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Legacies of Altruism: Richard Titmuss, Marie Meinhardt, and Health Policy Research in the 1940s

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During the Second World War, a German economist, Marie Dessauer, later Marie Meinhardt, worked with the British welfare state scholar and policy analyst Richard Titmuss on pioneering studies of social factors and health. Titmuss is remembered today for his role in establishing social policy as an academic discipline, and for his internationally-renowned works on welfare, health and public policy. Meinhardt's career as an economist has been largely forgotten. This was an unusual alliance with far-reaching consequences, as Meinhardt later bequeathed a large sum of money to the London School of Economics, where Titmuss worked, to help fund social policy students and research. This article documents the story of the Titmuss-Meinhardt collaboration, locating it in the context of Titmuss's last and probably best-known work, The Gift Relationship, which analyses the function of altruistic giving in promoting healthy and democratic social relations.

Keywords: Social policy, economics, health, donation, inequalities.

Richard Titmuss's *The Gift Relationship*, published in 1970, set the stage for many subsequent discussions about the role of altruism in social policy. His distinguished career in the field of social policy and welfare was established in the late 1930s and early 1940s, through original research and publications relating to health and population statistics. This work brought him into contact with a German economist, Marie Dessauer, later Marie Meinhardt, who, as a refugee from the Nazis, was living in Britain and working at the London School of Economics (LSE). Meinhardt worked with Titmuss on German mortality and morbidity statistics and on inequalities and health; he and his family befriended her and helped with her naturalisation as a British citizen. This gift of help was remembered by Meinhardt many years later. When she and her husband died in Switzerland, a large sum of money was bequeathed to LSE as a mark of her appreciation. The Titmuss-Meinhardt Fund was formally established in 1994 to provide financial help for social policy students and research at LSE, a role it continues to perform today.

This article tells the story of an unusual link with far-reaching consequences between a British welfare researcher and a German economist which was forged during the difficult political times of the Second World War. The article's purpose is to fill in the historical record, particularly of Marie Meinhardt's little-known work in economics, both in Germany and in Britain, and to comment on the theme of time in charting the role of altruism in social relations. It thus has a double narrative: to recover the record of one woman's contribution to public policy research in the period during and after the Second World War, and to locate the Meinhardt-Titmuss relationship in the context of theoretical work on altruism and social relations. The attempt to construct this narrative has struggled

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with the problem of incomplete and missing archives, particularly with respect to Marie Meinhardt's employment at LSE as one of a group of women researchers whose positions as support workers for senior male academics were tenuous and poorly recorded.

Richard Titmuss

Richard Titmuss played an important role in establishing the study of social policy as an academic discipline. He was born to a farming family in 1907, worked at first in the insurance industry and then, through the study of population health and public policy, was appointed to write a groundbreaking official history of wartime social policy, *Problems of Social Policy* (Titmuss, 1950). During the period of its research and writing, he co-directed a social medicine research unit and undertook, with his colleague Jerry Morris, pioneering analyses of social class inequalities and health (Morris and Titmuss, 1942, 1944a, 1944b). Titmuss moved to a professorship at LSE in 1950, leading the Department of Social Administration there until his death in 1973. This was a remarkable appointment, given Titmuss's lack of academic qualifications and his unfamiliarity with the university world, and it was an important one, in terms of how social policy, social work, and social science all developed their own trajectories in the 1950s and beyond. At LSE he combined teaching with administration, involvement in key government committees, policy activism, and the production of important papers and books, most notably *Essays on the Welfare State* (Titmuss, 1958), *Income Distribution and Social Change* (Titmuss, 1962) and *Commitment to Welfare* (Titmuss, 1968). His last book, published three years before he died, was a study of the economics and ethics of blood donation systems in Britain and the USA. *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* (Titmuss, 1970) quickly came to be regarded as a classic exposition of anti-market social theory. In it, Titmuss used the example of blood donation to document the wastefully inefficient and damaging effects of 'care' systems based on financial profit. His central observation was that exchanges motivated by altruism encourage both healthy bodies and healthy social relations. Titmuss's work has been the subject of many commentaries (see e.g. Glennerster, 2014; Riesman, 1977); a full-length biography will be published soon (Stewart, forthcoming).

Marie Meinhardt

Marie Meinhardt was born Marie Dessauer in Bamberg, Germany, in 1901 to a prominent Jewish family.[1] The Dessauers were related to the international banking dynasty of the Wassermanns, which also originated in Bamberg (Loval, 2010). Both families were victims of the wholesale destruction inflicted on Bamberg by the Nazi regime in the 1930s (Mistele, 1995); Marie Dessauer's parents were both murdered in the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942. Her education in Germany had included classes in the history of commerce, commercial law, social studies and, politics, all of which were unusual for a woman of her generation. She went on to work as a private secretary for several German banks, and then in 1925, and again in 1928, she lived with relatives in London and was employed at Jacob Wassermann's merchant bank in the City. In 1928–9, she took courses in banking theory and history, principles of economics, financing of industry and political and social theory at LSE. Returning to Germany, she worked as an Assistant in the Chamber of Commerce in Frankfurt, where she was responsible for

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economic reports and statistics. She studied law in Paris and took a commercial diploma in Frankfurt, where in 1933 she also gained a PhD focusing on English banking history: *The Big Five: On the Characteristics of English Deposit Banks* (Dessauer, 1933). Her publications include her PhD and a number of articles on economic subjects (Dessauer, 1935; Dessauer, 1940, Dessauer-Meinhardt, 1940). Forced by the Nazis to leave her job in Frankfurt, Dessauer sought refuge in London in 1934, working for William Beveridge, the Director of LSE, on his history of prices and wages (Beveridge, 1939). From the summer of 1937 until August 1941 records show that she was employed as a senior research assistant in LSE's Economic Research Division, which was headed by the monetary economist and political philosopher F. A. Hayek. LSE provided homes for a number of German intellectual refugees, including another female economist called Kaethe Liepmann, who published on housing policy and home-workplace relations (Liepmann, 1937, 1944).

In her capacity as an employee of LSE's Economic Research Division, Dessauer undertook research on English economic statistics and the measurement of national income for a number of LSE economists, including Hayek, Lionel Robbins, and A. L. Bowley, as well as producing publications of her own. She also gave German lessons to the American banker David Rockefeller, who was at LSE, grappling with German economics for his PhD, and she did some work for the American economist A. D. Gayer, an adviser to the US Government in the 1930s and the author of a much-quoted work on growth and economic fluctuations (Gayer, 1953). The LSE connection was helpful in other ways: Hayek wrote a reference for her recommending her as a proficient teacher of commercial German (Hayek, 1937) and, much more importantly, Walter Adams, Secretary, later Director, of LSE, recommended her registration in October 1939 as a non-enemy alien (Adams, 1939). Probably relevant here was Beveridge's own involvement in aiding refugees through the Academic Assistance Committee, later the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning.[2] Marie Dessauer married a lawyer, Peter Meinhardt, in 1940, and from then on was known as Marie Dessauer-Meinhardt or Marie Meinhardt. When LSE was evacuated to Cambridge during the War, Meinhardt did not follow, and this was when she started to work with Richard Titmuss.

Richard Titmuss and Marie Meinhardt's work during the Second World War

Titmuss and Meinhardt met each other in 1941 through Walter Adams. Their first project together was to collect and supply statistics on German health to the Ministry of Economic Warfare. This body, established in 1938, built on the work of industrial intelligence specialists, who had for some years been collecting and pooling information relevant to foreign military potential (Young, 1976). Based after 1942 in the BBC's Bush House in London, the Ministry of Economic Warfare was responsible for the attempt to lower German morale by generating and transmitting anti-Nazi material in German in such a way that German people would believe it came from inside Germany.

Since the surviving documents are both paltry and sketchy, it is unclear whether it was Titmuss or Meinhardt who initiated their input to this exercise of demonstrating the ineffectiveness of Nazi social policy. Titmuss had been collecting German 'vital' statistics (statistics relating to birth, death and disease rates) for some time. He was publishing articles composed of a mixture of statistics and rhetoric arguing that Hitler's policy of increasing the German birth-rate and maintaining health was failing dismally (see e.g. Titmuss, 1939, 1942a). However, his work on German statistics was limited by his not

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knowing the language. Meinhardt could have made the introduction to the Ministry of Economic Warfare herself, since a major player in the strategy of 'black propaganda' aimed at undermining German morale was Leonard Ingrams (a well-known banker at the New York Chemical Bank, who must have been familiar to the Dessauer/Wassermann banking family). Furthermore, the Ministry of Economic Warfare employed a number of women of a similar age to Meinhardt, who were, like her, Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany.[3]

Whoever's suggestion it was, Richard Titmuss went to see Leonard Ingrams in September, 1941, and it was consequently agreed that, under Titmuss's direction, 'certain lines of enquiry should be undertaken' in the field of German vital statistics which could 'make a valuable contribution to propaganda' (Ingrams, 1941). The subjects of the enquiry covered rickets, dysentery and tuberculosis in Germany, population figures, obituary notices in German newspapers, and numbers of married couples (considered relevant to birth-rate calculations). For all this, Meinhardt's systematic searching and analysis of official documents in German was required. In December, 1941, Titmuss sent Ingrams the first results of their work, a report on tuberculosis in Germany in the years 1932 to 1941. This was followed by one on typhus in Germany, submitted to *The News Chronicle* several months later. Sometime in 1942 Meinhardt also took on, at Titmuss's suggestion, some work for Philip D'Arcy Hart, a doctor who was working on lung diseases for the Medical Research Council (Burgen, 2010). Hart was instrumental in establishing the subject of social medicine. He set up a Committee for the Study of Social Medicine in 1939, which both Titmuss and Meinhardt attended (Watts, 2001).

The second main project of the Titmuss-Meinhardt collaboration directly related to this new discipline of social medicine. Meinhardt worked as an 'assistant' for multiple enquiries conducted by Titmuss and his colleague, the doctor and epidemiologist Jerry Morris, which led to a series of original papers mapping the associations between social class and particular diseases. Morris and Titmuss's analyses of social factors in juvenile rheumatism, rheumatic heart disease, and peptic ulcer, were hailed as among the first to use novel techniques for documenting social inequalities and health in the new territory of social medicine (Morris and Titmuss, 1942, 1944a, 1944b). Meinhardt extracted and analysed data from official reports for these studies. Titmuss and Morris's extensive correspondence makes clear that they relied heavily on her. Her indispensability held up their work when in 1943 she sadly had to take time off to recover from the premature birth of a child who died after a few hours: 'there isn't anyone else and there is a lot she could do', complained Morris to Titmuss (Morris, 1943). Meinhardt was back in the saddle a few months later: ''I am now getting Meinhardt to work out fertility rates, etc.,' wrote Titmuss to Morris, 'I hope we shall then be able to say whether changes in marriage 1931–39 affect the results at all significantly . . . I will send you all the results as soon as they are ready . . . I shall then read the work as a joint paper to the Royal Commission and we will see that the stuff is published somewhere' (Titmuss, 1944).

Meinhardt continued to work on social medicine until at least early 1945. By then she and her husband had moved for his work to Bournemouth, where she became involved in new research on lead poisoning with an engineer called Felix Singer. In their later years the Meinhardts lived in Switzerland. Marie helped her husband with his legal publications, but she did not forget her original work on banking history, following this up with publications in German in the 1960s (Dessauer-Meinhardt, 1965, 1967).

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The importance of Marie Meinhardt as an economist

Marie Dessauer-Meinhardt is one of many women economists whose contributions to the theory, practice and history of economics have been largely forgotten (see Dimand *et al.*, 2000; Groenewegen and King, 1994). In this respect she sits alongside the women economic historians whose intellectual work and connections in the first decades of the twentieth century are very little remembered (Berg, 1992). In Kirsten Madden's study of female contributors to economic thought between 1900 and 1940, Marie Dessauer-Meinhardt appears as one of 1,160 names. She features as one out of 63 women economists who earned their PhDs before 1941 and who authored five or more works. Interestingly, Madden notes that women economists' entry into the discipline in this period often required the patronage of a male economist, and that it was not uncommon for the women to be more highly qualified than their patrons (Madden, 2002). Meinhardt's major work on the development of English banks provides an unrivalled history of how the big five (Barclays, Lloyds, the Midland (now HSBC), the National Provincial Bank and Westminster Bank (now merged as NatWest)) competed successfully with private banks and the Bank of England to establish in 1918 a robust system of joint-stock banking. This proved much more resistant to insolvencies and bank runs in the 1920s and 1930s than the systems operating in both Germany and the USA (Trautwein, 2000). Meinhardt's thesis pointed out some of the underlying structural connections between banking practice and political systems: for instance, that the German banking system in the 1930s was particularly open to the authoritarian influence of the government. Her paper on the German Banking Act of 1934 dissected the strategic use of new regulations to maintain the appearance of a private banking system while ceding all effective control to the State (Dessauer, 1935). Her work on banking history is still considered relevant to the analysis of banking practices today.

There is no doubt that Meinhardt's career as a skilled economic researcher and analyst was permanently interrupted by the persecution of the Jewish community in Hitler's Germany. While she found a temporary home at LSE, which had a reputation for being relatively open to women scholars at the time, she had to contend with the inbred misogyny of the economic profession (Dimand, 1999; Groenewegen and King, 1994). She struggled to represent herself to them as on equal terms as a professional economist, sending Robbins and Beveridge copies of her article on the German Bank Act, for example, and Beveridge a copy of her paper on unemployment records 1848–59. Beveridge himself referred to Meinhardt's paper on unemployment records in an article on the trade cycle (Beveridge, 1940), but for the most part Meinhardt's labours for LSE economists were not recognized in their publications.

The same is true of her collaboration with Richard Titmuss and the emerging community of social medicine researchers. She is there in the correspondence, and in the minutes of meetings, which signal the very important part she played in building up the statistical basis of the arguments Titmuss and his collaborators constructed about the role of social factors in disease and mortality. Yet she does not appear as an author, or even as an acknowledged research 'assistant'. Titmuss's description above, of how he and Morris used Meinhardt's work on fertility, is typical of their approach, which was doubtless standard for the time. It speaks to a general history of women's assigned role in the production of academic knowledge (see e.g. Morley, 1994; Valian, 2004). Meinhardt's expertise with statistics, and all kinds of quantitative analysis, was invaluable

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to Titmuss, Morris, Hart and other practitioners of a new discipline. It is also possible that she introduced Titmuss to the work of German social medicine pioneers, who developed the technique he used of calculating the excess mortality of one occupational group compared to another (see Oakley, 1997; Rosen, 1948).

Reciprocal gifts

It is equally evident that, whatever Meinhardt felt about the formal acknowledgement of her activities in social medicine, she was deeply appreciative of the chance Titmuss gave her to be engaged in such interesting and trail-blazing work. The Meinhardts and the Titmusses stayed in touch for almost thirty years after the professional connection ended. Marie Meinhardt's letter of condolence to Titmuss's widow, written a few days after his death in April 1973, records her enduring debt to him: she recalls her first meeting with him, how much she had enjoyed working with him, how stimulating and personally supportive of her he had been (Meinhardt, 1973). One never-forgotten debt was the help he gave both her and her husband with their naturalisation as British citizens in 1946. Titmuss's official reference, which survives in the files, testified to the Meinhardts' 'integrity and stability of character', noting that they had 'assimilated much of the British way of life' and should prove 'loyal and grateful citizens' (Titmuss, 1946). His support for her is evident, too, in the rather tortuous correspondence that took place a few years earlier about the matter of Meinhardt's salary. The Ministry of Economic Warfare wanted the Emergency Society for German Scholars in Exile (a body set up in 1933 and based in London from 1936) to pay her for her statistical and translating work. The Society did eventually offer 30 shillings a week but Titmuss regarded this as 'quite inadequate, quite apart from Dr. Meinhardt's academic qualifications'. He held out for the Treasury paying Meinhardt at least twice this sum, citing the more than 10,000 statistics she had assembled and was busy analysing (Titmuss, 1942b).

Meinhardt died in 1985 and her husband in 1993, at which point the terms of Marie's will came into operation. A sizeable bequest was made to LSE, consisting of the value of a Pissarro painting and half the money obtained from selling the Meinhardts' house in Switzerland. The first payment, of £183,707, reached LSE in 1993. A further £68,293 was added in December 1995. A Titmuss Memorial Fund had been set up after Richard Titmuss died (the Meinhardts had contributed to it), but the Fund capital was small, and it had been used solely for hardship payments to help students in need.[4] The Meinhardt legacy entirely changed its capacity. The Fund was formally converted into the Titmuss-Meinhardt Fund in 1994: the first meeting of the newly constituted Fund Management Committee was held in that year, and regular meetings have taken place ever since.

The work of the Titmuss-Meinhardt Fund

In the early years of the Titmuss-Meinhardt Fund, income from the capital was used to fund a number of studentships in the Department of Social Policy: four annual Titmuss Research Scholarships, and a three-year Titmuss-Meinhardt award specifically in the field of social medicine. Between the academic years of 1998–9 and 2016–7, a total of £787,127 has been awarded in hardship and research grants, prizes and scholarships, with the

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breakdown between the categories as follows: 23 per cent hardship, 18 per cent research, 6 per cent prizes and 53 per cent scholarships.

Hardship payments to students were much more important in the earlier years. They made up, for example, 50 per cent of grants given in 1998/9. The Fund has always aimed to offer a speedy response to emergency payment requests. The amounts given per student have varied: in the four years from May 1998, for instance, fifty-eight students received such payments, averaging £2,950 per student per year (Titmuss-Meinhardt Fund Management Committee, 2002). The reasons for the payments have fallen into many categories, most related to some unforeseen event or set of circumstances, such as family illness or unemployment reducing students' financial support, burglaries and unexpected housing difficulties. Funds have also been used to support living costs for students undertaking internships abroad. In later years, much higher tuition fees, especially for overseas students, have constituted another call on the Fund, as have economic and political instability in students' home countries. Much gratitude has been expressed for this help, often in the form of letters directly to the Fund Committee; these letters have often noted that the Fund has been the only source of assistance available (Titmuss-Meinhardt Fund Management Committee, 2006).

Research supported by the Fund has spanned many different topics: for example, a project on the health of mid-life women in low and middle income countries; voluntary and community service provision in deprived London neighbourhoods; fertility behaviours and attitudes; the fate of Children's Centres since 2010; childcare workers, policy change and working conditions; the history of women social scientists and the welfare state. Funds have also been drawn on to support the necessary editorial work for two compendia of Richard Titmuss's work, and for a new edition of his *The Gift Relationship* (Alcock *et al.*, 2001; Oakley and Barker, 2004; Oakley and Ashton, 1997).

Giving and taking

Marie Meinhardt's donation to the LSE in recognition of her debt to Richard Titmuss has, through the operation of the Titmuss-Meinhardt Fund, had multiple repercussions in supporting and encouraging social policy research and in strengthening the resources of the student community at LSE. The notion of altruism was central to Titmuss's thought. He saw it as a building block of a healthy community; in conceiving of good conduct as a generalised sense of social obligation, he placed moral behaviour at the centre of the stage that economists and other social scientists need to confront in both their theoretical and empirical work. Although the methodology of Titmuss's *The Gift Relationship* has been queried since (see e.g. Rapport and Maggs, 2002), discussions of altruism in many areas of health and welfare remain indebted to his thinking, especially as the donation of body organs and tissues and human milk have extended the territory of 'corporeal generosity' in ways he did not originally envisage (Diprose, 2002; Modi, 2006; Shaw, 2008; Weaver and Williams, 1997).

Neither Richard Titmuss nor Marie Meinhardt could have anticipated the consequences seven decades on of their wartime efforts to reveal the statistical facts hiding beneath various ideologies and (mis)representations of health and disease. This was a relationship of reciprocal giving. Theorists of altruism have, since Titmuss wrote about it, dissected the concept in various ways, pointing out, for example, that 'true' or 'pure' altruism may need to be distinguished from 'cooperative egoism' and from a

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motive of exchange (see Lindbeck and Weibull, 1988; Alessie *et al*., 2011). But what is not in doubt is that Titmuss helped Meinhardt at a time when the barriers to women's academic work were substantial, and when, as a member of Germany's Jewish community, her life, as well as her livelihood, was in peril. She provided professional services of statistical research and analysis with which he and his colleagues were able to build a new academic/scientific discipline concerned with the study of social factors and health. As noted earlier, the work of women researchers such as Meinhardt at LSE as assistants for senior male academics is not well documented, and is deserving of further research. The Titmuss-Meinhardt working relationship, formed and maintained in difficult political and social circumstances, stretched into the future with her wish to mark the significance of his help and the resource needs of the social policy and health research communities. The continuing activities of the Titmuss-Meinhardt Fund at LSE today are a significant memorial to a skilled professional economist whose work and life have been allowed to lapse from our disciplinary memory.

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Notes

1 Information on the Dessauer and Meinhardt families has kindly been provided by Doris Wasserman, who is a relative, and one of the members of the Titmuss-Meinhardt Memorial Fund.

2 Thanks to John Stewart for drawing this to my attention.

3 Elizabeth Friedländer (1903-84), a graphic designer who invented the 'Elizabeth' font and was responsible for many Penguin Book designs after the war, had worked in Frankfurt, perhaps at the same time as Meinhardt. Friedländer produced forged rubber stamps, ration books and so on, for the 'black propaganda unit'.

4 The capital value of the Titmuss Fund in July 1993 was £54,375.

5 In the reference list, AO Titmuss Papers refers to Richard Titmuss's papers held by Ann Oakley.

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