arguing that other commitments had prevented him from devoting the necessary time and attention.[5] As the report neared publication, the Society's Secretary queried whether Titmuss should be listed as a member of the Committee who had resigned, or left out altogether. Titmuss replied he was very glad to see that the work had reached an advanced stage and would look forward to reading the report, but he also suggested his lack of involvement in the survey meant it would be 'misleading' if his name was associated with it.[6]

Earlier work on the younger Titmuss has tended to concentrate on the move from a biological to a social model of health, as symbolised in his work in the Eugenics Society and the movement for social medicine. But, while it has been recognised that Titmuss fell back on 'vague and contradictory notions of biological influences' (Oakley, 1991: 180), and that his 'problem family' work reflected 'a limiting concern with traditional approaches to social categorisation' (Oakley, 1997: 93), the obvious paradoxes in his stance have not been explained. More recent writing has also simplified what is a complex and contradictory story: if, as has been suggested, Titmuss dismissed the concept of 'problem families', why was he directly involved in these projects? Titmuss clearly did use support for eugenic ideas in an opportunist way. Nevertheless his interest in these approaches was much more than simply tactical. In part, Titmuss's involvement in the Luton report and Eugenics Society survey was a natural reflection of his interest in the early 1940s in debates about the 'unfit' and the environment, and in the role of parents in relation to juvenile delinquency. What is clear is that Titmuss was clearly interested in the relative importance of behaviour and structure in the causes of social 'problems', and that this was to provide an important thread in his thinking into the 1950s and beyond.

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Problems of social policy, Juvenile Delinquency, and 'sources of social need'

Many of the features identified as being key in the Titmuss paradigm – his optimism about human nature, belief in universal services, and opposition to means testing – are brought out well in his famous civilian history of wartime, *Problems of Social Policy*, published in 1950. Titmuss had been invited to join the group of historians commissioned to write the official civil histories of the Second World War, and to cover the work of the Ministry of Health. It was from this narrow brief that Titmuss was to produce a much broader thesis about war and social policy. He wrote that the evacuation of mothers and children, and the blitz of 1940, 'stimulated inquiry and proposals for reform long before victory was even thought possible' so that during the war 'the pressures for a higher standard of welfare and a deeper comprehension of social justice steadily gained in strength' (1950: 507–8). What were remarkable about the wartime expansion of school meals and milk, argued Titmuss, were the consensus behind policy, and the speed at which changes were made. He wrote that 'it was the universal character of these welfare policies which ensured their acceptance and success. They were free of social discrimination and the indignities of the Poor Law' (1950: 514). Historians have been at pains to revise the Titmuss interpretation of the wartime period, arguing for example that he drew too stark a contrast between the 1930s and the 1940s, and that officials were slow to accept the implications of evacuation for policy reform, preferring to stress the need for behavioural rather than structural changes (Welshman, 1999: 784). But again the wartime history has been more often cited than read.

When commentators look at Titmuss in the 1950s they tend to turn first to his inaugural lecture as Professor of Social Administration, given at the London School of Economics in May 1951, and this also appears to provide further support for the conventional interpretation. Titmuss quoted approvingly from R. H. Tawney's own inaugural lecture as Director of the Ratan Tata Foundation, given in October 1913. Titmuss suggested that Tawney had argued that 'the problem of poverty . . . is not a problem of individual character and its waywardness, but a problem of economic and industrial organisation. It had to be studied first at its sources, and only secondly in its manifestations' (1958a: 18). Titmuss noted that the character of many of the new social services created in the early 1900s had been moulded by the 'moral assumptions' of the nineteenth century, and there had been little attempt to explain why people behaved as they did. The application of assumptions about how people ought to behave to the new social services meant that they treated 'manifestations of disorder in the individual rather than the underlying causes in the family or social group' (1958a: 19). The implication was that since then an important shift had occurred, from locating the cause of social problems in individual behaviour, to acknowledging the influence of wider structural factors.

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Moreover by the mid-1950s, Titmuss was critical of the concept of the 'problem family'. In a book foreword published in 1957, Titmuss wrote there was a long tradition of concern about families 'supposedly characterised by similar traits, and thought to represent a closed, pathological entity' (1957: v). Furthermore, he argued that the debate on the 'problem family' had been conducted in a particularly uncritical way, since precision had been lacking, biology had obscured what might be learnt from sociology and psychology, and the emphasis had been on the classification and counting of 'abnormals'. In short, 'what knowledge has been gained from all these inquiries has not accumulated on any theoretical foundations' (1957: v). Titmuss argued that it was the growth of social policy that had made people more aware of the problem of 'social vagabonds', and it was even more important to make explicit the ethical and social values that underlay administrative activity and casework intervention. He wrote that 'the attitude that society adopts to its deviants, and especially its poor and politically inarticulate deviants, reflects its ultimate values' (1957: vi).

Nevertheless other evidence from the 1950s provides support for a more nuanced interpretation of his stance. Titmuss's criticism of the methodology of much 'problem family' research notwithstanding, he appeared nevertheless to approve of efforts to help these families. In a lecture on families and the welfare state, given in May 1952, Titmuss noted 'of course there are some who are feckless and irresponsible', this was inevitable in a country with a population of 50 m, and they were represented in all social classes. The real question was whether there were more of them than previously. He argued that many aspects of family relationships had improved, with less drunkenness, illegitimacy, child neglect, prostitution, and truancy than formerly. At the same time, he noted 'of course, we still have with us our "problem families" but my impression is that the proportion is much lower than it used to be'.[7] Furthermore while Titmuss was critical of 'problem family' research, as head of a social work department he could not be publicly opposed to casework intervention. In December 1954, he congratulated the relevant civil servant on the appearance of a Ministry of Health circular that urged local authorities to tackle 'problem families' using health visitors.[8] And he noted that voluntary and local authority activity in this sphere was 'impressive' in its scale (1957: vi). Thus this evidence suggests that Deacon and Mann are wrong in arguing that Titmuss would have seen debates about 'problem families' as an irrelevance or worse (Deacon and Mann, 1999: 418). Rather he was directly involved in these debates in the immediate post-war period.

The uncertainty in Titmuss's own mind about structure, behaviour, and poverty is also apparent on a close reading of *Problems of Social Policy*. In the chapter on the reception of the evacuees, for example, Titmuss looked at three issues to do with child health and welfare – bedwetting, footwear and clothing, and head lice. Titmuss was concerned to defend parents, suggesting it

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was likely they had sent children away in their best clothes, and many had taken the trouble to attend school medical inspections before the War (1950: 115, 133). Nevertheless on issues such as juvenile delinquency, Titmuss was prepared to take a stronger line. The early War years led to an increase in juvenile delinquency in London, Glasgow, and other cities (1950: 147–8). Titmuss wrote that children from broken homes got little training in their first five years, and became 'unstable, aggressive, lazy, cynical and untrustworthy' (1950: 123). Some of these children were what Marie Paneth in her book *Branch Street* (1944) had called 'hurt people', who 'live in an atmosphere which, though outspoken and tough in many ways, is secretive and untruthful on essential points' (1950: 123–4). In interpreting juvenile delinquency, Titmuss had earlier been swayed by the work of Hermann Mannheim, but he was also influenced by John Bowlby's research. Bowlby concluded from cases seen at the London Child Guidance Clinic that a large proportion of children who stole persistently were of 'an affectionless character', a condition which resulted from 'their having suffered prolonged separations from their mothers or foster-mothers in their early childhood' (1946: 49).

Titmuss was to extend Bowlby's analysis to the wider issue of bedwetting, arguing that children who wet their beds appeared to come from the kind of broken homes which produced, in the words of John Bowlby, 'affectionless thieves' (1950: 123). But in other cases, Titmuss argued that behaviour was an adaptive response to the environment people lived in, so that 'insanitary and anti-social behaviour was closely linked to the physical environment from which the children came. Slum mores are consistent with a slum home' (1950: 124). Thus 'corrupt manners' were the product of a 'corrupting environment', and Titmuss wrote of the city that 'such an environment signifies slovenliness and dirt, bad language and moral delinquency' (1950: 132). It was environmental conditions, overcrowding and the lack of baths and lavatories that, along with poverty, shaped the behaviour of evacuees and their mothers. Elsewhere, it was a case of cultural difference that led to misunderstandings. Titmuss wrote of the return home of mothers, for instance, that 'the isolation and strange quiet of the country . . . boredom, uncomprehended ways of life; these were the things which sometimes led to bad manners, ingratitude and irresponsibility', and this was how the rural middle-class families with whom the evacuees were billeted interpreted such behaviour (1950: 182).

In September 1939, much of the friction between evacuees and host families had been caused by head lice. On this point, Titmuss argued that if between 5 and 50 per cent of children and mothers had head lice, it was not fair to stigmatise them all as 'problem families'. Only 2—5 per cent were 'problem children' from 'problem homes'. The other 95—98 per cent were not 'the neglected children of irresponsible parents', and were not part of the 'social problem' group' (1950: 135). Thus, from this, Titmuss was able to make his famous assertion that 'the decencies

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of health and sanitation are more easily achieved by the rich than the poor, but they are no sufficient measure of personal virtue or political principle. The louse is not a political creature – it does not discriminate between the salt of the earth and the scum of the earth' (1950: 136). Overall, we can see in this short section from *Problems of Social Policy* that Titmuss's views were complex, and heavily influenced by others. On the question of juvenile delinquency, he conceded that parents had a role to play, but also argued that behaviour could be an adaptive response to the environment in which people found themselves. Similarly, while Titmuss distinguished between the concept of a 'social problem group' and the notion of 'problem families', and was aware that both were stigmatising devices, he was not totally opposed to them. In his ambivalence, Titmuss reflected other surveys, such as the *Our Towns* report, which had both exposed problems of housing and the inadequacy of health services in the 1930s, but also endorsed a new emphasis on a residuum of socially inadequate people (Welshman, 1999).

The inaugural lecture is worth looking at further, since the relationship between Titmuss and Tawney appears to provide answers to some of these questions. Alan Deacon has noted that Titmuss quoted approvingly from Tawney to trace the development of social administration as an academic subject in terms of a shift from behavioural to structural understandings of poverty (1996: 199). It has been suggested that Titmuss endorsed Tawney's approach to equality, but since he did not share Tawney's religious faith, differed from him on the role of character and choice. Since Tawney held a Christian view of people that included sin as well as compassion, he stressed duties and responsibilities rather than rights. Titmuss, on the other hand, was more optimistic about human nature, and so emphasised the duties of the state to the individual, rather than the obligations of the latter. It has further been argued that Titmuss was misled by the utopian element in Tawney's thought, and failed to notice his qualifications – it is this that presents conservatives with an 'entirely unnecessary weapon' (Deacon, 1996: 201).

What is interesting is what Tawney said in the original lecture, and what Titmuss missed out in his rather selective reading of it. Tawney did argue that what rich people called the 'problem of poverty', poor people called the 'problem of riches', and concentrating on destitution was to 'beg the questions that most need investigation' (1913: 10). Moreover he argued 'problems of poverty' should be approached as 'problems of industry', with the trade, town, or school as the unit of enquiry rather than the individual or family. Thus in his view, modern poverty was not associated with personal misfortunes, but with the economic status of classes and occupations. Nevertheless Tawney also believed that the capacity of individuals to resist misfortune depended on the 'habits of life' and economic resources that they had acquired before disaster struck (1913: 12). What was needed was to develop this 'economic resisting power' through public intervention. So what Tawney actually said, to be slightly misquoted subsequently by Titmuss, was

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that 'the problem of poverty . . . is primarily an industrial one. It is to be studied first at its sources, and only secondly in its manifestations, in the mill, in the mine or at the docks, not in casual wards or on the Embankment' (1913: 12).

How important therefore is the distinction between Tawney seeing the 'problem of poverty' as being 'primarily an industrial one' and Titmuss's later inaccurate paraphrasing that it was 'not a problem of individual character and its waywardness'? Norman Dennis and A. H. Halsey have argued that in the inaugural lecture Titmuss provoked laughter and applause by criticising older views that character and choice might influence conduct, and that poor people had anything to learn from others (1988: 254). In fact there is very little support in the published text for this comment by Dennis and Halsey. What is interesting is that Titmuss took the point about poverty and individual character from the Tawney lecture, but left out the bits about the individual's capacity to resist misfortune, and about habits of life. Leaving aside his odd location of the causes of poverty in the family or social group, he seemed to go out of his way to deny the possibility of any behavioural or individual factor in the causation of poverty. But what seems apparent from other writings is that the inaugural lecture was something of an exception in this respect.

Debates about juvenile delinquency had earlier provided a particularly interesting forum in which to examine the interface between behaviour and structure, and Titmuss returned to this theme in the 1950s. Especially revealing was the preface that he wrote for a study of juvenile delinquency carried out in Liverpool and published in 1954. Inspired by William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943), the methodology adopted by John Barron Mays was one of participant observation, based on 80 boys who were members of the city's youth clubs. Mays, then Warden of the Liverpool University Settlement, attempted to distinguish between 'personal' and 'environmental' factors. In his view, most children who broke the law were 'delinquents' who sooner or later conformed to accepted social standards, while 'criminals' were emotionally insecure and refused to conform. Delinquent behaviour was thus merely one aspect of group life, and Mays asked 'is there in fact a sub-cultural group existing within the wider culture which is more complacent towards breaking the law and more tolerant of proscribed behaviour?' (1954: 83). This reflected Foote Whyte's work, but also appeared to anticipate Hyman Rodman's 'value stretch' (1963). Mays argued it was in the interaction of environmental and individual psychological factors that the delinquency of any particular boy was to be understood. He concluded that juvenile delinquency was merely part of the behaviour pattern of underprivileged neighbourhoods in big cities that had long been characterised by poverty, casual employment and bad housing (1954: 147). However in his recommendations, Mays also focused on efforts to help children and parents to 'carry out their duties', such as improved contact with youth clubs, marriage preparation for young people, and football matches organised by social workers (1954: 161–7).

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In his preface, Titmuss agreed that what was necessary was not only to understand the life of individual boys, but their lives in terms of their friends, family, and community. For most of the boys, behaviour was not so much an indication of individual maladjustment, as part of adjusting to a sub-culture that was at odds with the culture of society as a whole. In this, he acknowledged the influence on Mays of Foote Whyte, where the problem of Cornerville had not been 'lack of organisation but failure of its own social organisation to mesh with the structure of the society around it' (1943: 273–4). But Titmuss's explanation for the causes of juvenile delinquency was striking, since he wrote that 'out of a long history of poverty, neglect and exploitation, culturally transmitted from generation to generation, there has accumulated a tradition of delinquent behaviour' (1954: v). His interpretation of the causes of juvenile delinquency did stress the role of structural factors, and he was concerned to argue that the focus should be on the group, rather than the individual. Nevertheless he conceded that neglect and exploitation were also important, and his mention of cultural transmission between generations, coupled with his endorsement of Mays' emphasis on services to support parents, comes remarkably close to the 'cycle of deprivation' thesis of the 1970s. Once again, it suggests that Deacon and Mann are incorrect in suggesting that to Titmuss, mention of a 'cycle of deprivation' would have been an 'irrelevance or worse' (1999: 418). On this evidence, he might very well have become involved in Sir Keith's initiative, had he lived to see it.

Foote Whyte crops up again in a paper given in August 1956, where Titmuss explored the impact of industrialisation on the family in Western Europe, Britain, and the USA. Titmuss suggested that the way children were socialised within families was of critical importance to the 'health' of societies, and it was the family that was the 'central mechanism' for the transmission of culture (1958b: 107). If people had had stable childhoods then they might be able to stand the pressures of industrial change. But their children or grandchildren, 'reared in an unstable culture by parents without a sure sense of direction or purpose' would be more likely to show the psychological effects of industrialisation. Many of these effects were long term, and Titmuss claimed social workers spent much of their time coping with families 'disabled and deformed' by poor housing conditions (1958b: 109). In reading studies of industrialisation, Titmuss had been struck by the differences in the 'norms of behaviour' expected from factory workers, and in their lives outside work, in relation to concepts such as stability, status and rewards and initiative. Thus if industrialisation led to feelings of personal dissatisfaction or 'a dispossession of personality', these could become family and community problems (1958b: 116). These problems could neither be solved by industry nor the family, argued Titmuss, but by the stabilising, preventive, and protective roles of the social services. One of Titmuss's sources was a collection edited by Foote Whyte, then Associate Professor of Sociology at Chicago, that summarised the

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work of the Committee on Human Relations in Industry, set up in 1943 and chaired by W. Lloyd Warner. Allison Davis, for example, had argued that the behaviour of 'underprivileged' workers was a response to their socio-economic and cultural environment (1946: 104). In seeking to shift the discussion from habits viewed as 'innate', to characteristics that might be realistic and rational in a particular environment, Davis was making a similar journey to Titmuss.

What has also not previously been realised is that Titmuss explored 'sources of social need' in a book manuscript written over a four-year period (1952–56), but which was never published. In the proposed chapter 4, 'The Growth of Dependency', Titmuss argued that dependency could arise through economic factors such as unemployment, or by others that were 'culturally-imposed'. But most 'social dependencies' were a combination of both. Titmuss wrote that 'the vast majority of social dependencies are, however, inter-related as to cause whether it stems predominantly from the characteristics of the person, the situation or both simultaneously'.[9] He argued that as standards rose, and became more discriminatory and demanding, the more intolerant society became of its 'ineffectives'. These included older people, 'problem families', delinquents, psychotics, and the 'feeble-minded' who were variously retired, segregated, punished, and institutionalised. As the dependencies of these groups were emphasised and their employment opportunities restricted, needs were created. It was the task of the social services to meet these needs.[10] Titmuss argued that for the benefit of society as a whole, and as part of the price of scientific and technological advance, more 'social ineffectives' or 'rejected people' were being created. This was either because they were 'ineffectives in fact', or because they felt and behaved like rejected people. He concluded that 'though not all are or will become economically dependant people many of them with a permanent, irreversible physical or mental disability will be along with their families'.[11] Thus Titmuss seemed to be making a distinction here between people who actually were 'ineffectives', and those who behaved like this because they had become stigmatised. He certainly agreed that dependencies were created both by 'individual characteristics' and by 'the situation'. Titmuss continued to develop his ideas on 'dependency' in the early 1960s, as we shall see in the following section.

Alan Deacon has distinguished between the 'Titmuss paradigm' and the 'quasi-Titmuss paradigm', where he argues it was the latter that paid little attention to how far people's behaviour and activities represented some form of choice or agency (2002: 14). Because of the importance he attached to altruism, Titmuss did discuss agency, and did write about the ways welfare could shape attitudes and values. Yet at the same time Deacon suggests that Titmuss either 'fiercely rejected' any attempt to explain poverty in terms of the failings or weaknesses of the poor themselves, or simply did not dwell much on issues of behaviour – by the late 1960s these analyses were 'irrelevant' and 'did not merit

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further enquiry' (2002: 14, 22). There seems to be an important gap between what Titmuss thought and what he wrote. Even so, it is difficult to find support for the fierce rejection or irrelevance arguments in light of the evidence cited here. On the issue of juvenile delinquency, Titmuss can be seen to move between the Bowlby position that the key issue was separation from parents, and the Mays argument that structural factors were more significant. Similarly in *Problems of Social Policy*, and on such issues as bedwetting and head lice, Titmuss can be seen to be developing an adaptive interpretation of how people's behaviour might be moulded by the structural characteristics of the environment in which they found themselves. He continued to distinguish between the 'social problem group' and the 'problem family', but nonetheless approved of social casework. Furthermore in the unpublished manuscript, Titmuss begins to confront directly the question of the extent to which dependency stemmed from economic circumstances or personal inadequacy. Thus, rather than denying or ignoring these questions, Titmuss actively grappled with them, seeking to move to a position that viewed behaviour in a wider context. Here Titmuss's view of human nature was less optimistic than has previously been suggested, and should therefore have been less vulnerable to conservative criticism, had it been better publicised.

Titmuss, Dependency, and the Moynihan report

The final period has usually been viewed in terms of Titmuss's support for universal services as influenced by his thinking on stigma. As Mike Miller and Paul Wilding have argued, Titmuss was concerned that services targeted at vulnerable people tended to stigmatise those that received them (Miller, 1987: 13; Wilding, 1995: 155–6). In April 1967, Titmuss provided some insights into his emphasis on universal services. He argued services should be made available in ways that did not 'involve users in any humiliating loss of status, dignity or self-respect. There should be no sense of inferiority, pauperism, shame or stigma in the use of a publicly funded service; no attribution that one was being or becoming a "public burden"' (1968: 129). On another occasion, relating the concept of 'burden' to welfare, he argued that 'if men are treated as a burden to others – if this is the role expected of them – then, in time, they will behave as a burden' (1968: 26). In his final (posthumous) book, Titmuss again outlined his view of 'institutional stigmatising', following on from Goffman's concept of 'spoiled identity' (Abel-Smith and Titmuss, 1974: 44–5). Writing of stigma, Titmuss argued 'if men and women come to think of (and feel) themselves as inferior persons, subordinated persons, then in part they stigmatise themselves, and in part they are reflecting what other people think or say about them' (Abel-Smith and Titmuss, 1974: 44).

The final period also provides clear evidence of Titmuss's belief in altruism and his optimism in human nature. Indeed it has been suggested by some

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commentators that the only time that he considered issues of agency was in discussing altruism in the context of voluntary blood donation systems (Williams, Popay and Oakley, 1999: 11). In *The Gift Relationship*, Titmuss argued that the type 'H' voluntary community donor was characterised by altruism, writing that 'these are acts of free will; of the exercise of choice; of conscience without shame' (1970: 89). He suggested that voluntary blood donor systems represented a democratisation of fellowship relationships, writing 'if it is accepted that man has a social and a biological need to help to deny him opportunities to express this need is to deny him the freedom to enter into gift relationships' (1970: 243). And Titmuss argued that the private blood market in the United States repressed altruism, eroded a sense of community, lowered scientific standards, limited personal and professional freedom, sanctioned profit making in laboratories, and increased the danger of unethical behaviour. Overall, it resulted in a situation where blood was supplied by low-income groups (1970: 245–6). It is this belief in human nature that arguably created the gap that was to be exploited by conservative writers in the 1980s.

Nevertheless the argument that by the 1960s, Titmuss ignored behaviour also seems flawed. In a paper given at Brandeis University in 1962, for example, Titmuss suggested that dependency could have 'internal' causes; could be associated with the wider family; could be linked to the 'social good'; or could be imposed by external 'social disservices'.[12] In distinguishing between 'internal' and 'external' causes, this clearly drew on the unpublished book manuscript of some years earlier. Some of his themes were developed by Martin Rein, though in a way that Titmuss was clearly unhappy about.[13] Rein argued that 'some critics believe that we are in danger of producing in the future a social underclass, displaced victims of a society which no longer requires their labor and rejects them as useless' (1970: 86). Along with Gunnar Myrdal, Titmuss was also one of the first to use the term 'underclass' in the modern period (Myrdal, 1963: 19). Titmuss noted that the Beveridge principle of universality could not by itself solve the problems of the 'underclass', the fifth or quarter of the population who were badly educated, poorly housed, inadequately fed, and who had greater need of medical services. Titmuss observed that technological change and the raising of entry barriers, known in the USA as 'credentialism', was creating 'a permanent underclass of deprived citizens, uneducated, unattached and alternating between apathetic resignation and frustrated violence' (1965: 357, 363). Titmuss seemed to be using the phrase 'underclass' both in the structural sense implied by Myrdal, but also in terms of the behavioural usage that was to become increasingly dominant from the early 1980s. Since people were uneducated, they had been left behind by technological change and had become unattached, but they were also apathetic, resigned, and potentially violent. What was surprising was that Titmuss seemed to believe that this was a permanent group that could not be retrained or re-educated.

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But, while Titmuss had engaged with debates about 'problem families' in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he showed no inclination to get involved with the 1960s equivalent 'underclass' concept – the notion of the 'culture of poverty'. The anthropologist Oscar Lewis had first elaborated the idea of a 'culture of poverty' in the late 1950s, based on fieldwork in Mexico, and was subsequently to test it out in Puerto Rico (Rigdon, 1988: 51–86). In the classic version, Lewis was to argue that the 'culture of poverty' was both an adaptation and reaction of the poor to their marginal position in capitalist societies. But it was also passed down from generation to generation because of its effect on the children. Moreover it was associated with various traits that included 'a strong present-time orientation with relatively little ability to defer gratification and to plan for the future, a sense of resignation and fatalism, a widespread belief in male superiority, and a high tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts' (Lewis, 1967: xliv). The debates about the 'culture of poverty' are extensive, and have been covered by other writers. What is interesting is that, unusually, Titmuss did not intervene. The Titmuss papers show that he was aware, for example, of the work of Peter Marris, formerly of the Institute of Community Studies, who had argued that attempts at urban renewal were being frustrated by what he called the 'culture of slums'.[14] This seems to be a case of Titmuss ignoring, if not actively dismissing, a behavioural interpretation of poverty and deprivation.

In his apparent rejection of the idea of the 'culture of poverty', Titmuss seemed to be at one with the British social policy community. On the other hand, Titmuss did intervene in the debates about the Moynihan Report (1965). The background to the Moynihan Report and the furore it created has been well-covered (Rainwater and Yancey, 1967). William Julius Wilson has suggested that the storm that followed the publication of the Report deterred liberal scholars from studying the problems of the inner cities for decades (Wilson, 1991: 4). As Assistant Secretary of Labor, and Director of the Office of Policy Planning and Research, Daniel Patrick Moynihan produced his report on the Negro family, originally for internal use. Moynihan argued that there was much evidence to suggest that 'Negro social structure, in particular the Negro family, battered and harassed by discrimination, injustice, and uprooting, is in the deepest trouble' (1965: 3–14). A quarter of urban Negro marriages were dissolved, one in four Negro births were illegitimate, and a quarter of Negro families were headed by females. At the centre of the 'tangle of pathology' was the weakness of family structure. This was 'the principal source of most of the aberrant, inadequate, or anti-social behaviour that did not establish, but now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation' (1965: 30–45). While the report argued that 'distortions' were structural, in much of its analysis it reflected the earlier interpretation of E. Franklin Frazier, and Kenneth Clark's book *Dark Ghetto*. The response has been well documented (Rainwater and Yancey, 1967: 462; Valentine, 1968: 31–5).

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The point here is to show that Titmuss was sympathetic to the Moynihan Report. Titmuss had met Moynihan in London in the summer of 1964. The next contact was in November 1965, when Moynihan sent Titmuss a copy of his report. Titmuss told Moynihan his report on the Negro family was 'one of the most impressive pieces of documentary writing I have come across for years'. He wrote 'You have a gift for combining hard statistical facts, a strong sense of history, and a human understanding of the people you are writing about'.[15] Titmuss (who was on the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants) observed that Britain was struggling with similar problems, though their scale and nature was different to the USA. There was not the same sense of 'abject helplessness'; family life was more stable; and unemployment was not a problem if thought of in terms of unskilled jobs. Titmuss did think there were similarities in national attitudes.[16] In fact, Titmuss sympathised with Moynihan about the hostile reception his report received. Writing in January 1966, he wrote 'it is a tragic business and I sympathise with you profoundly . . . I sincerely hope that the leaders of our "civil rights movement" will be a little more responsible'.[17]

Alan Deacon has argued a focus upon personal responsibility and reciprocity ran directly counter to the Titmuss paradigm which dominated academic thinking about social policy for much of the post-war period. In that respect the row over Sir Keith Joseph's 'cycle of deprivation' in the early 1970s seems similar to the void created by the publication of the Moynihan Report in the USA (Deacon, 2000: 9). But the evidence of a link between Titmuss and the Moynihan Report undermines this argument. If Titmuss was so opposed to personal responsibility and reciprocity, why did he appear to be congratulating Moynihan on his report, and commiserating with him on the reception that it received? Titmuss would have been impressed with Moynihan's advocacy of European style family allowances, and emphasis on employment for black men. But we would expect him to have baulked at the reference to the 'tangle of pathology' and the notion of a 'cycle of poverty and disadvantage'. Titmuss's correspondence with Moynihan is surprising, and at the very least indicates that Deacon's portrayal of the debate over the Moynihan Report as analogous to that over the 'cycle of deprivation' requires some qualification. It suggests further that the idea of a 'Titmuss paradigm' may be more misleading than helpful; the Moynihan Report may not mark a turning point as has been suggested; and that the 'void' argument may mask other continuities in both Britain and the USA.

Finally, there are hints in the later lectures that Titmuss began to doubt his earlier visions of the welfare state, and suspect that some service users could be troublesome. In April 1967, Titmuss noted that modern society was finding it increasingly difficult to identify the 'causal agent or agencies' of diswelfare, and it was because of this that social services were necessary. He argued that 'non-discriminating universalist services are in part the consequence of unidentifiable

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causality' (1968: 134). Titmuss noted that the next question was whether it was possible to distinguish between 'faults in the individual' – moral, psychological, or social – and the 'faults of society'. But this question remained unanswered. The real challenge identified was to develop 'socially acceptable selective services aiming to discriminate positively, with the minimum risk of stigma, in favour of those whose needs are greatest' (1968: 135). Thus Titmuss raised, but left unanswered, the question of whether it was possible to distinguish between 'faults in the individual' and the 'faults of society'. In his last book, Titmuss conceded that poorer people were resorting to tax avoidance and evasion, including 'moonlighting', converting cash income into benefits in kind, and undisclosed earnings, though in this they were simply emulating the behaviour of the better-off (Abel Smith and Titmuss, 1974: 127–8). Therefore Titmuss's acknowledgements that there could be 'faults in the individual', and poor people might act in a self-interested way, sit oddly with the argument that his neglect of agency left his analysis vulnerable to right-wing commentators in the 1980s.

Conclusion

This article has been concerned with re-examining the approach of Richard Titmuss to behaviour, structure, and poverty in the light of an emerging interpretation of both the 'Titmuss paradigm' and social administration in the post-war period. It is clear that some caution is necessary. Titmuss was unsystematic in his thinking, and inconsistent in his approach to issues of behaviour. What we might call the vocabulary of poverty needs careful interpretation. And Titmuss occupied a number of different though not necessarily exclusive positions, as would be inevitable in the case of any individual over a 30-year period. But the evidence presented here suggests some qualifications to the interpretation outlined by earlier writers, and indicates that their portrayal of Titmuss needs to be substantially revised. What is obvious is the importance of locating Titmuss's thinking within its proper historical context. Titmuss was clearly interested in behaviour over and above his belief in altruism. It seems that what he was essentially trying to do was to make others aware of the broader context in which human behaviour had to be analysed. Titmuss made serious efforts to shift the discussion from individualist and behavioural explanations of poverty, taking the Tawney and Mannheim positions, that behaviour was a factor in the causes of poverty, but by no means the only one. This was what he seemed to be attempting to do in the inaugural lecture. He was doing this against an ideological background in which ideas of social pathology remained important. Older ideas of a deserving or undeserving poor, and of the importance of character, had been replaced in the 1950s by a psychoanalytical approach, which was different in origin and methodology, but similarly individualist in its focus on parents and families. Thus an approach that

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has been viewed as vulnerable to the approach of conservative commentators in the 1980s, was in itself a reaction to an earlier and then still current behavioural analysis.

What then, are the implications of this analysis for Titmuss's reputation as a seminal thinker on social policy issues? Does this evidence alter, in subtle but important ways, the way that we see him? Titmuss is much more cited than read, and a close reading of even well-known books such as *Problems of Social Policy* suggest a more nuanced position than previous writers have realised. This is supported by the evidence of other less well-known writings, minor pieces, and by the Titmuss papers and other archival evidence. If Titmuss did not confront issues of behaviour, structure, and poverty directly head-on as much as he might have done, he was clearly aware of the importance of such debates. However, while he wrestled with these issues, he failed to resolve them, and seemed unable to move to a convincing position that combined behavioural and structural causes of poverty, and addressed agency. This was because he tended to equate ideas of agency with an interpretation of poverty that linked it to dysfunctional behaviour, and downplayed the role of structural factors. Thus, if Titmuss did more than anyone else to create a paradigm, it was one that he ultimately seemed constrained by. Even so, it is arguable that his less well-known writing is relevant to recent thinking, and to the search for a new research paradigm that might bridge the dichotomy between agency and structure. What is clear is that debates about behaviour, structure, and poverty have been marked as much by continuity as by change.

Notes

The Titmuss papers are those in the possession of Ann Oakley (AO), and those at the British Library of Political and Economic Science (LSE).

1 Titmuss papers (AO), box file '1942–48', R. M. Titmuss to H. F. Chambers, 9/11/42.
2 Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, The Wellcome Institute, London, SA/EUG, L58, minutes of the Problem Families Committee, 18/7/47.
3 Ibid., SA/EUG D169, Problem Families Committee, Eugenics Society, 'Problem Families: Proposed Pilot Inquiries', 11/47, p. 1.
4 Ibid., SA/EUG L58, minutes of the Problem Families Committee, 10/10/47.
5 Titmuss papers (LSE), 4/545, Richard Titmuss to C. P. Blacker, 14/11/50.
6 Ibid., Richard Titmuss to C. P. Blacker, 3/1/52.
7 Titmuss papers (LSE), 2/130, cutting from Richard Titmuss, 'The family in the welfare state', *Nursing Times*, 31/5/52, p. 537.
8 Titmuss papers (LSE), 2/154, R. M. Titmuss to Dame Enid Russell-Smith, 6/12/54.
9 Titmuss papers (AO), R. M. Titmuss, 'Sources of Social Need', unpublished manuscript, 1952–6, pp. 4, 18–19.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Titmuss papers (LSE), 4/511, R. M. Titmuss, 'Changing characteristics of dependency in modern society', 5/62.

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13 Titmuss papers (AO), R. M. Titmuss to Katherine D. Lower, 22/12/64.
14 Titmuss papers (LSE), 4/511, Peter Marris, 'A Report on Urban Renewal', 1962.
15 Titmuss papers (AO), '1966' box, R. M. Titmuss to Daniel P. Moynihan, 22/11/65.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., R. M. Titmuss to Daniel P. Moynihan, 13/1/66.

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