4 Of Welfare and Citizenship

The question is not whether all men will ultimately be equal – that they certainly will not – but whether progress may not go on steadily, if slowly, till, by occupation at least, every man is a gentleman. I hold that it may, and that it will.


We began Chapter 1 with an epigraph to illustrate a particular nineteenth century view which imagined that the statuses of poverty and riches were natural, proper and unalterable. We begin this chapter by illustrating a more ‘progressive’ nineteenth century view which foretold that the civilising forces of industrialised liberal democracy would ensure the amelioration of class differences and the possibility, not of social equality, but of equal citizenship. The symbols in Alfred Marshall’s vision are not of beggars and castles, but of modern factories made congenial by the advance of technology. It is a view which, precisely because it attributes status to male occupations within the labour market, once again renders invisible the lives of women and children. None the less, it is a view which at least lays claim to encompass the ordinary mass; the ‘civilised’ working class who are neither rich nor poor.

The hope therefore was that the industrial proletariat or working class would be absorbed into a common citizenship status and that most people would experience lives which were neither deprived nor privileged. In the event, modern technology did not and does not now assure congenial employment for all. While the nature of class differences may have changed in the course of the twentieth century, they have not been ameliorated. The gap between rich and poor, as we have seen, has lately been growing. In Chapter 1 we discussed the work of Scott (1994) who has suggested that deprivation and privilege (poverty and riches) remain as conditions which lie, as it were, beyond the pale of ordinary citizenship. Scott refers to certain ‘catastrophic’ boundaries in the distribution of resources (*ibid*: 175). Certainly, the extent of structural inequality
may be said to be catastrophic, although we argue in this book that the boundaries which fence off the rich and poor are essentially symbolic in nature.

We begin this chapter by addressing the concept of citizenship. We shall critically discuss the different conceptual or philosophical traditions which inform notions of citizenship before moving on to describe how the sociologist, T.H. Marshall, built upon the arguments of his (unrelated) namesake, the above mentioned Alfred Marshall, to advance the idea of ‘social citizenship’. Social citizenship as a concept has been the cornerstone of much thinking about the nature of social justice and the welfare state. It is a concept which calls us back to issues of morality and we shall discuss the different moral repertoires which may characteristically be called upon in discussions of citizenship. Finally, we shall review some of the latest social attitude data to see what people seem to think about issues of inequality and social justice and the extent to which their values reflect notions of class interest or common citizenship. Are we yet all gentlemen and gentlewomen?

TRADITIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

The concept of citizenship – and of the civilised gentleman – can be traced back to ancient Athens. It was Aristotle (384–322 BC) who contended that ‘There are by nature free men and slaves’. For the Athenian elite the concept of liberty associated with citizenship of a city state was a natural and not an ideologically constructed principle. Women did not figure in affairs of state and the state was founded on the exploitation of a social stratum which was regarded in effect as an inferior race. Aristotle’s own theory of governance (which differed from that of Plato, his mentor) was sceptical of democracy. Athenian democracy was a form of self-government in which the members of the small and elite citizenry took turns to rule and to be ruled by each other. Aristotle foresaw that, divorced from the constraints of this particular context, the logic of pure democracy could in theory lead to mob rule, because ‘as birth, wealth and education are the defining marks of oligarchy, so their opposites, low birth, low incomes, and mechanical occupations are regarded as typical of democracy’ (1981: 364). He recognised that ‘the democratic idea of justice is in fact numerical equality, not equality based on merit... the result is that in democracies