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Amidst the constant changes of Europe’s social climate between 1400-1700, some problems remained consistently. The issue of “the poor” has in various ways continued over centuries, however, the attitudes and responses towards them have fluctuated according to other social situations. In particular, class distinctions, governmental action, and religion have influenced these reactions.

The most eminent reason for attitudes towards the poor is class distinction. Especially during this time period when Europe was staunchly divided into classes, it was difficult to break apart from the stigma of being poor. Even as new ideas with humanism were emerging, the separation was clear, as shown by some Humanist’s writing. Lives says that the poor are “driven” to robbery and other deplorable behavior. This educated, possibly liberal-minded man describes the most negative behaviors, yet concede that those of his class cannot understand their motivations (Doc 3).

Another part of class is how upper
Part A

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Classes felt a duty towards the poor. A doctor of the 16th century talked about his offerings of help. However, he admits to not performing after judging that the poor often would rather be idle than work honestly (Doc 6). Because of his hard working ethics as a doctor, he feels he has the class privilege to judge these poor. Again, with the humanistic views, he later remarks on the worthiness of poor people for charity.

Over a century and a half later, a wealthy merchant writes to his kids about the benefits of a poor lifestyle. He judges their behavior as a choice, and from his wealthy, point of view, may be generous.

Other groups felt the need to have judgmental attitudes towards the poor, including governmental bodies. Although a 19th century town council seeks a quick fix to their poor problem, later governments were not as pressed for desperate solutions (Doc 2). For instance, a French town council later precautions the village to consider the poor person's desires, abilities, and willingness to
work before removing them from town (Doc 5). As time progresses, Europeans developed more and more regulations regarding the poor. People working at a poorhouse, who were worn by their working environment, set up specific lashings for punishments (Doc 7). Later, in the tradition of judgement, a royal councilor Richelieu urges the kingdom rules in regard to poor folk (Doc 8). Again, the government influenced attitudes towards the poor severely, like with Charles II. He said too much begging could only expand problems (Doc 4).

Charles V statement also provides a different perspective as to the response to the poor. He says that upon necessity, poor should have aid according to "the glory of God." Religion was not only the most impacting social being of the 14–1700, but played a huge role with the poor. Sermons, said to call listeners, encouraged people to give to the poor. As a Catholic priest says, it is not only an obligation, but
money is not worth anything in the after life (Doc. 1). This aid to the poor from religious continued over centuries, despite vast changes in the religious powers with the Reformation. Catholics maintained their ideals of help as shown by Vincent de Paul. In a speech, he proclaims the need for generosity (Doc. 10). He does, too, include the benefits of alms giving in sainthood.

Helping the poor and having a suspicious, yet giving attitudes toward them was a social custom during this time. Even artwork of the 17th century depicted the modest scene of giving alms to a poor family (Doc. 9). What has become a moral issues today was previously an issue encountered by various groups for various reasons.
During the mid 15th century to the early 16th century, almost half of Europe’s total population could be considered poor and destitute. The attitudes of the clergy and the attitudes of the social elite towards these people varied from pity to disgust, and their proposed solutions to these problems differed. Some suggested helping all of the poor by giving them alms, some warned to be careful of who the money was given to (show discernment) and some people believed that being poor was a voluntary decision of the poor and if they wanted to get out of that situation, they could do so without the help of others.

Many of the clergy practiced the giving of alms, for this type of behavior was encouraged in the Bible, which after the Council of Trent, became one of the most influential and reliable sources of religion. During the 15th century, the emphasis shifted from the act of giving to the poor, considered to be a good deed, but if money was given after one’s death, then the act of giving to the poor wasn’t as valued. This ties in to Christian teachings of Jesus where in aparable, he taught that a poor widow who gave only 2 coins was greater in the eyes of God than a rich man who gave 100 coins. Many people felt sorry for these poor people and raised money for shelters to let them reside in. Some people portrayed those who gave...
to the poor as good Samaritans such as in the painting "Beggars Receiving Alms" at the door of a house, where the man giving the money has an injured arm but is still giving happily to the family of poor peasants. Other priests, like Vincent de Paul, another Catholic priest, reproved people who were all talk and had no action. He said that in order to truly alleviate the situation of the needy, one must not only tell them about the Lord but that they must help them out by giving money to them. In these cases, most of the clergy believed that the poor should be helped no matter what their situation was or why they were in that state.

However, not all people agreed on giving without discretion. Many of the governmental agents and the nobility believed in giving alms to the poor but wanted to make sure that the people they gave to were truly in need of money. As Juan Vives, a humanist wrote, "Still others withdraw...and they are uncertain where first or more effectively to bestow their money." His concern towards giving to all the poor is valid because in those days, there were people who begged for food and money because it was the easy path to go, as noted by Jean Malherbe, a merchant who probably worked hard to earn money to become rich. He notes that the poor often talk about how accustomed they were to that lifestyle in that they can be independent and sleep wherever they want to, and do whatever they wish to do because they had no worries. This view of the poor can be debated because during the mid-1600s, a peasant
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revolt occurred where they wanted to alleviate their dire situation. They thought that they would but the revolt was violently suppressed when Martin Luther expressed his disdain at their wrong interpretation of his ideas. In 1625, Cardinal Richelieu suggested that most of the people should give discerningly to the poor because the vagabonds were taking advantage of the situation and were being helped out by the kind-hearted. The money people these people were wary of the group of poor people and of those who took advantage of the charity of others.

As time progressed new ideas came into society. Instead of giving freely to the poor, they should be made to work for their money, as Emperor Charles I expressed, when he "experience shows that begging for alms...errors and abuses will result..." therefore, he proposed that only the sick and those unable to work should receive aid. An English doctor noted that beggars who came to his house expressed their desire to live a sick but easy life than to get well and have to work hard to earn a living. This type of attitude was scorned by society, and it is reflected in the poorhouse regulations of 1588 where it declared that everyone who went to the poorhouse must be punished. The poorhouses tried to make things that living there would not be a easy and comfortable life. They hoped that by making it so
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Poor house would give the poor incentive to get out of that situation.

Through the famine and plague-filled years between the 1450's to the 1700's, the number of poor people fluctuated from about 50% to 80%. In times where there seemed to be change, near the beginning of this crisis, people were more tolerant towards them and gave them money and shelter without asking too many questions, but as time went by, and the number of poor rose, people became more wary and realized that some of the beggars were begging merely because it was easier to do so even to the upper class and those who had money took on the stance of a belief that the poor should get themselves out of their poverty because it was their fault that they were in that situation in the first place.