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## Charity, reform and politics

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► **To cite this version:**

Christian Topalov. Charity, reform and politics: Differential structures of charitable worlds in New York and Paris around 1900. 2015. hal-01192877v1

**HAL Id: hal-01192877**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01192877v1>**

Submitted on 3 Sep 2015 (v1), last revised 21 Sep 2015 (v2)

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TEPSIS PAPERS  
September 2015

Christian Topalov

# CHARITY, REFORM AND POLITICS

*Differential structures of charitable worlds in New York  
and Paris around 1900 (1)*

The charities that developed in the major cities of the industrialized world throughout the nineteenth century and beyond are no longer considered as anecdotal by historiography. Charitable practices consolidated or redistributed the relationships between political forces, redefined the internal hierarchies of the privileged classes, were intended to stabilize social order and control urban working classes, were matrices for the reformist public policies that came to prevail later, and created a space where middle-class women could have access to public action.

However, aside from biographies of certain leading figures or descriptions of institutions, there exists no sociography of charitable worlds. We have worked on a project aiming to produce a sociography of charities for several major cities around 1900, and have used as source material charity directories issued by “charity organizers” who intended to render charitable practices more “scientific” (2) in their respective cities.

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Keywords **Charity** **Social Reform** **Social Network Analysis** **Paris** **New York**

Electronic reference <http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/TEPSIS>

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**tepsis**

Transformation de l'Etat  
politisation des sociétés  
institution du social

In the present paper, we present the results pertaining to New York and Paris. Our sources were the *New York Charities Directory*, compiled by the Charity Organization Society, and for Paris, two distinct directories revealing two “points of view” on the charitable world: (a) the inventory compiled by Office Central des Oeuvres de Bienfaisance (OCOB), a “neutral” undertaking initiated by rallied Catholics supported by Société d’Economie Sociale and the Opportunist republican government; (b) *Manuel des Oeuvres*, published by uncompromising Catholics, heirs to viscount Armand de Melun.

Social network analysis has allowed us to produce formal representations of the descriptions found in charity directories. It rests on the hypothesis that a person’s involvement in a charity constitutes a meaningful act, all the more so as it is publicized. It is a way for that person to show that he/she supports a cause and that he/she does so along with other people: thus, one person’s affiliation to several charities can be regarded as a pertinent link between these charities, and the affiliation of two people to the same charity, as a pertinent link between these people. Thus, social network analysis makes it possible to describe the density of relations inside the network and characterize what constitutes its central core and different zones.

## NEW YORK: THE POLITICAL AND MORAL CRUSADE FOR GOOD GOVERNMENT WITHIN THE CHARITABLE WORLD

In New York, three institutions form the center of the network.

– The Federation of Churches and Christian Workers in New York City, organized in 1895, was a wide-ranging interdenominational grouping of protestant churches under the banner of the “Social Gospel” movement, a multifaceted movement advocating a public order rooted in Christian teachings. The vast literature on the movement reveals strong disagreement among historians as to its definition, cohesion, American specificity, and the motivations of the people involved. Our network approach to the issue highlights several figures with interconnected biographies: (a) Spencer Trask (1844-1909) a financier, venture capitalist and

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(1) The present research has been supported by a “mini-workshop” grant from Tepsis. The datasets have been collected thanks to funding from ANR’s Europhil Project. The results presented here have benefited from the collaboration of University of Lausanne’s Thomas David and Stéphanie Ginalski, and from the assistance of Paris 1 University’s Lucia Katz and CRH-EHESS’ Marion Rabier.

(2) See Stéphane Baciocchi, Thomas David, Lucia Katz, Anne Lhuissier, Sonja Matter and Christian Topalov, “Les mondes de la charité se décrivent eux-mêmes: Une étude des répertoires charitables au XIXe et début du XXe siècle,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 61, 3 (July-Sept. 2014): 28-66.

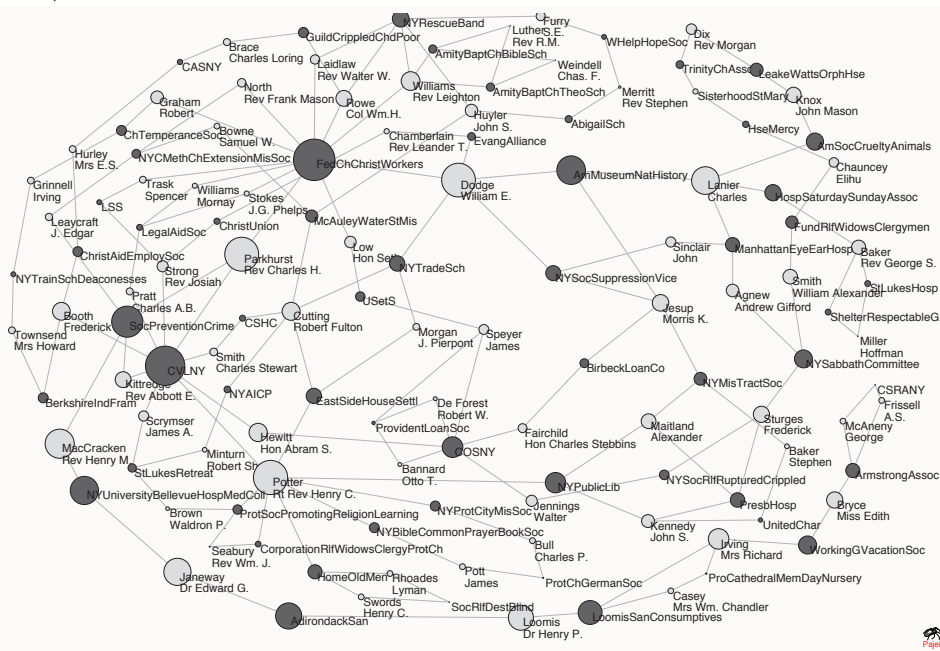
majority shareholder of the New York Times Company; (b) George Foster Peabody (1852-1938), who met Trask at the Reformed Church in Brooklyn Heights and became a partner in his investment firm; (c) Graham Phelps Stokes (1872-1960), who was born to one of New York's wealthiest families (his father, a banker and real estate developer, was one of the founders of the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art and a champion of the civil service reform), held a degree from Columbia University's medical school, and moved into a settlement house of the Lower East Side in 1902.

– The City Vigilance League of New York, organized in 1892, was committed to informing the public on the City government's administrative organization and poor management. It professed to promote the general interest over private interests and purported to be an efficient lobby in matters of municipal action. One of its major leaders was Reverend Josiah Strong (1847-1916), co-founder of the Social Gospel and secretary of the League for Social Service.

– The Society for the Prevention of Crime, incorporated in 1878, aimed “to remove the causes and sources of crime, assist in the prosecution of law breakers, disseminate information by means of the press, and influence correct legislation in favor of measures needed for the honest enforcement of law.”

The last two societies had their central offices in the United Charities Building (105 East 22d Street). The building also housed the Charity Organization Society and numerous other charities.

Institutions and actors at the center of the New York charities network (source: *New York Charities Directory*, 1900).



Note: two-mode network; dark nodes: charities; light nodes: affiliated actors (individuals only); node size is proportional to betweenness centrality (graph by Stéphanie Ginalski with Pajek).

It must be noted that the central institutions of the New York charities networks were not themselves charities, neither were they “charity organizers” (as were, for example, the Charity Organization Society or the New York Association for Improving

the Condition of the Poor). They can be mainly characterized as the instruments of a political battle waged on the morality front throughout the Progressive Era by New York's patrician elites against Tammany Hall, the corrupt Democratic Party political machine that had a stranglehold on the New York City government.

Other interconnected institutions occupy a less central position. Worthy of note are, among others, the Charity Organization Society itself, New York University (NYU), the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice (incorporated in 1873), whose central office was in the New York Times Building (41 Park Row), the American Museum of Natural History (1869), and the New York Public Library (1895). The museum and library constituted great causes giving the wealthiest families the opportunity to engage in visible acts of philanthropy, and this may explain their centrality: their benefactors also supported charities and the battle against Tammany Hall.

There are five noteworthy figures at the center of the network's core. The main three are Charles H. Parkhurst (1842-1933), a Presbyterian minister and staunch denouncer of Tammany Hall's corruption, Henry C. Potter (1835-1908), New York's Episcopalian bishop, and William E. Dodge, Jr. (1832-1903), a Presbyterian copper tycoon and philanthropist, and a business partner of the Phelps family. The two other figures have a lower degree of betweenness: Abram S. Hewitt (1822-1903), a former Democratic "good mayor," whose failure to be nominated for a second term was of Tammany Hall's doing, and Henry M. MacCracken (1840-1918), a Presbyterian minister and chancellor of NYU. In 1900, Parkhurst, Potter, Dodge, Jr., and Hewitt were leaders in the battle for the control of New York City's government.

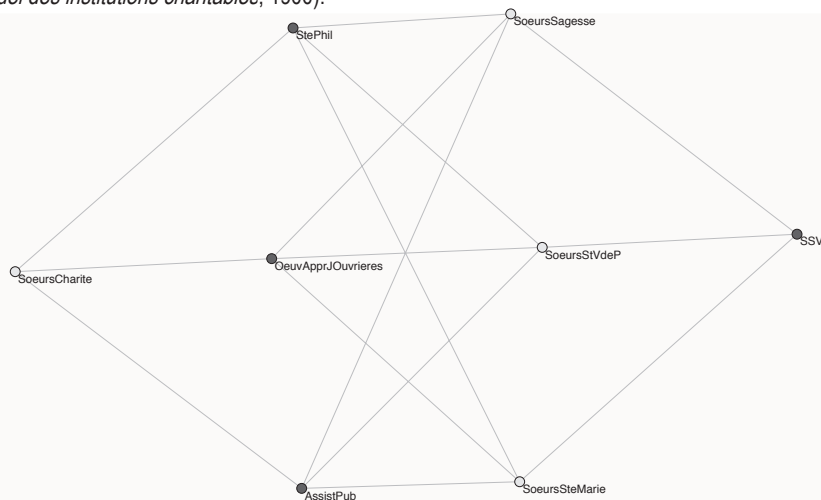
What draws the link between the central figures of the network's core is not so much "field" charities (that is, charities whose action focuses on specific cause-sor is inspired by religion) as societies presenting two facets of the same world. On one side, there are societies supporting Good government, more specifically those most engaged in the moral battle against Tammany Hall, and on the other, societies promoting organized charity. The leaders of the Charity Organization Society, who compiled the New York Charities Directory – our source, had a close view of this dual world. It is no surprise that they gave the careful and detailed description of it that network analysis has revealed.

## PARIS: A CENTRAL CORE OF MAJOR GENERALIST CHARITIES AND CATHOLIC WOMEN'S CONGREGATION

In Paris, eight large, old, and very strongly interconnected institutions constitute the central core of the charities network: they include four major charitable organizations and four Catholic women's congregations interconnecting these organizations.

- Created during the French Revolution and reorganized in 1849 into a body administrating hospitals and public relief for the poor, *Assistance Publique* was the official assistance institution.
- *Société Philanthropique* was the oldest private charity in Paris. It was founded in 1780 and had since undergone several restructurings. It was engaged in various activities ranging from food distribution to worker housing.
- A men’s charity founded in 1833, *Société Saint Vincent de Paul* (the St. Vincent de Paul Society) operated through a large network of “conferences” calqued on that of Catholic parishes.
- *Oeuvre des Apprentis et des Jeunes Ouvrières* was founded in 1843 following a split from the St. Vincent de Paul Society. It comprised numerous single-gender church youth clubs.

Central institutional core of the Parisian charities network (sources: *Paris charitable et prévoyant*, 1897, and *Manuel des institutions charitables*, 1900).



Note : core of the main component (core=3); dark nodes: charities; light nodes: affiliated actors – here, congregations (graph by Stéphanie Ginalski with Pajek).

Each of these organizations commanded an extensive network of local branches. The first three were generalist, in the sense that they simultaneously engaged in several modes of action. Two were religiously “neutral”: Assistance Publique was an official institution dependent on the Seine prefecture, and in 1900, Société Philanthropique was headed by prominent citizens of different religious or political persuasions. The last two were strictly Catholic, with close relations with the archbishopric and infrastructures made up by parishes.

These organizations were interconnected by four congregations in a way that deserves to be emphasized and that our sources highlight in an unprecedented manner: these congregations furnished personnel “serving” and more often “heading” several of the societies’ branches. Effectively, “sisters,” as they were called at the time, headed dispensaries of Assistance Publique or Société Philanthropique, soup kitchens of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, or church youth clubs for female workers. They belonged to the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, by far

the most important congregation, the Sisters of St. Mary, the Sisters of Charity, and the Sisters of Wisdom. These congregations were female, while the four charities were run by men (with the exception of the women's section of *Oeuvre des Apprentis*).

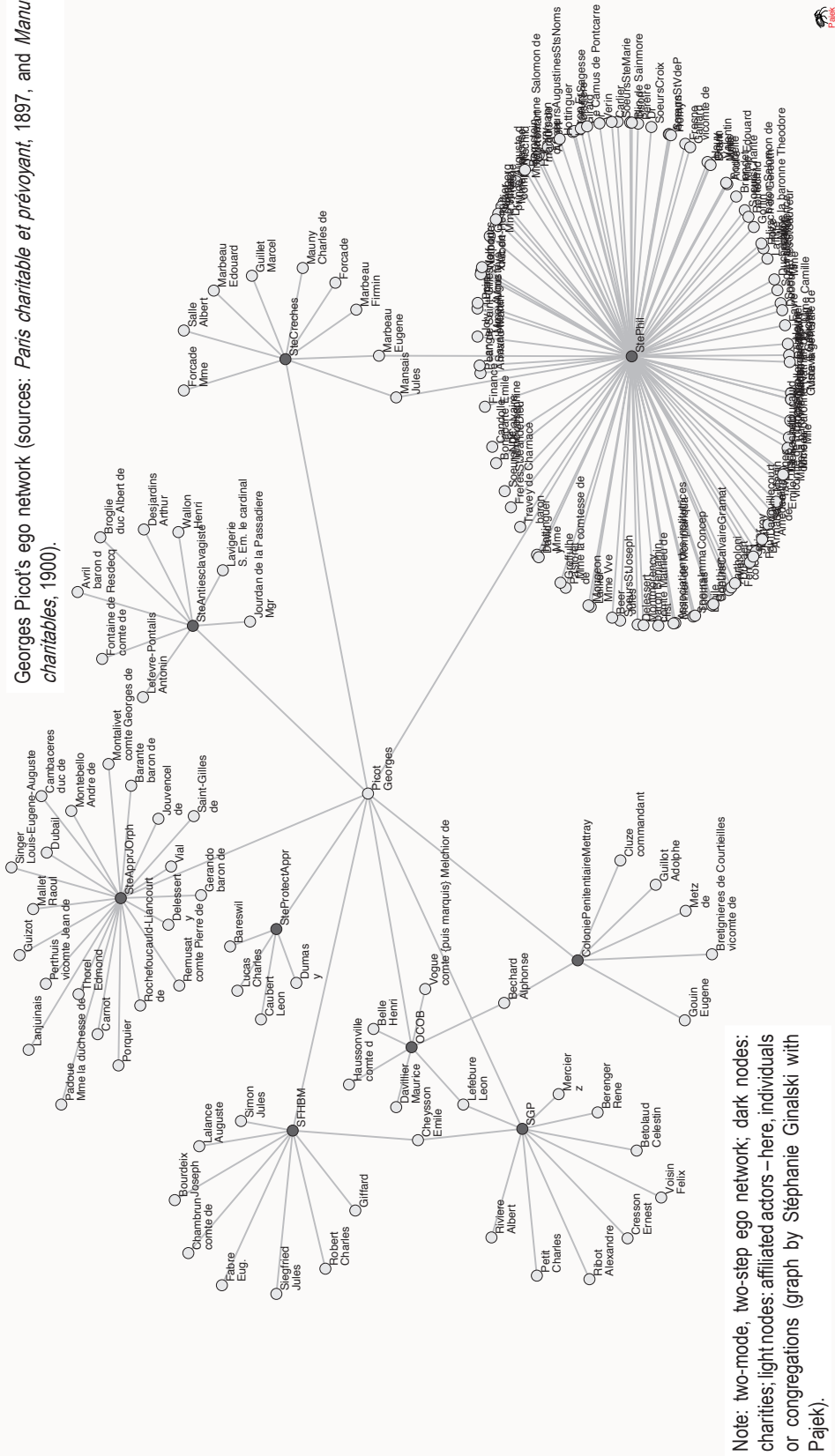
It is no surprise that *Assistance Publique* occupies an important place among Parisian charities, but what is more surprising is the fact that it belongs among the charities network's central institutions. This observation points to an essential phenomenon, the porous character of the separation between what we call today the "public" and the "private" – then more often designated as "official" and "free". One modest in scale, but significant aspect of this "porosity" is that *Assistance Publique* had authority over and administered private ("free") charities at the behest of their founder. Another aspect is that, through the four congregations that provided it with personnel, *Assistance Publique* was connected with numerous other congregations, primarily the empire of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, but also with the more modest territories of the other three. In fact, the *maisons de charité* (relief centers) and other agencies of the congregations were often located in the same buildings as *Assistance Publique*'s dispensaries. With the secularization of hospital personnel and the creation of a corps of professional nurses, these ties, which were extremely strong in 1900, gradually loosened. The importance of major Catholic charities and congregations in the structuring of the Parisian charitable world in 1900 was absolutely crucial despite the efforts exerted since the consolidation of the Third Republic by Opportunist governments, reformers and rallied Catholics to structure a "neutral" charity.

This explains why Paris Archbishop Richard (1819-1908), who headed a large number of Catholic charities, ranks among the network's most central figures, together with Georges Picot (1838-1909), a former magistrate and permanent secretary of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences. A devout Catholic, Picot contributed to interconnecting "neutral" charities of the traditional urban elite (*Société Philanthropique*, *Société des Crèches*), supporters of the penitentiary reform (*Société Générale des Prisons*), whose grouping was a breeding ground for important reforming enterprises (*OCOB*, *Société Française des HBM*), and the Catholic world of church youth clubs for workers.

To sum up, the New York charities network is structured around an Evangelical movement closely related to a reformist "civil" movement whose political objective is to take back city government. In Paris, on the other hand, on the eve of the state-church separation, the administrations of *Assistance Publique* and of the major "neutral" and Catholic charities are closely interconnected by women's Catholic congregations.

Thanks to the graphic representation of charity directories produced by social network analysis, there emerges a reading of charitable work in New York and Paris belying the evidence on which mainstream historiography has been based to date. In New York, the charitable world organized itself around a political battle under a reformist banner, and in Paris, it appears as a laboratory for collaboration between two parties that politics was in the process of tearing apart.

Georges Picot's ego network (sources: Paris charitable et prévoyant, 1897, and Manuel des institutions charitables, 1900).



Note: two-mode, two-step ego network; dark nodes: charities; light nodes: affiliated actors – here, individuals or congregations (graph by Stéphanie Gimalski with Pajek).