SOCIAL POLICY

AN INTRODUCTION

Third Edition

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Social policy: an identity problem?

Social policy can be defined in two ways. First, it is an academic subject to research and to study. The aim of this first chapter is to introduce you to it. Second, policies have an impact on the 'real' world. Government, business and voluntary organizations all have policies which are experienced by families and individuals.

What are 'policies'? In one way they can be seen as aims or goals, or statements of what ought to happen. *Social* policies aim to improve human welfare (though they often fail to do so) and to meet human needs for education, health, housing and social security.

As goals, intentions and ideas, policies can be found in the form of official government policy (legislation, or the guidelines that govern how laws should be put into operation). The ideas and proposals put forward in manifestos and glossy leaflets by the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and other political parties are examples of policies as broad ideas and stirring goals. Outside government, a company's or an organization's statement of policy on something – for instance, an equal opportunity policy – is also an example of policy expressing ideas about what ought to happen.

However, policies are living things, not just static lists of goals, rules or laws. Policy blueprints have to be implemented, often with unexpected and sometimes with disastrous results. Therefore, social policies are what happens 'on the ground' when they are implemented, as well as what happens at the preliminary decision-making or legislative stage. There is often a gulf between the concepts and goals that inspire policy and 'real' policy, the ugly result of compromise.

Studying social policy will involve you in thinking about:

- *What* social policies are: that is, what the content of specific government policies is, such as an Education Act or a policy on abortion in a National Health Service (NHS) hospital.
- *How* policies are developed, administered and implemented: for instance, how a new policy on tackling youth unemployment was conceived, what its stated and hidden aims are, how it is funded and how far it meets its objectives.
- *Why* policies exist (or do not exist). Why, for example, was a market approach to providing health and social services introduced in the 1980s and early 1990s? Or why, in Britain, has there never been – until recently – a concerted policy on nursery provision and preschool care for children?

Social policy and other subjects

Although preliminary definitions of social policy might be helpful, no definition tells the whole story. The challenge facing us, therefore, is more than that of moving from simple to slightly more complicated definitions of social policy, and descriptions of various policies in areas such as education and health.

Definitions and descriptions are not enough. Anyone new to a subject needs something else: an image of the subject to identify with, or a glimpse of the whole thing which gives a feel for the subject, and some way of anticipating what is coming next.

To demonstrate the importance of these things, you might briefly think about a range of subjects that you are already familiar with: English literature, perhaps, or media studies, sociology, geography, history or economics. Now think of the images that each one calls up in your mind.

English and media studies bring images from drama, film and novels – some of which, incidentally, are very useful for a broader understanding of social policy and changing social conditions (see suggestions for further reading at the end of Chapter 3). Geography helps us to visualize the globe, space and particular environments such as a tropical rain forest or mountain ranges. History and sociology might prompt images of particular periods that you have been interested in – how ordinary people fared in Hitler's Germany in the 1930s, for instance. Depending on the health of your bank balance, economics might give an image of either a looming overdraft or fountains of golden coins.

Now try the same exercise with the words 'social policy' in mind. Do any images appear? If they do, you might be sufficiently well informed to consider shelving this book. If you have no clear image or impression of the subject, on the other hand, this is perfectly understandable – and you need to read on.

Social policy's identity problem – or, more precisely, its problem of *lack* of identity – has a number of causes. As with sociology, perhaps social policy's lack of a clear image is due to it being a relatively new subject compared with traditional disciplines such as history and geography. Also, social policy has only just been introduced as an advanced level subject. To date, very few schools and colleges have included it in their A-level programmes. Consequently, not many people considering a course in social policy have a clear idea of what is entailed because they are unfamiliar with it as a taught subject.

There is another reason for social policy's identity problem. It is a 'magpie' subject – a discipline that has taken bright and sparkling treasures from other disciplines such as economics, philosophy, politics and sociology. For this reason social policy is sometimes seen as an interdisciplinary subject rather than an academic discipline in its own right. As argued later, however, there is a strong case for viewing social policy as a discipline. Like the magpie's nest, social policy's base contains others' pearls of wisdom, but social policy has also developed insights, theories and empirical research of its own.

Like any other discipline, social policy employs a distinctive body of theory that individual scholars and researchers have used to test hypotheses about the impact of social policies on people's lives (see Box 1.1). Through the study of social policy as a discipline, therefore, you will gain a view of the world that is distinctly different from, but related to, the perspectives of sociology, politics and the other social sciences.

BOX 1.1 Social policy research – an example

Example of a theory	*Some possible hypotheses to test the theory*
Public provision (for example of social housing) maintains some fairness in allocation of goods and services; market provision is bound to exclude disadvantaged groups.	1 Where social housing is sold off, poorer families tend to get left behind in substandard housing; they are excluded from better quality flats or houses. **or** 2 Where social housing is sold off, the purchasers are more likely to stay; there is a better mix than if people have to leave their estates to purchase a home.

An example of research that examines these hypotheses – in relation to council house sales and the African-Caribbean community – can be found in a study by Peach and Byron (1994). See Chapter 9 for further discussion of Peach and Byron's study.

Before we leave initial impressions and images, it is important to realize that experienced scholars in social policy have their personal images of the subject, just as much as do people who have only recently begun to study it. For example, Nicholas Deakin (1994: 1) gives us this personal impression:

> *Towards the end of the War (which is how people of my generation still habitually refer to the Second World War) my mother took to bringing home from our visits to the children's clinic . . . small brown bottles labelled 'welfare orange juice'. My brother and I gulped down the contents willingly enough: the flavour, bland, but with a slightly bitter chemical back taste, was in every way preferable to the only other alternative on offer: cod liver oil. Now, forty years later, the ghost of the tang that the juice once left still appears unbidden on my palate whenever I first see the word 'welfare'; and it illustrates in a trivial but (to me) highly immediate way how the terms employed in the debate about the future of welfare have developed associations and personal references which are lodged deep in the collective unconscious of the nation.*

For the millions of people of Nicholas Deakin's generation and of preceding generations, this particular impression has a lot of resonance. It expresses a deep attachment to the welfare state and might be termed a welfarist image of social policy.

More recent impressions among younger generations might be less pro-welfare or welfarist. For instance, the term welfare might be more readily associated with the frustrations of dealing with a benefits office, or with the suspicion that sometimes poverty is made worse by the welfare system rather than relieved by it (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Images of welfare and social policy (assuming these two terms are used synonymously) can therefore be negative as well as positive. The study of social policy must include a critical element. Social policies are 'nasty' as well as 'nice'. The aims and impact of social policies and the welfare system (either deliberately or unintentionally) can as often be to control people and to keep them in their place (see Chapter 6) as to liberate them or to give them a better life than they would otherwise have.

Thus, a major aim of the subject of social policy is to *evaluate critically* the impact of social policies on people's lives. As already mentioned, this involves developing theories about the role of welfare and using hypotheses to test out what is happening. As an example, we might consider the impact of standard assessment tests (SATs) in (English and Welsh) primary and secondary schools (see Chapter 7), and whether these have really helped to improve children's education.

To engage in an honest and objective appraisal, the social policy researcher must, like any other social scientist, try to lay aside personal views and political opinions. A teacher overwhelmed by the work of administering SATs, and whose school is not performing very well in the 'league tables' of SATs results, would probably not be the best choice of person to research the value of standard testing of schoolchildren. But then neither would a government spokesperson committed to this policy.

Despite the importance of objectivity, though, the identity of social policy as a subject *is* simultaneously bound up with values: that is, expressing what you believe in, and what you think social policies *should be* trying to achieve to make society better for everyone.

How can there be a commitment to objectivity on the one hand, and to personal and political values on the other? The tension between these two opposites will be explored by looking at the life and work of Richard Titmuss, who is perhaps the most important founder of the subject of social policy. He argued strongly that it is possible to be committed to one's values and political standpoint *and* to be objective about social conditions and the need for social reform.

We shall also explore the way in which social policy developed as a subject both before and after Titmuss made his important contribution. Before this, however, it might help to review these opening remarks about social policy by comparing the ways in which different academic subjects relate to social policy (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2 Examples of links between social policy and other disciplines

Discipline	*Examples of social policy relevance*
Anthropology	Study of family, kinship and differences in household composition and living arrangements. Social security entitlements depend on official policy of 'what counts' as a recognized household unit.

Economics	Looking at the economic costs and 'payoffs' of particular policies and social benefits, for example child benefit.
Geography	Insights into the spatial patterns of the distribution and take-up of services, for example maps of the boundaries of general practitioners' practices, numbers of patients and visits to the doctor.
History	Study of the development of social policies through time: comparing present-day services and attitudes to them with examples from the past, for example hostels for the homeless today could be compared with 'Poor Law' institutions in the past.
Philosophy	Examining the reasons or justifications for choosing one kind of policy rather than another; discussing ethical questions, such as the right of health authorities not to provide certain kinds of treatment, drugs or therapy.
Politics	Investigating the social policy aims of the Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Green and nationalist parties; or, conversely, looking at the political impact of social policies, for example what have been the effects of council house sales on voting patterns?
Psychology	Studying personal perceptions of, and attitudes towards, welfare services. Psychological perspectives are important in investigating individual need and design of services, for example the way prostate cancer screening is advertised and provided, and men's perceptions of this service.
Sociology	Researching the norms, values and other social pressures that affect the relationship between the welfare system and different groups, for example reasons for racial inequalities in access to social services.

The story of social policy

In order to understand the distinctive character of social policy as a subject, we need briefly to examine its roots and the way it developed in the UK.

Early roots: social work, sociology and social administration

Concern about questions of social policy grew throughout the nineteenth century. For instance, there was mounting concern about poverty and the squalid conditions that many people had to live in at that time, concern about child labour in mills, factories and mines, and concern about lack of literacy and the threatening power of the uneducated masses (see Chapter 3).

As the end of the nineteenth century neared, it became increasingly clear to a growing number of reformers that government would have to play a much larger role than before in dealing with the social problems of the day. Although some of this

concern was motivated by genuine and progressive aims to improve social conditions for ordinary people, it was mixed with other more controlling and reactionary motivations.

The work of those who led the Charity Organisation Society (COS) is a good example of this mix of motivations and aims. The COS, set up to coordinate charitable efforts and to eliminate problems of charities duplicating one another's work, became a highly influential advisory body in late Victorian and early twentieth-century Britain. For instance, several of its members, including Octavia Hill (see Chapter 10), served on a government commission on the reform of the Poor Law between 1905 and 1909.

In general, the COS and those who shared similar opinions were looking for a more efficient way of managing the existing system of poverty relief, rather than a radical overhaul of social policy and the introduction of universal state benefits. The COS had pioneered the development of a new kind of occupation – the social caseworker – who was often a volunteer and often a (middle- or upper-class) woman. 'Social workers', as they gradually came to be known, were responsible for investigating the needs of poor families and for finding out whether they were 'deserving' cases. There was great concern among those who ran charities at the time that no one who was 'undeserving' should receive any help, because undeserved help would compound the character faults that were then thought to cause poverty and unemployment: laziness, ignorance, immoral behaviour and dependence.

Social work in its early days was arguably more concerned with social control and with trying to make the poor 'respectable' than with helping them on their own terms. But the very fact that social casework was thought necessary did succeed in bringing the problems of poverty and social inequality to the attention of middle-class volunteers and opinion-formers on a scale that had never been seen before.

At the same time, journalists, radical politicians and other commentators were writing about the appalling conditions in which many British people lived. They gave first-hand accounts and vivid descriptions of slum life that were as shocking to 'respectable' society as reports of other cultures and ways of life among the 'savages' in newly-conquered parts of the Empire.

As a result of both social casework investigation and journalistic reports, philanthropists began to provide funds for research on poverty and social problems as well as for schemes to help the poor directly. One famous example of this was Seebohm Rowntree's survey of poverty in York in 1901, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (discussed by Fraser 1984: 136–7). It showed that an alarmingly high proportion of York's population (28 per cent) was then living below subsistence level. Rowntree's survey, which was followed by other Rowntree investigations after the First World War, is a prime example of the way in which the social conscience of leading manufacturing firms (in this case, the well-known chocolate and cocoa-processing firm) was translated into social research.

Rowntree's study was more progressive and less moralistic about the poor than an earlier study by Charles Booth, *The Life and Labour of the People in London*. This was an extremely lengthy and exhaustive study of poverty carried out between 1889 and 1903. All the studies of social conditions during this period were marked by an overriding concern to discover the 'facts' of poverty. Providing statistics of poverty and simply drawing the public's attention to social problems would make a conclusive case for urgent social reform, it was thought, and would galvanize government into action.

Therefore, the key to understanding these early, problem-focused pieces of research is to realize that they were strongly motivated by a desire to be *scientific*. Rather than an appeal for social reform and action based solely upon grounds of conscience or morality, the case put forward by Booth, Rowntree and others was to be based on irrefutable evidence and an objective approach to social problems.

It is about this time – the beginning of the twentieth century – that the term 'sociology' began to gain currency as a way of summing up this scientific, statistical approach to understanding social problems. Early sociology, reflecting as it did the passion for collecting facts and statistics, came to be known as 'blue book sociology', because it was based so heavily on official reports and population censuses (published in blue covers).

All this rapidly accumulating knowledge about social conditions and social problems fostered the development of new kinds of training courses and university degrees in social work. In the relatively new municipal 'redbrick' universities of the time, such as Birmingham, and in the newly-established London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), three important strands of learning and training were fused together. These were social work, sociology and social administration, the last being the study of local and central government institutions, and of the framework in which services to the poor and needy were to be delivered.

The early roots of the subject of social policy (or its forerunner, social administration) were therefore entwined inextricably with practical action (social work) and research (sociology). Later, as sociology developed a more independent identity, sociologists began to deplore the idea of their subject being a problem-focused or policy-oriented discipline. Sociology became more theoretical in its concerns, though some sociologists retain an interest in 'real world' and policy issues.

The main aim of sociology, however, is to discover knowledge about society for its own sake. The main aim in social policy is to research the impact of social policies on people and society. Thus a key question for social policy is, 'what difference does a policy make?' At the same time, the subject of social policy raises other questions, focusing upon how policies develop, why certain policies are chosen over others and what the economic, political and social implications of policies are.

Box 1.3 Richard Titmuss, 1907–73

When Richard Titmuss became Professor of Social Administration at the LSE at the age of 43, he was one of the few non-graduates to have ever become a professor. Titmuss had had to leave school at the age of 14. His father, who had been thrown out of work on a small farm and became heavily indebted, died before Richard was 20. As a result, Titmuss had experienced first-hand the shock of financial insecurity.

After leaving school, Titmuss worked as a clerk, then as a more senior inspector, for an insurance company. This work deepened his knowledge of both social welfare and inequality. As Kincaid explains, 'During the 1930s Titmuss lived a double life. In working hours, the insurance office – but in the evenings and at the weekends, the actuarial skills learned in the insurance office were brought to bear on data about birth-rates, poverty and ill-health' (Kincaid 1984: 115).

By this time Richard Titmuss had married, and his wife, Kay Titmuss, further encouraged his social conscience and his drive to write on policy and welfare matters. During the Second World War, Titmuss was appointed as an official war historian, and subsequently wrote a masterpiece on the civilian experience of wartime, called *Problems of Social Policy* (1950). Of many later works, among the more important are *Essays on the Welfare State* (1958), *Commitment to Welfare* (1968) and *The Gift Relationship* (1970), the last being a study of blood donation and the significance of this as a model of altruism for the provision of welfare generally.

Richard Titmuss died of cancer in an NHS hospital and, at the time, his daughter Ann Oakley (well known for her feminist analyses of family life and housework) wrote a moving tribute to his life and work.

Coming of age: the welfare state and social administration

In 1950, Richard Titmuss was appointed as the first professor of social administration at the London School of Economics (see Box 1.3). The subject had 'come of age' and was fast becoming recognized as a university discipline in many other British universities.

Titmuss's department at the LSE became a central influence on the subject in the 1950s and 1960s. The LSE itself had been set up in the early years of the twentieth century, largely as a result of the efforts of energetic and pioneering socialist thinkers such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb. It was envisaged as a powerhouse of progressive political ideas and adult education. Its chief aims were, first, to provide a route into higher education for able students from working-class backgrounds and, second, to build a solid base of research studies on economic and social problems. Both of these functions were thought to be vital for developing the planned society led by enlightened experts that the Webbs and other socialists believed in at the time.

Under the directorship of William Beveridge (see Chapter 3, Box 3.4) in the 1920s and 1930s, the LSE became an internationally renowned centre of learning. Among the scholars who joined the LSE during Beveridge's time was Friedrich von Hayek, an exponent of right-wing ideas on economics and politics who was to have a profound effect on future leaders such as Margaret Thatcher.

Thus the early development of social administration and social policy as university subjects took place in an environment in which a variety of views and a commitment to scholarly research were highly valued.

Richard Titmuss's teaching and research activities ably met these standards. He was not only highly prolific as a writer and researcher (see suggestions for further reading at the end of this chapter). Like those who had worked in the early poverty research tradition of Booth, Rowntree and other important reformers, his aim was not simply to do factual research for its own sake. It was also to engage in research which, while still based on *empirical studies* (that is, observation of factual evidence and real-life experience), would be directed by the aims of exposing unmet need, social inequality and the ways in which policies seemed to be failing to bring social justice.

Why was Titmuss so committed to such values as equality and social justice, and what were the implications of this commitment for the development of social policy as a subject? See, first, the brief summary of his life and work in Box 1.3. As the thumbnail

sketch of Titmuss's life indicates, the twin strands in his approach to writing about social welfare go back to his own experience.

There was the dispassionate critic of social inequalities and of 'who gets what' in a society dominated by class privilege and an unfair labour market (see Chapter 5). Titmuss succeeded in elevating the subject of social administration from the tedious study of how the welfare system is administered to a more questioning analysis of why inequalities persist, even in a welfare state such as the one developed in Britain after 1945.

It was Titmuss who first pointed out that there are two welfare states: the obvious welfare system that provides education, health services and social security, and a less obvious system that particularly benefits the middle classes. The latter, 'hidden welfare state' includes subsidies to better-off groups in the form of tax advantages, public support for higher education (a near monopoly of students from middle-class families when Titmuss was writing) and mortgage interest tax relief (also benefiting better-off households at that time).

Second, though, there was the Titmuss who celebrated the welfare state that had been built in Britain after 1945 (see Chapter 3). He defended not only the actual services provided 'free' at the point of use, but also the values that underpinned the welfare state: the values of altruism, of community and of the collective will to improve people's lives. By contrast, the values that underpinned the market – individualism and competition – seemed to Titmuss to be destructive of human welfare.

Not surprisingly, therefore, many have seen marked inconsistencies in Titmuss's ideas. How could there be a unified subject of social policy based on Titmuss's approach if it included on the one hand a strong defence of the existing welfare system, and on the other a devastating critique of the inequalities and injustices that it masked?

In retrospect, it is not too difficult to see how both of these views can be reconciled even though there is some tension between them. It is quite possible to point out the weaknesses and injustices of the present welfare system while at the same time drawing attention to the possibility of greater inequalities and problems if the system were to be scrapped. For instance, the NHS, despite being a largely 'free at the point of use' service, has not succeeded in eradicating inequalities in health and use of health services (see Chapter 9). But Titmuss argued that the replacement of the NHS with a completely privatized health system, as in the USA, would lead to health inequalities even greater than already existed.

Crisis and change: the development of social policy as a subject

In the 1970s, the Titmussian approach to the study of the welfare state was challenged from a number of directions. This was partly because, despite Titmuss's lively criticisms of the flaws in the welfare state, much of the subject of social administration seemed to have developed into a rather complacent and technical description of existing social services and how they were to be delivered.

What criticisms there were of existing social problems, unmet need and inequality seemed to be dominated by the Titmussian assumption that all would be well if a left of centre, planned and rather paternalistic approach to providing state welfare was followed. But what if there was something more fundamentally wrong with the whole approach to providing welfare through state institutions?

It was this latter question that provoked much interest in the 1970s, when 'social policy' began to replace 'social administration' as the heading or title of university courses in the subject. Students of social policy were increasingly exposed to a range of critiques of the welfare state and of the traditional welfare values that had been contained in the old subject of social administration.

These critiques (critical discussions) may be divided into *culturalist* criticisms and *materialist* criticisms of state welfare. Culturalist critiques are those that challenge the *way* that welfare services are designed and provided, and the cultural assumptions (for example about men's and women's roles in society) that underpin the manner in which services are delivered. For instance, in the 1970s a growing feminist and women's studies literature raised questions about the sexist assumptions behind many health, education and social services, and the ways in which those services could reinforce gender inequality (see Chapter 6). Similarly, growing awareness of racism and studies of racial discrimination pinpointed the inappropriateness of many social services to the needs of minority ethnic groups, as well as the paternalistic, 'culture blind' attitudes of those who ran them.

Materialist critiques, on the other hand, focused on material factors and the economic crisis apparently facing the welfare state. On the political left, Marxists and other kinds of socialists concentrated on the material inequalities that seemed to be inherent in the welfare state: for instance, in the provision of housing, schools and hospitals of unequal quality or standards. This kind of critique (as an example, see Gough 1979) paid less attention to the way in which welfare services are run, and was more concerned that *not enough* welfare was being provided to poorer and working-class groups in society. At the same time, though, Marxists pointed to what they saw as an uncontainable and rising demand from the working classes for more welfare services and higher social security benefits – a demand that would spiral out of control and lead to a fundamental crisis in the capitalist system.

For entirely different reasons, commentators on the political right shared with Marxists a view of the welfare state as an unmanageable economic burden upon the capitalist economy. Therefore, they too were putting forward materialist criticisms of the welfare state. However, unlike the Marxists, right-wing commentators based their criticisms on the belief that *too much* state welfare was being provided.

Conclusions: the subject today

From today's vantage point many of the debates about social policy that used to take place in the 1970s and 1980s now seem out of date. In those days, debates were rather polarized. On the one hand, Marxist and left-wing critics of the welfare state were combining dreams of a socialist future with dire predictions of the end of capitalism. On the other, the so-called 'New Right' called for the privatization of much of the welfare system.

Neither school of thought proved to be much good at forecasting the actual development of social policy. As will be shown elsewhere in this book, Conservative government in the 1980s and 1990s did not lead to the full-scale implementation of all 'New

Right' ideas, nor to the scrapping of the welfare state (though there were many significant changes). The massive rise in unemployment during the 1980s and large increases in social security spending did not result, as many Marxists had suggested, in the breakdown of the capitalist system.

The writings of Titmuss about the social policy dilemmas of the 1950s and 1960s seem in some ways to be more pertinent than the theories of the 1970s and 1980s to an understanding of today's social policy questions and the approach of government to dealing with these questions. When Titmuss was writing about the welfare state in the 1950s it was a relatively new and untried institution. Though public welfare and institutions such as the NHS enjoyed popular approval, there were strong pressures in a newly 'affluent society' to develop separate, market-based provision for the better-off and to leave the stretched public services for everyone else. There was a certain fragility about the welfare state then, and the prospect of returning to a more divided, private-insurance based system, which has strong echoes today. For instance in 1959, in a Fabian Society lecture, Titmuss warned of growing inequality in an 'irresponsible society' – a society in which a two-tier welfare system could develop if its middle- and upper-class members opted out of the system. This seems highly relevant to today's context. Those who can afford it are being encouraged to take out private health insurance, and there are government incentives to make personal arrangements for our pensions (instead of relying on standard state pensions), and for funding any long-term care that we might need in the future. Therefore a rereading of Titmuss's concerns about the future of the welfare state has a resonance with today's dilemmas over what direction social policy should take.

By contrast, the radical left-wing ideas of the 1970s and 1980s, preoccupied as they were with over-abstract theories about class conflict and the end of capitalism, now seem rather archaic. They did not anticipate a future in which there could be significant reversals of social welfare policy without great political upheavals and crisis. In the event, there have been fundamental changes in social policy since 1979 without the scale of social crisis envisaged by Marxists.

Equally, the ideas of the New Right, which placed the market above the value of any state-provided health, education or social service, now have a rather tired and discredited appearance. Almost 20 years of Conservative government (1979–97) saw the implementation of *some* of these ideas but there is now a widespread realization that privatization, market competition and other New Right ideas have marked limitations as well as the supposed advantages that were advocated by the government at the time.

However, this is not to say that the debate between right and left did not have its uses in the development of social policy as a subject. As pointed out above, Titmuss's strong influence over the subject in the 1950s and 1960s led to the dominance of a rather cosy view of the world. The British approach to welfare was thought to be the best and a planned, state-run welfare system was seen as inevitably superior to anything the private or voluntary sector could do.

In Britain, this was largely a result of the way the subject developed as an independent discipline. In universities in other countries, it is rare to find 'social policy' as a separate undergraduate course. Social policy is often subsumed under politics, sociology

or public administration in other European countries, while in the USA 'social welfare' and social policy studies are often linked with social work education. British social policy and administration grew rather more separately as a university discipline in the 1950s and 1960s.

Thus the traditional approach to the subject in Britain did establish a strong foundation of social policy studies, but it had its limitations. The explosion of debate about social policy and the welfare state in the 1970s blew fresh air into the subject and established the fundamental point that there are many ways of providing welfare. There is a range of competing models or types of welfare system to discuss, a point that is further explored at the end of Chapter 3, where Britain's welfare system or the 'British model' is compared with other models.

Plan of the book

In this chapter we have begun to explore how social policy has developed in recent times, both as a subject and as a programme of action 'out there' in the 'real' world. In Chapter 13 we shall return to these themes. The impact of the 'New' Labour government which came to power in 1997 will be assessed, together with broader questions about the interrelationship between social policy, economic change and social trends – for instance, the value of the concept of a 'postmodern' or 'late modern' world and its contribution to understanding current trends in social policy.

As for the filling in the sandwich – that is, all the intervening chapters – the choices that had to be made were difficult ones. For instance, there is a fundamental choice to be made between writing a book which is all 'isms and ologies' – that is, concerned primarily with theories of welfare and society – or another kind of book which provides a 'Cook's tour' of the welfare system. The drawback with the first kind is that it can easily become a semi-sociological or philosophical discussion, relatively abstract and timeless, and without much relevance to the world outside the university gates. That kind of book would not tell you much about the content of actual policies or how they were decided upon. The drawback with the second kind of book is that, after a few months, it begins to look like last summer's travel brochure. Time moves on, policies change and new Acts of Parliament are passed.

The plan of this book represents an attempt to bridge the gap between the two basic choices outlined above. The next four chapters deal with the big picture and with some important general themes in social policy, as follows:

- Chapter 2: the key ideas and principles upon which social policies are based.
- Chapter 3: the historical development of social policy.
- Chapter 4: criminal justice policy, which also explores the boundaries of social policy and considers the usefulness of comparative approaches to the study of policy.
- Chapter 5: 'who gets what?' Questions of social and economic inequality raised by social policy, and current issues of poverty and income maintenance.
- Chapter 6: the connections between social policy, social control and liberation.

Although these chapters focus on general themes, they also refer to specific policy areas and examples. Chapters 5 and 6, for instance, discuss social security benefits policy as an illustration of both the 'who gets what?' question and the question of 'how much control do social policies exercise over us?'

The remaining chapters (before the concluding Chapter 13) also try to marry thematic approaches with specific policy areas, though the emphasis is more upon the latter than the former.

- Chapter 7 discusses education policy, using the example of the Education Reform Act 1988 and its impact on education today to reflect upon how policies are made in Britain.
- Chapter 8 traces the links between welfare and work, looking at government employment policy and its impact on the well-being of different groups, including youth, low-income workers and older workers.
- Chapter 9 defines and explores health policy, examining recent changes in the structure of the NHS and the ways in which professional groups shape the design of health services.
- Chapter 10 takes the example of housing to examine how rival ideologies, values and utopian dreams influence policy.
- Chapter 11 gives an account of recent community care policy, exploring at the same time 'who cares?' in today's welfare system.
- Chapter 12 discusses important changes in the way that policy is being created and implemented in the UK as a result of devolution of power from Westminster to the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and to other regional and devolved bodies. It focuses on the significance of these changes for growing differences in social policy within the UK, and it also includes a discussion of the impact of European Union (EU) social policy.

A final point, assuming that you have decided to launch into the rest of the book, is that the term 'welfare *system*' is preferred throughout the book to that of 'welfare *state*'. Interestingly, William Beveridge – a key founder of Britain's welfare system (see Chapter 3) – strongly disliked the 'welfare state' tag. As a supporter of insurance and the principle of saving for a rainy day, he disapproved of any term that seemed to encourage the idea of welfare being a bottomless pit of resources, or an institution which would unquestioningly look after people however 'undeserving' of help they were.

However, avoiding the 'welfare state' term in this book has little to do with Beveridge's preferences. Rather, it is to signal some sort of recognition that we have moved out of the twentieth-century, postwar era of 'big government' in which the state was expected to play the leading role as provider of every major welfare service.

At the same time, there is still a 'system' of welfare. Though inadequate and badly coordinated in parts (see Chapter 11 on community care for examples), there is a connected set of agencies making decisions about, paying for, or providing services. The structure of the welfare system is composed of: central and local government; quangos or quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations (see Chapter 7 for examples in education); the voluntary (non-profit-making) sector; the private (for-profit) sector; and

the informal sector of the family and community. This book is about the system, why it is run according to certain principles and not others and – in the next chapter – what these principles mean.

Key terms and concepts

critique
disciplines
empirical research
hypothesis
implementation
models (of welfare or social policy)
objectivity
public administration
quangos
social administration
theory
values
welfare
welfare system
welfarism

Suggestions for further reading

A book written by Nicholas Deakin, *Politics of Welfare* (1994) represents a good start in reading about social policy. The introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 of his book provide a helpful historical framework that discusses the development of social policy in Britain. Another authentic taste of social policy can be obtained by dipping into one or more of the books written by Richard Titmuss; *Problems of Social Policy* (1950), for instance, is a huge work and contains a lot of detail, but there are some genuinely moving and extremely well-written passages on Britain's response to wartime problems. Any of Titmuss's later books, such as *Essays on the Welfare State* (1958), *Commitment to Welfare* (1968) and *The Gift Relationship* (1970) give an impression of social policy's roots. A convenient collection of Titmuss's writing about welfare is *The Philosophy of Welfare: Selected Writings of Richard M. Titmuss* (1987), edited by Brian Abel-Smith and Kay Titmuss. Another period piece, Ian Gough's *The Political Economy of the Welfare State* (1979) provides a readable example of late 1970s radicalism. A collection of papers, *The Goals of Social Policy* (1989), edited by M. Bulmer and colleagues, contains some useful reflective and historical essays from a largely mainstream perspective on the state of social policy as it appeared in the late 1980s.

Finally, recent 'postmodernist' or 'poststructuralist' styles of thinking about social policy are exemplified in *Embodying the Social: Constructions of Difference* (1998), edited by Esther Saraga.

2 IDEAS AND CONCEPTS IN SOCIAL POLICY

Introduction

Equality, equity and justice
- Equality and politics
- Justifying policies for equality
  - *Egalitarianism*
  - *Equity*
  - *Equality of opportunity*

Need
- Needs, wants and satisfaction
- Sen's theory: 'commodities','capabilities' and 'functionings'

Freedom and rights
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Conclusions

Key terms and concepts

Suggestions for further reading

Introduction

The principles of social policy are the guiding ideas that underlie policies for social welfare, education, health services and the like. For instance, one policy might make the principle of *equality* a priority, while another might stress choice or freedom. This chapter is about such principles – equality, equity, need, freedom and rights – and how these words can be interpreted in different ways.

While the term 'principle' is both useful and widely used, it has a very general meaning and is potentially rather confusing. In fact it has several different but *interconnected* meanings.

First, a principle might be said to have a *moral* or ethical meaning. If someone takes a 'principled stand', they will be standing up for certain beliefs in what is right and wrong and upholding certain moral standards. A moral standard in social policy could be represented, for instance, by the principle that no individual in need, no matter how poor or for whatever reasons, should be left without access to health care. Another more contentious example might be the principle, advocated by some, that housing and social

benefits should either be reduced for lone parents or be withheld unless they fulfil certain conditions, such as finding work or employment training.

As can be seen from these examples, the moralistic side of a welfare principle contains a vision of how things ought or ought not to be. Social policy reflects the *norms* and *values* of society. Many social policies have a normative element, and are drafted with the intent of influencing society or the behaviour of individuals in line with deeply-held convictions and values. Thus there are left-wing normative principles which would include, among other things, the idea of equalizing outcomes for people. Conservative normative views tend to stress the idea that social policies should uphold 'traditional family values', or wherever possible make greater use of the voluntary sector in providing welfare services rather than expanding the role of government.

A second way of defining principles is to see them as *rules*. To take an example from the physical world, the human body – or any part of it, such as the heart – operates according to certain principles: for instance, the physical laws governing blood pressure and muscle tension.

However, the principles of social policy are not the same as the principles of human biology or the laws of nature. When New Labour formed a government in 1997, much was made of the idea of making policy 'evidence-based': the intention was to use social scientific evidence and hard evidence from public enquiry to decide 'what works', rather than basing policy on ideology or values. However, while efforts to use objective evidence undoubtedly increased, there remain many examples of recent policy change that seem to be based more on the government's determination to push through certain reforms irrespective of the evidence for or against them. Government proposals to greatly increase the number of city academies are just one example of this, in education policy (see Chapter 7). But even if policies are based on evidence, we could not expect to scientifically predict what the effects of social policies will be in the way that a scientist or doctor can predict what will happen if a certain medical operation or treatment is carried out (though even here we must be careful not to expect too much certainty).

On the other hand, there is an important sense in which principles do convey an idea of the rules of social policy. Each welfare system creates a welfare bureaucracy: government departments with thousands of staff and a framework of laws and rules to regulate the work. Users of services will be affected by the rules: for example, in relation to eligibility for a service or a grant.

Third, 'principles of social policy' refer to the *ideas* and theories that underpin social policy. This definition very much overlaps with the first: principles as morals, norms or value judgements.

However, there is a valid and useful distinction between a principle as a moral statement and a principle as an idea or a theory. It is possible, as we saw in Chapter 1, to have theories about social policy that are not based *primarily* on morals or value judgements, even though such ideas might be coloured *partly* by political opinions or other biases.

For example, we may seek to define, in as objective a way as possible, what such ideas as 'freedom', 'liberty', 'justice' and 'equality' mean in social policy terms. Another example of a leading idea in social policy, which was developed in the early nineteenth

century, is utilitarianism: a set of principles outlined by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) to offer what he saw as a rational alternative to governing on the basis of values or religious morals (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1 An early principle still relevant? The example of Bentham and utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham was born in 1748 into a prosperous middle-class family. At the age of 7 he was sent to Westminster school and, at the tender age of 12, he entered Queen's College Oxford, which 'he hated even more' than school (Warnock 1966: 7). By the age of 20 he had received five years of training in London as a lawyer, but his brilliant mind and wide-ranging interests led him into the world of publishing and discourse on philosophy.

Between early adulthood and middle age, Bentham established himself as a radical thinker on social, political and moral issues. Together with a circle of friends, writers and publishers, he became an influential figure, challenging government inefficiency and abuse and recommending radical and rational solutions to social problems. His influences on policy were especially noticeable in the field of poverty and 'poor relief' (see Chapter 3), though he also put forward an ambitious scheme to reform and redesign prisons, as well as many other constitutional and administrative proposals.

In 1788, he published his *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (see Bentham 1982), which contains all the main elements of what became known as 'utilitarianism' or 'Benthamism'. Though not a socialist (socialism was in its infancy), Jeremy Bentham did advocate changes that were revolutionary in their time: the vote for all adult men and women, annual parliaments, open and accountable government based on rational or scientific principles. Above all, he firmly believed that the value of any policy should be decided on its objective merits, not whether it fitted with custom and practice or with any particular religious viewpoint.

In this way, Bentham's philosophy could be summarized as 'radical and ruthless'. There is no room for sentiment, or tradition, or for policies that support unearned privilege. The basic question, according to Bentham, is whether any government policy or institution serves any valuable purpose or has any *utility* (use) – hence 'utilitarianism'.

But how do we decide whether a policy has a useful function or not? Bentham's answer – and the principle he is perhaps most famous for – was to suggest that we find out what would bring 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. The best policy is one that minimizes the harm or discomfort to the greatest possible number of individuals, or that brings 'happiness' to the majority, even if there is a cost to the minority.

Bentham's method or 'calculus' for working this out was based on the degree of pleasure or pain involved in any course of action. Not surprisingly, he was denounced by leading religious authorities of the day because he appeared to be advancing a godless doctrine that appealed to primitive or basic human instincts. In defence, Bentham's calculus of pleasures included the 'higher' things – for example, education and artistic achievement – and he suggested that policies that promote these have the greatest utility.

How does utilitarianism apply to modern dilemmas of rationing services or calculating who should benefit from welfare? The utilitarian approach to these dilemmas is to apply 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' principle. It therefore questions whether all human life is of equal value, and whether it is immoral to weigh some people's happiness or continued life against that of others. These questions are still very much with us, as illustrated by moral

dilemmas in the provision of scarce health care resources (see Chapter 9). When health service professionals make judgements about patients on other than medical criteria, they may stray into making utilitarian judgements: for example, whether a patient is young or old, is married or has dependants. Consciously or not, they may be asking themselves, 'What use does saving or prolonging this life have, and how far would medical help in this case add to the sum of human happiness?'

On the one hand, utilitarianism can be seen as realistic: in this world, hard choices have to be made and it is better to be clearheaded about the relative costs and gains of a policy so that welfare can be maximized. On the other, utilitarianism can be seen as one element in an overarching Victorian philosophy of self-interest and a penny-pinching approach to public services. It would be unfair to portray Bentham as someone who advocated pure self-interest. After all, he believed in the idea of expanding public education and other services to benefit the majority. However, it was the case that a cruder kind of utilitarian thinking gained ground in the nineteenth century and helped to justify the harsh treatment of the poor.

Equality, equity and justice

Equality and politics

The principle of equality occupies a central place in debates about social policy. For those on the left of the political spectrum, social policies are ideally the tools or mechanisms with which to create a fairer society by equalizing benefits from health, education and other services.

But from the perspectives of the political right and centre, social policies that attempt to equalize outcomes for people do so at considerable cost. Not only do they impose a burden of high taxation on people with average and higher incomes, with the suggested effect of dampening incentives and *economic growth*, but also they require a highly interventionist state and an army of bureaucrats and professionals.

Robert Nozick, a philosopher who published an influential book, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, in 1974, powerfully attacked the goal of using social policies and other forms of government intervention (such as taxation) to increase equality. He based his argument on a distinction between 'patterned' and 'non-patterned' forms of justice. To summarize Nozick's complex and interesting argument, his fundamental point is that patterned justice involves the idea of continual interference in people's lives in order to bring about a particular distribution (pattern) of property, goods and other things of value (for instance, employment opportunities). The pattern would be based upon a particular goal. For instance, in one society there might be a particularly strong attachment to the idea of rewarding merit and of distributing resources and rewards on that basis. Conversely, another society might stress the goal of equality between individuals irrespective of merit or performance.

However, according to Nozick, any attempt to enforce patterns of justice will tend to undermine the supremely important value of liberty – hence Nozick's philosophy is an example of 'libertarian' principles. It is wrong and unjust, according to these principles, for any government to take away the individual's property or income in order to

redistribute it in the attempt to create patterned justice: for instance, by taxing individuals to fund social welfare. Nozick's approach therefore emphasizes the idea that there is justice in wealth and property being owned in 'non-patterned' ways (for instance, according to historical factors and chance). For him, the only moral form of government is one that is minimal in its interventions and actions; any 'more extensive state would (will) violate the rights of individuals' (Nozick 1974: 333).

Note how perspectives of the 'right', including libertarian principles such as Nozick's, often suggest that the principle of *freedom* is threatened if social policies are too concerned with equality, while 'left' perspectives often defend equality by reference to people's *needs*. Thus, arguments about the value of equality, and whether promoting it is a good idea, cannot be fully understood in isolation from either of these other concepts.

However, it is misleading to package all ideas about equality and policy neatly into either a left-wing or right-wing perspective. To begin with, and despite the popularity of the terms, there is little consensus on what being 'left wing' or 'right wing' actually means. The distinction between left and right in politics is thought to originate from the days of the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century, when the more liberal and radical representatives in the newly-formed National Assembly were seated to the left of the presiding officer, while the more conservative members of the legislature sat on the right. As democracy developed in Europe, a similar seating arrangement became common practice in a number of parliaments. Thus a tradition grew up, associating 'left' with principles that favoured equality, radical reform and 'bigger government', and 'right' with principles that favour individual freedom and liberty over equality of outcome, a more cautious approach to change and reform, and an emphasis on reducing the role of 'big government' in people's lives.

In the contemporary **postmodern** political context, however, these earlier distinctions between left and right have become blurred (see concluding chapter for further discussion). But also, there have always been considerable differences *among* fellow socialists, liberals and conservatives on the question of how much equality is desirable and how far social policies should attempt to 'correct' the inequalities and injustices of society.

For instance, a liberal thinker on equality, John Rawls (1972), argues that a basic goal of every policy should be one of equality. As far as possible, the 'good things' of life should be shared equally: education and career opportunities, welfare services, leisure and so on. Further, Rawls regards the right to liberty as fundamental in a just society. Everyone should be treated equally in this respect.

However, Rawls also argues that a certain amount of inequality – just enough to create rewards and incentives for the better-off people in society – will benefit not only the advantaged *but also the least advantaged*. With the right amount of incentive, the better-off groups in society will work at an optimum level of efficiency. This will mean that everyone will benefit from well-run public services and private businesses. But if rewards for the better-off exceed the optimum level, the poorer groups begin to lose out. The better-off contribute less than they should in the form of taxes (wealth and income that can be redistributed) and have fewer incentives to be efficient, because their incomes are high irrespective of their work efforts. Rawls termed the idea of achieving just about the right amount of inequality the 'difference principle' (see Rawls 1972).

It has always been the case that some thinkers on the left have believed that certain inequalities are unavoidable. Some kinds of inequality might even be encouraged if they are based on rewarding merit. Conversely, it is also true that some thinkers on the right have subscribed to the idea that there should be certain basic equalities between people.

In Britain, the old left–right battle lines between the Labour and Conservative parties have been redrawn in recent times. Partly, this is a reflection of international events – in particular, the downfall of communism in the former Soviet Union (Russia) and its satellite states in eastern and central Europe. Though almost all western European socialists had already distanced themselves from repressive, corrupt and highly unequal communist regimes, the end of communism nevertheless removed an important reference point.

In short, socialism may live on as an idea, but if we define it as a set of policies to redistribute resources and to make society substantially more equal than it was, it is dead. No major political party in Britain – including the Labour Party – now supports principles of equality in the traditional socialist sense.

There is another strong reason for this. In the first half of the twentieth century, policies to redistribute wealth and to make society more equal than before held some appeal for the majority of the population. Approximately a third of the British population enjoyed relatively high incomes and considerable wealth, while the remaining two thirds lived either on moderate and static incomes, or in poverty. Most people could agree with the idea of redistribution, knowing that it would be likely to benefit them.

In more recent decades, however, the pattern of income and wealth has shifted. Although inequalities have widened, living standards for a two-thirds majority have steadily improved at the same time. A political party that stands for equality and a substantial redistribution of resources therefore no longer has the appeal it may have had. The Labour Party in Britain painfully discovered this in election defeat after election defeat between 1979 and 1992. Its victory in 1997 was largely attributable to its ability to distance itself from the idea that it was a high tax party with policies to help the poorer third of the population at the expense of the majority (see Chapter 13).

Justifying policies for equality

Given these changes in the political context and the lack of support for full-blooded socialism, can equality still be defended as an important principle of social policy? As with every principle, the answer to this question depends on how equality is interpreted. Three basically different views can be identified: the goal of near-equality or egalitarianism; equity; and equality of opportunity. Attached to each of these definitions are somewhat different justifications for equality.

Egalitarianism

This is an ideal, an expression of equality in its 'purest' or most utopian form (Drabble 1988). It is about finding ways of ensuring that people enjoy the same results or *outcomes* in life: the same incomes, the same life span, similar levels of education and health and so on.

What would be the justification for policies to bring about a state of near-equality? Again, much would depend on the egalitarian's values or morality. The example of communism has already been mentioned. There has also been a thread of ethical or

Christian socialism in British egalitarianism, and this has been a recurrent influence on thinking about social policy (see, for example, Tawney 1964). In communism or Marxism, the ultimate objective was a society in which no one unfairly exploited the labour of anyone else. Ethical socialists, however, stressed the *moral* dimension: gross inequalities are morally wrong, whereas a society of near-equals is one in which community, brotherhood and sisterhood will flourish. Note the normative ideas underlying this principle of equality.

Tawney was a Christian socialist and a leading figure in debates about equality in a welfare society. For him, equality amounted to much more than 'distributive justice' or making sure that incomes and the benefits of the welfare system were distributed equally among individuals and classes. Julian Le Grand's study, *Strategy of Equality* (1982) is an example of how the concept of distributive justice can be applied to research on 'who gets what' from the welfare system. Tawney held to a wider socialistic vision of equality. His goal and his vision of social policy was to help create a society in which people felt that they belonged to a common community – a society in which they would feel free to participate in making political decisions about their own future, and in which everyone was valued equally.

In a similar vein, Marshall – another founder of the principles of an egalitarian welfare society – argued that: 'The extension of the social services is not primarily a means of equalising incomes . . . What matters is that there is a general enrichment of the concrete substance of civilized life, a general reduction of risk and insecurity, an equalisation between the more and less fortunate at all levels . . . Equality of status is more important than equality of income' (1963: 107).

However, *inequality* of income is important to egalitarians in one important respect. Large inequalities, it is argued, lead to social division and are, in themselves, morally wrong. For instance, public concern has been expressed about the enormous annual pay increases (of over 30 per cent and totalling thousands of pounds) awarded to the heads of government agencies. This has been at a time when the great majority of public sector employees, working in the same agencies, have been expected to accept much lower annual pay increases.

Thus, the egalitarian's argument against inequality is relatively easy to invoke, as did Charles Dickens in his scathing attacks on the greed and selfishness of Victorian business people and corrupt public servants. However, a critique of gross inequality is not the same as making a case for *near-equality*. Here the egalitarians' arguments are harder to sustain, for a number of reasons.

First, *individuals differ*. Whether as a result of nature or nurture, every individual has a unique combination of talents, abilities, temperament and motivation. Policies trying to bring about absolute or near-equality would work against these differences, rewarding the lazy, the incompetent and the dishonest as well as the innovative, intelligent or honest.

There is a lack of justice in policies that try to ensure equal outcomes for all. Would it be just, for example, to ensure that all 16-year-olds 'achieved' the same number of GCSE passes at the same grades, even though everyone knew that a proportion of the 'successful' candidates were being rewarded for either mediocre efforts or none at all? Such a policy would immediately devalue the GCSE qualification but, more importantly, would be unjust to those who had worked hard or had the ability to achieve the better results.

The second factor is coercion and *lack of freedom*. In order for a state of near-equality to be maintained, very strong regulatory authorities would be needed to survey constantly individuals' incomes, redistribute wealth and monitor who was being appointed to each and every job. Not only would this cost a great deal to implement, but it would also bring about a very invasive state. Everyone's private life would have to be scrutinized regularly and closely to make sure that no one was becoming better off than anyone else. So while inequality spells lack of freedom for some because better-off individuals and groups may gain at the expense of the poor, a state of *imposed equality* would severely reduce everyone's freedom.

However, these criticisms of equality are valid only where policies are taken to extremes. It is relatively easy to put up a 'straw man' of absolute equality and then knock it down, as gurus of the New Right such as Hayek (1944), Worsthorne (1971) and Scruton (1984) have done. In arguing that the goal of equality is unattainable, they have always told cautionary tales of the horrors of repressive state socialist regimes such as the former Soviet Union. But they have never carefully considered the achievements of countries that successfully applied social democratic principles in the past. Countries such as Sweden and Denmark have not sought to abolish inequality completely, but have acted to reduce the extremes that arise in other capitalist economies.

So while everyone agrees that near-equality is an impossible dream, perhaps even a nightmare, this does not mean that the equality principle need be rejected altogether. In policy terms, a more acceptable and practical principle might be that of *making society more equal than it was*, rather than trying to bring about absolute equality. This is in one way a utilitarian consideration, increasing social equality not so much for the sake of it but more to maintain social order and to ensure 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. But, more importantly, there is also the justification of fairness – making sure that less well-off or disadvantaged groups are treated with justice.

A policy to bring about near-equality might look more justifiable if we think about it in relation to *groups* rather than individuals. For example, while accepting that individual men and women differ – the more and the less intelligent, able, rich and poor individuals – there is a strong argument that men and women as groups should be near-equals. This would mean that approximately equal proportions of women and men would occupy each occupational or income level. Sweden, for instance, has set policy targets to do just this, and aims to achieve a balance of no more than 60 per cent or less than 40 per cent of either men or women in a comprehensive list of occupations (Blakemore and Drake 1995).

Similar arguments about equality and the representation of different groups at every level of society can be applied to minority groups as well as to men and women. Equal opportunity policies (see pp. 24–26), for instance, aim to increase opportunities for people who have experienced discrimination in the past because of their disability, age, sexual orientation or 'race'. As they are minority groups in the population, however, this means that equality in terms of numbers is achieved once the *proportions* of black, gay, disabled and older people in a given occupation or at a given income level match the proportions in the population as a whole. This notion of equality based on proportions – 'proportionality' – is a relatively limited definition of equality, however, because it does not include any reference to *power*. A business firm or a government department might

employ representative proportions of women and disabled people, for instance, but this does not necessarily mean that women and disabled employees have an equal say in the shaping of policy or in sharing managerial control of the organization.

Equity

This is a useful idea that extends the concept of equality. The notion of equality tends to make us focus on sameness or similarity. Thus, if neighbours X and Y are equal, we tend to think of them having similar incomes, houses, type of car, number of children and so on. But if such an end-state were to be brought about by social and taxation policies, what would be required?

This is where the concept of equity is useful because, to reach a similar end-state or outcome, it is usually necessary to treat individuals, families and groups *equitably* rather than *equally*. An equitable approach means treating people fairly, but differently, to ensure that there is some equality between them at the end.

Dividing a cake gives a homely example to illustrate equity. Assuming that one guest feels full, two are not very hungry and a fourth is ravenous, equitable slicing would mean no cake for the first, two thin slices and one large wedge. After this, all guests should be in an equal state – full – but they have been treated unequally to achieve this. Treating them all equally, on the other hand, would have resulted in unequal or undesirable outcomes.

In social policy terms, and returning to our neighbouring families X and Y, equitable social policies would treat each household differently depending on its needs and circumstances. For example, if X's son is disabled or has special educational needs, there might be targeted grants, benefits or school facilities that would have the object of compensating the X family for additional expenditure and bringing them back to a state of near-equality with the Y family.

The problem with equitable social policies is that sometimes they do not *look* fair. Treating everyone in the same way is seen as fair, whereas treating them differently seems to smack of injustice or special favours. For example, equitable cake slicing might work with adults but try it with small children, who expect equal slices of a birthday cake. In this situation equity will almost certainly end in tears.

A more serious example is provided by public reaction to William Beveridge's wartime proposals for social security reform, which might be regarded as the cornerstone of Britain's welfare state (see Chapter 3). Above all, it was the fairness and perceived equality of the scheme that gripped the public imagination, made Beveridge into something of a hero and the 'Beveridge Report' into a best seller (Beveridge 1942). Beveridge's proposal that all contributors be treated equally, paying the same (flat-rate) National Insurance contributions and being able to draw the same flat-rate benefits when in need, seemed to tune in perfectly with the wartime collective spirit of equality.

Yet, in essence, Beveridge's plan owed more to liberal principles of equality than to socialist ones. Treating people 'equally' meant that the scheme did not substantially redistribute resources from the better-off social classes to the less well-off, although of course it did redistribute from the healthy to the temporarily sick and from the employed to the temporarily unemployed. A more equitable social security policy, it could be argued, would have asked the better-off to pay a little more into the scheme in return for the same benefits as everyone else – but would this have looked fair?

Applying the equity principle can also raise problems because fairness demands an accurate and accepted definition of people's *needs*. Suppose that you are again faced with a table of squabbling children at mealtime and that you have decided to distribute food in unequal, equitable portions. If you are both a parent and a student of social policy, perhaps the children will already have grudgingly learned to put up with the principle of equity. However, this does not solve the problem of deciding whose definitions of need to take into account – yours or theirs? There might be vociferous objections from the children to the *grounds* on which the size of each child's portion has been decided: 'That's not fair, he had a big slice yesterday', 'She said she's going to be sick if you give her any vegetables' and so on. You may yourself be unsure of each child's 'real' needs: is Matthew clamouring for more simply because he is showing off; is Alison hungrier than she is prepared to say, and should she be encouraged to eat more? Faced with all this, it is not surprising that parents, like welfare systems, resort to giving equal, but inequitable, benefits.

Equality of opportunity

This is another useful refinement of the meaning of equality. The equal opportunity concept might be applied first to *employment*, through policies to remove barriers of discrimination, improving access to jobs, education and training. In an age of temporary work contracts and part-time jobs, this is important. Work, despite its drawbacks, raises incomes, usually provides social contact and reduces social exclusion (see Chapter 8). Second, equal opportunity principles can be applied to improving access to, and use of, *health and social services*.

However, as with other equality principles, equal opportunity means different things to different people. Conservatives, as well as those on the left, subscribe to 'equality of opportunity'. Views from the political right stress *opportunity*, while those from the left stress the *equality* side of the equation. These differences of emphasis can result in substantial practical differences in the ways that equal opportunity policies are applied. Distinctions can be made between (a) relatively limited and modest definitions of equal opportunity, and (b) more ambitious and 'tougher' approaches. These distinctions are summarized in Box 2.2.

Under British law – for example, the anti-discrimination laws planned for 2007 that will combine legislation against discrimination on the basis of gender, race, disability, age and other categories for the first time – policy and practice are much closer to (a) than to (b). But it is better to think of equal opportunity policies on a spectrum from 'modest' to 'tough'. Particular examples do not necessarily fit neatly into either category. In the UK, for example, not all equal opportunity policies can be pigeonholed as weak. A certain amount of 'positive action' to correct gender and 'race' discrimination is allowed under British law, and in Northern Ireland a Fair Employment Act and other government action has endorsed the principle of 'proportionality' mentioned above. In the Northern Ireland case proportionality means a more equal sharing of job opportunities between the Protestant and Catholic communities than before. Although a strict policy of reserving jobs for the under-represented Catholic minority has not been introduced, it is in Northern Ireland that the UK has moved closest to the principle of a 'tougher' approach to equal opportunities.

The summarized distinctions between minimalist policies and maximalist policies (or 'weak' and 'tough') of equal opportunity (see Box 2.2) suggest sharp differences between two types of equality policy. However, it is worth re-emphasizing that in reality these distinctions are blurred. If policies favour positive action rather than positive discrimination, for instance, we can describe them as being midway between 'weak' and 'tough'.

Positive action refers to policies that stop short of positive discrimination. Under Britain's Race Relations Act 1976, for example, it was permissible to take positive steps to encourage members of under-represented groups to apply for work in an organization (for instance, in the way that job advertisements were worded). Other forms of positive action include additional training courses to meet the needs of under-represented groups, career breaks for women, and improvements in facilities in the workplace that enhance disabled people's opportunities.

All these measures were designed to develop a workforce that was more representative of the population, but that did not rely on a quota system of reserving jobs for each under-represented group. Similar principles apply to the distribution of benefits or access to social and health services. Positive action here would entail taking steps to encourage access and to enable under-represented or disadvantaged groups to make fuller use of the services available.

However, positive action does not mean that people will automatically qualify for a service or a benefit *because* they are members of a minority or a disadvantaged group. *Need* remains the basic criterion. The object of positive action is therefore to equalize access and to ensure that everyone with needs is heard: for instance, by providing translation services to hospital patients whose first language is other than English.

Box 2.2 Equal opportunity strategies

'Minimalist' principles	*'Maximalist' principles*
Equality policies aim to ensure that people are *treated* fairly or on an equal basis. Discrimination on grounds of gender, 'race', disability or other irrelevant criteria is unjust and illegal in most cases.	Equality policies aim to create *equal outcomes*. Policies and the law must go further than banning unfair or negative discrimination; they must also positively encourage or discriminate so that minorities and other disadvantaged groups benefit equally from employment opportunities or the welfare system.
'Fair competition' on a 'level playing field' is the hallmark of this approach. The end result or outcome (for example, being employed or receiving a benefit) must be decided on *merit* or according to *need*.	There is no 'level playing field'. Historic advantages enjoyed by those in control now mean that they decide how 'merit' and 'need' are defined. Though merit is important, it may have to be redefined to avoid in-built bias against women, disabled people and others.

Individuals must be treated 'in like fashion'. The end result is unequal, but fair. *Any* discrimination, positive or negative, is wrong.	Individuals may be treated differently according to the social group or category they belong to. 'Positive action' or 'positive discrimination' might be necessary to make sure that under-represented groups obtain benefits or employment from which they have previously been excluded.
Quotas, or reserving a certain number of jobs, educational places or services for members of minority and disadvantaged groups, are unjust.	Quotas, or at least targets, to bring the *proportions* of people in various groups (women, disabled people and others) in line with the proportions receiving employment, education and welfare are necessary because without them little will change.
'Minimalist' principles fit best with liberal or conservative principles and values.	'Maximalist' principles fit best with social democratic or egalitarian principles, though 'tough' equal opportunities policies are found in the right-of-centre dominated USA.

Having said this, the distinction between (a) providing services strictly according to need and (b) positive discrimination in favour of a certain group, is not as clear-cut as it might first appear. Some social benefits combine (a) need criteria with (b): a kind of positive discrimination. For example, child benefit is distributed to mothers (or the father, if he is the main carer). The idea behind this benefit is to meet need by offsetting partly the expenses incurred in bringing up children. Parents receive this benefit because they are parents, not because every one of them is in need. Thus recipients of child benefit are in one sense the beneficiaries of a form of positive discrimination, in that they are singled out as a group or category rather than being treated as individuals, some of whom actually do not need the benefit and some of whom do.

This point is linked to arguments about whether benefits should be universal benefits – that is, available to everyone in a certain category, such as child benefit for parents – or whether they should be targeted or selective benefits. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Need

This brings us to the important concept of need. We have already seen that 'need' is a *problematic* concept (by 'problematic', we mean a term that is not easy to define and where there is a lack of consensus about what it means). This causes difficulties when, for example, we try to decide whether one person's or one group's needs are greater than another's.

Before you read any further, it might help at this point to spend five minutes writing a short list of what you think are the most important human needs. Try to list at least ten.

Now ask yourself these questions. Is there any pattern or logic in the list you have drawn up? For example, do some needs come before others and if so, why? Are some more basic or fundamental? (If you do not see a pattern, add some more needs and then try to prioritize the needs in some way.)

Are your definitions of need culture-free, or do they relate only to a particular country or social group? To test this, think about whether your list would be as applicable in India or Mali, say, as in Britain or another economically developed country. Try constructing a list as if *you* were living in a village in the African Sahel, or on the streets of an Indian city. How does your list compare with that of Doyal and Gough (1991), presented a little further on?

Writing your own list of human needs and the questions this poses in your mind should help to identify two fundamental points about need. These points have been at the centre of social policy ever since the state began to take on certain basic responsibilities for people's welfare. The first is a central question about objectivity. Is it possible to establish a commonly accepted or objective definition of need and to distinguish clearly between those who are in need and those who are not? The second point relates to questions of responsibility and duty. How far is the state responsible for meeting certain needs? Should every citizen have *rights* to have their needs met, and does the community have a *duty* to meet them?

These questions not only are of great interest today, but also vexed the conscience of nineteenth-century Britain. In Britain, the 'new' Poor Law of 1834 showed official acceptance of a very basic responsibility of the state towards the poorest citizens. Workhouses and 'parish relief' were organized into a system that was designed to provide for only the absolutely destitute (see Chapter 3). In return for their freedom and loss of *civil rights*, paupers could obtain just enough from the public purse to survive. In this early example of social policy we have a definition of basic needs: shelter, food and perhaps some very limited medical care.

Doyal and Gough (1991: 56–9) point out that survival is too limited a definition even of basic need. As they suggest, the victim of a serious accident who is in a coma is surviving but is not able to achieve anything or to satisfy any other needs. Similarly, the example of severely malnourished victims of famine shows that people might be surviving – just – but are hardly having their basic needs met. Another problem with 'survival' as a definition of basic need is that it is rather circular: it is rather like saying that human beings 'need to live'.

For these reasons, Doyal and Gough suggest that *physical health* is a better definition of basic need, because 'to complete a range of practical tasks in daily life requires manual, mental and emotional abilities with which poor physical health usually interferes' (1991: 56).

The advantage of using physical health as a criterion of basic need is that it suggests certain *goals*. Note that Doyal and Gough talk of 'good' physical health, which takes us away from mere survival to a goal that people can aim for. However, the concept of 'physical health' also opens up problems of definition: how healthy do people have to be before we can say that their needs can be met?

Thus, it might not be possible to find completely objective definitions, even of basic needs. This is more apparent when we include Doyal and Gough's second criterion of

basic needs, *autonomy*. Without autonomy, or the freedom to be able to decide and choose, human beings are arguably deprived of a need as basic as physical health. It is no use being physically healthy without the ability to realize the aspirations or objectives that make us human – secondary needs such as the need to develop oneself in various ways, to communicate and to form relationships with other human beings. As with physical health, however, autonomy is a matter of degree. There is bound to be debate about how much autonomy human beings need or, more negatively, how much they can do without. Related to this is the question of mental health. It is hard to see why only physical health should be seen as a basic need when mental illness can seriously impair quality of life and can remove people's ability to live autonomous, independent lives.

Sadly, loss or lack of autonomy is not difficult to find in the field of welfare and social policy. Older people, for example, are particularly vulnerable in this respect, because they might have been judged to be incapable of exercising autonomy. The very old are often written off as too mentally confused or frail to exercise any autonomy. Studies of confused older people in residential care suggest that the staff or 'carers' might exaggerate these infirmities and might actually increase them (Kitwood 1997). Such residents are not even allowed to exercise choice or autonomy in matters that they can still comprehend. Similar issues of loss of autonomy and the controlling aspects of residential care are discussed further in Chapter 6.

Box 2.3 Universal human needs?

Doyal and Gough (1991) argue that it is relatively easy to make up a list of needs – social policy research abounds with them. However, it is more difficult to decide which needs are *universal* and which definitions would permit us to compare need satisfaction in different countries or cultures.

Their list (below) has been drawn up according to one main criterion. To be included, each item must contribute towards satisfying the two most *basic* needs (physical health and autonomy). For example, they suggest that sexual relationships need not be included 'because some people manage to live healthy and autonomous lives without sex with others' (1991: 158). Do you agree with this, and in general what do you think of their list of needs?

- nutritional food and clean water
- protective housing
- a non-hazardous work environment
- a non-hazardous physical environment
- appropriate health care
- security in childhood
- significant primary relationships
- physical security
- economic security

- appropriate education
- safe birth control and childbearing.

To sum up, physical health and autonomy can be seen as basic needs that, if denied, will result in people being unable to meet other, secondary needs. Putting it another way, *needs could be defined as basic if being deprived of them will lead to serious harm*.

Once basic needs have been discussed, however, there remains the question of how secondary or intermediate needs are to be identified. This is the point at which to compare your own list with that of Doyal and Gough (see Box 2.3).

Needs, wants and satisfaction

So far, our discussion of need has highlighted some of the problems encountered in trying objectively to define 'real' needs. But while difficult, this is not an impossible task as long as we remember that there has to be some argument. In fact, debate about needs is a healthy phenomenon. For instance, it might be prompted by attempts to improve standards of welfare or to expose the hidden needs of disadvantaged groups.

Bradshaw (1972), in a pioneering discussion, suggested that there are four main ways in which people define needs.

- *Felt need*, according to Bradshaw, occurs when individuals are conscious of their needs. This, however, leaves open the question of whether they decide to express their felt needs or whether they are able to do so. Not all felt needs are expressed, either because those in need choose not to express them or because inequalities of power and status prevent oppressed and less powerful groups from voicing their needs. For example, older Asian women's needs have been neglected in the provision of community services because of the subordinate position of many of these women (see Blakemore and Boneham 1994).
- *Expressed needs* are publicized and known about. They become *demands*, as opposed to the hidden needs of those who are unwilling or too powerless or otherwise unable to express what they need, as just mentioned.
- *Normative needs* are those defined according to professional norms or standards; they are needs defined by outside observers or experts. For example, a professional counsellor might identify a need in a client that the client might accept, or on the other hand reject or fail to comprehend. Or, to give another example, social workers responsible for finding foster homes will judge whether a particular home is adequate to meet the needs of a child, as defined by their professional view and the standards laid down by their employer.
- *Comparative need* introduces the concept of relative judgement – that is, the needs of a group are defined relative to what other groups have or do not have. There is an element of justice here. If there are two similar groups, but only one is receiving a benefit or a service, the group not receiving welfare could be unjustly deprived and in comparative need.

The first definition – felt need – introduces a subjective element into the discussion. On the one hand, there are some needs that can be defined objectively (albeit with some disagreement among observers) and, on the other, wants that are apparently more to do with subjective or personal states of mind or desires. For example, a person might need a certain medical treatment that is invasive or painful, but not want it. Or a hypochondriac will be obsessed with medical treatments even though objectively these are not needed.

Remember that one way of defining a *need* is that being deprived of it causes serious harm, whereas this is not the case with things that are purely *wants*. A child might desperately want the latest computer game but arguably being deprived of it will not cause harm and might even do some good.

This distinction between wants and needs is not a clear-cut one, however. The very idea of 'felt needs' suggests that a strongly subjective element *can* enter into definitions of need. For example, pensioners on a low income might decide that keeping in touch with their grandchildren is a basic requirement (and a need to sustain important family relationships). They might decide that it is vitally important to spend a lot of their money on cards and gifts, especially on the grandchildren's birthdays or at seasonal holidays such as Christmas. But in refusing to compromise on this, they might well have to economize on heating or food costs. In this case, what appear to be unnecessary wants (cards, gifts) take the place of things that safeguard a basic need, such as physical health. For instance, they might decide that their heating must be switched off to save money, possibly risking death from hypothermia for the sake of being able to afford Christmas cards and presents.

Therefore, although being deprived of needs can be said to cause serious harm, so in some ways could being deprived of wants. The teenager who is deprived of the latest fashion item might take this want so seriously that they become depressed, feel that they are a social outcast and that their whole life has been blighted. If this happens, then we might have to take the consequences seriously: for example, shoplifting or other forms of offending.

The value of bringing the subjective element into any discussion of needs and wants is that it helps to answer the question of why *satisfaction* levels are not rising markedly in industrialized countries when, according to many objective economic criteria, needs are being met more fully than ever before.

For instance, if economic indicators of well-being are anything to go by, great progress has been made in the past few decades. British incomes rose by 230 per cent in real terms between 1950 and 1990 (Vidal 1994: 4), life expectancy has increased and ordinary people now own many more consumer goods – television sets, computers, cars, freezers and refrigerators – than could have been dreamt of in the 1950s. But whether there has been progress in meeting the full range of human needs is a much more debatable point.

This is where the subjective element is important, for as Vidal (1994: 4–5) notes,

> *many people feel intuitively that growth has not necessarily made people better off. Evidence that quality of life is declining is all around. The British now work the longest average weekly hours in the European Union . . . We appear to have invented new illnesses – from chronic fatigue syndrome to anorexia – and we have increased our vulnerability to older ones, such as asthma, ulcers and diabetes . . . Job stress may cost*

> *the UK ten per cent of GNP [gross national product] annually. And so on, through jammed-up cities, loss of greenbelt, more noise, increasing need for the car . . . the abuse of natural resources . . . pollution, and inner city blight.*

We do not have to accept the whole of this negative message. For instance, there are objective grounds for saying that health is better now than it was in the early 1960s (see Chapter 9). However, an equally important factor is whether people *feel* that their needs are being met and whether their quality of life is failing to improve. As societies with welfare systems become more affluent than before, perhaps they can increasingly 'afford' to be disenchanted with the costs of progress (pollution, erosion of public amenities and loss of community life) in a way that poorer, less industrialized countries cannot.

Sen's theory: 'commodities','capabilities' and 'functionings'

The eminent Indian economist Amartya Sen has developed a view of poverty, and more generally of well-being and the standard of living, which has attracted a great deal of attention in the 20 years or so since he first put them forward. Sen's theory may be regarded as a critique and revision of economic views about well-being and at the same time his approach can be viewed as a variant of, or an application of, a 'needs' approach.

Sen criticizes what he calls the economist's and utilitarian's definitions of welfare or of value in terms of 'happiness' or utility. These, he argues, neglect a range of moral and economic issues that are important, such as exploitation (Sen 1980). He points to the urgency of basic wants and needs and the objectivity of such facts as whether a person is 'hungry, cold or oppressed' (1980: 154). Utility information (pleasure, desire–satisfaction) must be supplemented by such objective assessments. Sen therefore suggests that it is more appropriate to see demands for freedom from exploitation as a moral claim for just rewards ('equality of desert') than as 'lack of well-being' (1980: 155). Similarly, the demand for 'equal pay for equal work' is not a purely instrumental claim, which in welfarist/utilitarian terms it would be.

In developing his theory, Sen has identified, and distinguishes between, three concepts: 'commodities', 'capabilities' and 'functionings'. Commodities (which can be defined as resources, including income, health care and education) have tended to be the focus in most research on needs, poverty and social policy. The notion of a poverty line or subsistence, minimum income level is based on the idea of such commodities, or the lack of them. But Sen suggests that focusing only on commodities is an inadequate basis for poverty research and for defining needs. This is because people vary in their capacities to transform commodities into 'capabilities' and 'functionings' (Sen 1980: 161).

'Capabilities' can be defined objectively, according to Sen, and they describe the necessary conditions human beings need to enable them to function fully. Examples of basic capabilities would include the following: the ability to move about; the ability to meet our nutritional requirements; the wherewithal to be clothed and sheltered; and the ability to participate in the social life of the community.

The object of public policy, according to Sen, is therefore to try to ensure as fair a distribution as possible of both commodities and capabilities. Functionings, which can be at the social or the individual level, involve the idea of activity, or of 'being and doing'.

So, in sum, capabilities are necessary conditions to achieve functionings. They relate directly to the kinds of lives that people are able to lead – the kinds of activities they can pursue, or 'being and doing' (which, he argues, is what our concern with the standard of living and poverty is all about). Commodities by themselves are described as 'opaque' by Sen; it is what people are able to *do* with them that matters.

A useful feature of the capabilities concept is its connection with the idea of positive freedom – freedom as 'empowerment' or as opportunity (see the next section for further discussion of 'positive' and 'negative' definitions of freedom). Capabilities seem to involve choice and the range of choice that individuals have: 'Capabilities . . . are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you may have regarding the life you may lead' (Sen 1987: 36). So, in contrasting a capability and a functioning, the latter is an achievement and the former is 'the *ability* to achieve' (1987: 36) (italics added).

Sen's theory is valuable for a number of reasons. It provides a systematic attempt to explore and develop a more precise characterization of well-being for social science and policy purposes than that provided by some of the standard theories on offer. It provides a corrective to some established views. Sen has drawn attention to what commodities are *for*. His theory attempts to integrate economic and sociological ideas about inequality, poverty and need – that is, economic theory based on the idea of utility or subjective preference, and social science and policy ideas based on objective notions such as need. Finally, Sen's contribution has the great merit of internationalizing the debate about issues such as poverty and need, and the political questions and moral principles these issues provoke. His discussion is as applicable to economically developed countries such as the UK as it is to developing countries such as India.

Freedom and rights

If we are coerced or told what to do throughout our lives and are deprived of rights, we cannot realize our potential to become fully human beings. However, as with equality, 'freedom' and 'rights' can easily become slogans. Difficulties begin when policy-makers or those who deliver welfare services have to decide what 'freedom' and 'rights' mean in practical terms, and on what grounds some people's freedoms might have to be removed or curtailed.

For instance, there might be a need to suspend the driving licence of a driver whose seriously failing vision and hearing pose grave dangers to other road users and pedestrians. However, difficulties arise in defining safety limits for the majority of older drivers, most of whom are safe drivers and enjoy lower insurance premiums as a result. What if a driver's vision is poor but just about adequate to drive a car along familiar routes? Or what if the driver and their partner live in a rural area, where without the use of a car it would be very difficult to visit a chemist's shop or buy groceries? Should such drivers have the freedom to take moderate risks with their own and others' safety?

Disability throws up a range of even deeper questions about freedoms and rights. The right to vote, for example, signifies an individual's full membership of society as a citizen. But should people with significant learning difficulties have the right to vote and, if not, how can their voices be heard and rights as citizens be respected?

Those who champion the rights of disabled people (for instance, Oliver 1990) argue

that most, if not all, of the problems they face have been created by the society around them rather than directly by their disabilities. This is a 'social' model of disability, as opposed to a 'charity' or 'victim' model. It suggests that rather than pitying disabled people as victims of their own physical or mental states, society is responsible for improving their freedoms and guaranteeing their rights. Considerable investment in redesigning housing, work environments and transport facilities is needed in order to remove the barriers to freedom experienced by disabled people.

How far and in what ways society should be expected to make such a full commitment to the rights of disabled people is an open question, and is likely to cause continuing arguments about how to balance the rights and freedoms of disabled and non-disabled people. However, any discussion of freedom and rights will be unproductive unless these principles are broken down into different elements.

One way of doing this is to follow Marshall's (1950) classic distinction between civil, political and social rights. It is possible for individuals and groups to enjoy one or more of these types of right and the freedoms that are associated with them.

- *Civil rights* include basic freedoms under the law: for instance, freedom from discrimination, arbitrary arrest and detention, freedom to meet in groups and to have open discussion, freedom of the press and of expression.
- *Political rights* extend these freedoms to include the right to vote, to join and participate in political parties and to hold government accountable to democratic opinion.
- *Social rights*, according to Marshall, are of a rather different order. They involve a greater commitment of resources and are represented by rights to education, social welfare and social security; in short, rights to the benefits of a welfare system.

Viewed historically, in Britain, the three categories of rights can be seen to have developed gradually, with civil rights being established first, then political rights (for men first, and for women substantially later) and finally social rights. However, Marshall stressed that there is not necessarily an inevitable process of evolution at work here, involving automatic or continued progress towards social rights.

Some countries, such as present-day Singapore, combine substantial social rights and a well-organized welfare system with rather limited political rights (see Chapter 6). Thus one kind of freedom and one set of rights does not necessarily lead to another. In fact, social welfare can bolster paternalistic governments by making them appear fair and reasonable, thus reducing basic political freedoms.

To return to particular groups in society, such as disabled people, older people or children, we may apply Marshall's distinctions to questions about the rights of each. For example, with regard to children, electoral democracies have nowhere extended them *political* rights – they cannot vote or send their own representatives to parliament. However, this does not mean that they cannot have their *civil* rights improved and, under the Children Act 1989 and many other pieces of legislation, children have legal rights to education and welfare services: *social* rights.

If we consider people with learning difficulties, it may well be that they enjoy social

protection and certain social rights, but they may never be granted civil and political rights even though, in some cases, they are capable of exercising political preferences or participating in decisions made about their welfare.

Another way of looking at both rights and freedoms is to think of them either as *negative* principles ('freedom *from*' certain things that endanger liberty) or as *positive* principles ('freedom *to*' do certain things).

A negative definition of freedom would give every citizen the right to be protected from harm from others – for example, from physical assault, burglary or discrimination. Negative definitions of freedom are very much part of a classical liberal or laissez-faire philosophy. In this view, people should be allowed as many freedoms as possible. However, complete freedom, or free-for-all anarchy, would not bring genuine liberty. Laissez-faire must be coupled with strong laws to restrain those who would intentionally seek to harm or reduce the freedoms of others. Thus a liberal society such as the USA has always had relatively strong laws to limit the power of both the state and of private monopolies (which form to fix prices unfairly and exploit consumers).

A strong belief among those on the political right who subscribe to the negative view of freedom (for example, Joseph and Sumption 1979) is that *to be poor is not to be unfree*. In other words, the poor and the rich alike enjoy political rights – all can vote in parliamentary elections, for instance – and civil rights, such as freedom from arbitrary arrest. According to this view, it is not up to society or a government to bring about a state of affairs in which everyone has equal freedom of action.

To those on the political right, freedom can be fully guaranteed only in a society organized by the market, in which people are free to own as much property as they can amass and in which there is competition between individuals and businesses. Markets are seen as vital in ensuring not only freedom but also efficiency. But by their very nature, markets lead to differences and they expose inequalities. People are bound to have different amounts of talent and ability, luck and spending power. In a 'free' market, there cannot be equal freedom for everyone to be able to afford tea at the Ritz.

Why do defenders of this view, such as Hayek (1944), argue that the poor – the losers in a market-based society – are not deprived of freedom? First, civil and political freedoms are still protected. For example, a family on income support probably could not afford tea at the Ritz, but they would have as much (civil) right to enter as anyone else (in contrast to a society in which discrimination against certain groups was legal, as in the former South Africa, where a black person could legally be denied entry to a hotel). They would also have the political right to meet with others on the street outside to demonstrate about poverty, if they wished, or to write to their Members of Parliament (MPs) to complain about the inadequacy of benefit payments.

Second, this argument runs, loss of freedom involves coercion or the *intention* of someone to deprive others of freedom. In a true market, though, there is no planned intention to reduce anyone's freedom. The market operates impersonally, and its outcomes (for example, rising or falling house prices, booming demand in one industry, layoffs in another) are apparently unknowable in advance.

Does this argument ring true, especially to anyone who happens to be poor in a society dominated by the market? First, we may question the suggestion that the outcomes of living in a market-based society are unknowable. There *is* clear evidence that, if

unchecked, inequalities tend to widen. The social gap increases between wealthy elites and a more or less permanent group of disadvantaged people, while those in the middle feel increasingly insecure about their position. Rather than an increase in freedom and the creation of a mobile society in which enterprise and individuality are rewarded, there is an argument that increasing numbers of people begin to feel unfree and the better-off tend to monopolize positions of power and influence.

Also there is an assumption that, because market forces are blind, nothing should be done to 'tinker' with them, apart from ensuring that the rules of fair competition are enforced. But it is on this point that many, including some conservatives as well as those in the political centre and on the left, agree that it is both unethical and unwise to allow the market full rein. A more positive view of freedom involves policies to make sure that it is possible for those disadvantaged by a market society to have or to do certain things: for instance, to be able to purchase adequate food or housing, to be educated or to use a public library.

In one sense, the whole of social policy and its history revolves around this question: *how far* should the state step in to mitigate the effects of a society based on the market and on competition? How far can it guarantee rights to both freedom and security for every citizen, which implies not only 'freedom from' discrimination or harm, but also 'freedom to' enjoy a certain standard of living and welfare?

As we have seen, there are flaws in the pro-market, 'negative' concept of freedom. On the other hand, there is also growing acceptance in social policy of the limits of 'positive' views of freedom. Partly because of the spiralling costs of welfare systems and also because of worries about the creation of welfare dependency, politicians and policy-makers in every major industrial country have introduced reforms to limit the automatic right to welfare. For example, recent policies to shift people on benefit 'from welfare to work' in Britain, the USA and elsewhere, emphasize the *responsibilities* of the young unemployed rather than their *rights*.

Citizenship

Having looked, in the previous sections, at ideas about equality, needs, rights and freedom, let us now turn to look at a concept which puts together all these ideas, and which is important for thinking about the meaning and purpose of the welfare state. This concept, citizenship, is one that has undergone something of a revival and reformulation in recent decades. But what is 'citizenship'?

First, citizenship implies membership – membership of a particular type of community, namely, the nation-state: 'Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community' (Marshall 1964: 92). How is such membership defined, and what are the markers or identifiers of citizenship? They include, for example, nationality and right of residence, the possession of a passport and the right to participate in elections. They also include the right to work and the right to a range of social benefits. Thus the general principle of citizenship poses some fundamental questions, such as 'who is a citizen?' and, perhaps more importantly, 'who are non-citizens'? What is citizenship's connection with social policy, and do the formal rights attached to being a citizen match up with substantial rights, or the experiences people have when they make use of the

health service or a social service, or when they claim benefits or try to enter the job market to find work?

In social policy, the concept of citizenship was developed by T.H. Marshall in 1949, in a series of lectures exploring the nature of the recently developed welfare state. Marshall was offering an account of the remodelling of the social services by the post-war Labour government, interpreting these in the light of an expanded conception of citizenship as an expression of social rights (see previous section). Marshall was the first to suggest that the concept of citizenship had mutated and developed in the modern period, so that by the mid-twentieth century it had come to include welfare entitlements. Marshall debated the nature of modern capitalism and its relation to democracy, and of the competing conceptions of equality and inequality that arise from the conflict and conjunction of these two. His contribution to the understanding of a modern conception of citizenship is, therefore, a major one and continues to be vigorously explored (Bulmer and Rees 1996).

Social and policy changes since the late 1970s arguably helped to revive interest in the concept of citizenship. One social change was the dramatic increase in income inequality in the UK, USA and other Anglophone countries resulting from greater inequality in earnings from paid employment, the growth of unemployment and growing polarization between two-earner and no-earner households (see Chapter 5). There was a growth, in the 1980s, of social polarization, of a 'North–South divide', of a '30-30-40' society and of social exclusion.

Accompanying these developments and associated with them was the discovery, or rediscovery, of the contentious concept of an 'underclass', a class with, allegedly, only a tenuous connection with mainstream norms and values, to the labour market and paid work, and to conventional family life. Murray's (1994) writings on the underclass associated it with the rise in criminality in this period, and defined the underclass not simply as a group defined by its poverty or unemployment but one outside, and sometimes in opposition to, mainstream society. Although many of Murray's conclusions were subsequently challenged and shown to be unfounded, they nevertheless stimulated a debate about the degree to which some sections of the population had come to be seen – and maybe saw themselves – as 'non citizens'. Another important social development of the last three decades has been the advent of movements – so-called 'new social movements', associated with, among others, gender, race, disability and sexuality – for liberation and empowerment, which have explicitly questioned the extent to which citizenship rights had been equalized in postwar Britain (Lister 1998).

Marshall believed that citizenship was a dynamic and developing concept and he certainly did not believe that Britain had reached the end of the road with regard to bringing equal citizenship rights to all. For him, social class differences and inequalities still seemed to raise barriers to full and equal use of the welfare state. He also devoted some space to discussing the extent to which there could be genuine equality in the possession of civil rights, given unequal access to courts and litigation because of their costs.

The aforementioned 'new social movements', to do with gender, race, disability and sexuality, among others, have reignited the debate about the boundaries of citizenship in contemporary societies such as Britain, and have posed again the question of the extent to which citizenship's formal attributes are matched by substantial ones. In other words,

is the equal status which is the promise of citizenship matched by real equality of rights? Formally, every adult British national resident in the UK is a citizen, equal in the possession of the basic package of citizenship rights described above (with some limited exceptions, including peers and criminals!), but real equality of status, it is claimed, does not exist.

Marshall neglected the dimensions of race, ethnicity and culture, understandably, perhaps, since the UK had a much smaller ethnic minority population at the time of his lectures. These are issues of great interest and importance at the present time because of their significance as sources of social division – for instance, in relation to heated public debates about the social rights of migrants, particularly those who have travelled to work in the UK from new member states of the EU in eastern Europe. Marshall's focus was on class divisions as the major determinant of social inequality and the main challenge to citizenship, and he could not have foreseen the difficulties that were to arise in deciding how far social rights should be extended to include not only EU migrants but also to people migrating to the UK from countries outside the EU, and to those seeking asylum.

Conclusions

From this chapter you should have gained an insight into some basic principles of social policy: equality, need, freedom and rights. But before leaving this discussion, a word of warning: any debate about concepts is bound to exaggerate their importance. It is easy to elevate them to a position of influence over social policy that in reality they do not always have. Therefore, to end the chapter, it might be worth thinking about the following points in order to keep the principles of social policy in perspective.

First, *in reality, social policies are based on conflicting principles*. There is rarely, if ever, a clear and unambiguous set of principles underlying any single policy or welfare system. Sometimes rival groups, each with its own set of principles, support the same policy. The Child Support Agency (CSA), for example, was in the beginning supported by both feminist opinion (because it seemed as though more absent fathers than before would have to recognize their responsibilities) and conservatives who subscribe to 'traditional family values' and responsibilities. Similarly, feminists and conservatives might combine to support a policy to restrict or ban pornography. When a new policy comes to be implemented, though, these temporary alliances of principles and groups easily shatter.

Second, *rarely, if ever, do the ideas and stated principles put forward by a government actually determine policy*. For instance, looking back to the 1980s, it would be misleading to use a checklist of 'Thatcherite' principles (such as introducing business principles into welfare provision) to show how British social policy changed course in the space of a few years *as a direct result* of changed ideas in government. Even reforming governments such as those of Mrs Thatcher could not rip up every existing principle and start afresh the next day. The British welfare system today continues to operate on a mix of conservative and social democratic principles (see the last section of Chapter 3). Arguably, the introduction of new principles and ideas by Tony Blair's 'New' Labour government – summarized as the 'Third Way' – have not had a significant effect on the direction of

social policy either. Policy has broadly continued along the lines set by previous Conservative governments (see Chapter 13). In this sense the principles and ideas which are supposed to guide policy are actually more like fig leaves that vainly attempt to disguise what governments are doing.

Third, *so-called principles are often rationalizations for decisions that would have been taken anyway*. For instance, continuing the example of the impact of 'Thatcherite' principles, it is likely that the slow-down in Britain's economic growth in the 1970s and early 1980s would have led to a sharp brake on welfare expenditure, whichever political party had come to power in 1979. Thatcherism could be seen as one of several possible ways in which British politicians and policy-makers could have tried to justify to the electorate what was inevitable: tougher limits to welfare expenditure. The popularity of the Conservative message in some quarters may have derived from the way it attempted to make a virtue of the 'tough' approach to welfare (whereas previous governments had been defensive and apologetic about reducing expenditure).

Despite these three points, however, principles can still be seen as important – even if they do not always play a strong, decisive role in shaping policy. For one thing, they act as signposts towards new developments in social policy and they can be invoked as goals or targets by those who wish to move policies in a new direction. Mrs Thatcher's drive to inject market and business principles into the welfare system is a case in point.

This chapter has examined principles, such as equality and need, that were once the bedrock of social policy. As mentioned in Chapter 1, students of social policy were traditionally tutored in a framework of mainly social democratic principles (see the last section of Chapter 3 for an explanation of social democracy). The merits of the welfare state would have largely been taken for granted, just as there would have been trust in the idea of improving state-provided welfare services to meet needs.

However, as a result of profound economic and social change, including the splintering of former class divisions and allegiances, we can no longer take for granted all the old aims and principles of the welfare state. This does not mean that principles or concepts of equality and inequality are irrelevant, but it does mean that such principles have to be rethought and reconsidered to understand better the role of social policy in a more uncertain world.

Key terms and concepts

autonomy
basic needs
civil rights
comparative need
egalitarianism
equality
equality of opportunity
equity
expressed needs
felt need

freedom
justice
minimalist and maximalist policies (of equal opportunity)
need
normative needs
normative policies
political rights
positive action
principles
social rights
utilitarianism
wants

Suggestions for further reading

If you are interested in the ideas discussed in this chapter and would like to read more about them, there is no better way of starting than with Robert Drake's excellent overview, *The Principles of Social Policy* (2001). This book wrestles with complex ideas – and wins! – and in the process provides an admirably clear and stimulating range of examples of the ways in which principles and ideas shape social policy.

For a specialized discussion of Bentham and utilitarianism, see Steintrager's book, *Bentham* (1977). For more general purposes, though, concise and readable introductions to utilitarianism can be found in Eric Midwinter's *The Development of Social Welfare in Britain* (1994) and Derek Fraser's *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (3rd edn, 2003).

To get a flavour of the stirring yet scholarly and well-reasoned debates about equality that used to permeate British social policy, try any book by R.H. Tawney, but especially *Equality*. The 1964 edition – if you come across it in a library – has an introduction by Richard Titmuss, which is interesting in itself as a commentary on ideas about equality in the postwar period. T.H. Marshall's *Sociology at the Crossroads* (1963) or *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950) provide essential historical background to the development of welfare principles.

At the other end of the political spectrum, Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), written before the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, offers a passionate defence of freedom and the principles of a property-owning, market society. And for an overview of both 'old' and 'new' right thinking on concepts of equality and inequality, freedom, justice and so on, see Roger Scruton's collection of short articles, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (1984).

For more contemporary reading, my book with Robert Drake, *Understanding Equal Opportunity Policies* (Blakemore and Drake 1995, especially Chapter 2) offers discussion of the principles of, and justifications for, equality policies. Finally, Doyal and Gough's *A Theory of Human Needs* (1991) provides a thorough exploration of concepts of need and the policy dilemmas that arise in trying to meet them.