



Liberal and Marxist Justifications for Basic Income

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Preface

The first part of this paper consists of replies to a series of objections made by David Schweickart to my proposal, in *Self-Management and the Crisis of Socialism*, to combine economic democracy with an unconditional basic income at the highest sustainable level (BI).¹ The second part is framed with reference to the liberal theory of justice, and answers in greater depth one variant of the “deontological” objection that there is no right to a basic income because there is a moral obligation to work. Both proponents and defenders of BI make appeal to the principle of liberal neutrality; I argue that this principle favours BI.

¹ *Self-management and the Crisis of Socialism: The Rose in the Fist of the Present* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). David Schweickart’s comments, quoted in the text above, were made at the Radical Philosophy Association Fourth National Conference, Loyola University, Chicago, 11/2-5/00. Not all of his arguments are strictly “Marxist,” but since our discussion focused on what socialists should think about basic income, and most of the comments are either Marxist-inspired or neo-Marxist or consistent with Marxism, the heading of Part I catches the spirit of the exchange.

1. Marxist arguments for and against basic income

David Schweickart, commenting on my proposal for combining a basic income (BI) with economic democracy, a model of self-managed market socialism, offers the following series of objections, to which I attach respective replies:

“A. Deontological: We do not have a moral right to a BI. We do have a moral obligation to work. When we consume, we take from society. Justice requires that we give something back in return. But if we have a moral obligation to work, since “ought implies can,” we have a moral “right to work”. That is to say, the government has a duty to serve as an employer-of-last-resort.”

Let me first note that the right and obligation claimed here do not entail rejecting BI. Pragmatic defences of BI as a more effective way of eliminating the poverty trap than means tested and work-linked alternatives are compatible with a view that there is no fundamental moral right to BI, and that there is in principle an obligation to “work” or at least to give back in some way. Proponents of “participation income” explicitly recognize this obligation, or at least its political salience, and make the BI at least loosely contingent on giving back. And one argument for BI is that it enables people to work by pricing themselves into a job.²

But to address these two principles head on, doesn’t it depend on the level of BI, or more generally what society gives to its members? One gets public schools, some health care, roads and other goods from society, whether one undertakes a work career or loafers. Even prior to BI, there is a minimal level of public sustenance that it is generally considered appropriate to give each, without getting anything back. Only when one expects to consume beyond that level are people

² Atkinson, A. B. “The Case for a Participation Income.” *The Political Quarterly*, Vol 67, no. 1 (Jan. / March 1996): 67-70. Brian Barry makes a pragmatic case for basic income in “Survey Article: Real Freedom and Basic Income”, in *Journal of Political Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (1996): 242--76.

expected to contribute: when one leaves school and expects an income, society expects a contribution as a condition of the income.

Or does it? In capitalist societies, those who inherit sufficient wealth, or manage to accumulate sufficient capital in some way, are legally entitled to an unearned income without any corresponding obligation to work. For most socialists, this legal entitlement is morally illegitimate, resting as it does on exploitation. But why not think about unearned income and wealth in another way? Consider the following thought experiment: Imagine an island in which the fruits of nature are so abundant and the climate so temperate that a person can eat nutritionally and live exposed to the elements without any labour beyond that necessary to pick the fruit from the trees and gather leaves for a bed. Not everyone chooses to live at comfortable subsistence; some engage in crafts, exchanging the fruits of their labour for money, and buying commodities with the money earned. But everyone equally enjoys the free goods provided by nature, as a human right.

In advanced capitalist societies we tend to focus on wealth as the product of human labour, given the predominance of labour as a factor of production in our economies. But we then lose sight of the unearned wealth that is nature's contribution, which we all share in and which, some own and control more of than others do. If we were to socialize all of nature's contribution – the land, the natural resources, etc., and distribute the value of these equally to all citizens, this is another way to move from capitalist inequality to socialist equality (see the Alaskan citizen's fund as an illustration). The principle of equality of unearned wealth does not negate the principle of income in accordance with work, for income above this social dividend could still be proportional to work. Now extend this idea of equality of one's share of natural resources to include the socially inherited capital wealth, and one get's something like Roemer's social dividend.³ More controversially, factor in the "employment rent" enjoyed by many workers

³ John Roemer, *A Future for Socialism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994. Roemer estimates the annual dividend on non-financial, non-farm corporate and non-corporate wealth per adult in the 1980s to be about \$1200, if these assets were to be nationalized and distributed equally (133–43).

as unearned income, and the value of the dividend will rise further.⁴ But whatever basis one settles on, the basic principle is that some wealth is inevitably unearned, not the product of labour, and if this is significant in quantity, it should be factored in alongside work as a basis for entitlement of all people who inhabit the planet. It would appear to follow that we do have a right to a BI up to a certain level, and no obligation to work, so long as our consumption does not exceed a certain minimum. (Under certain natural and social conditions, this minimum will be below the level of subsistence, which would in effect impose a moral obligation to work on all able-bodied people.) I return to one aspect of this deontological objection in Part II of this paper.

“B. Utilitarian: Work is essential to human dignity and human happiness, so utilitarian considerations also favour a ‘right to work’ over a mere ‘right to consume.’ Many empirical studies have documented the sense of shame, degradation and embarrassment suffered by the unemployed. (See Robert Solow, *Work and Welfare* (Princeton, 1998) for a sampling).”

Again, one motivation for BI is enabling people to escape the poverty trap and price themselves into a job. BI is not an alternative to work, but a complement to a full employment strategy. It is also a way of valorizing many forms of social contribution, such as child care, elder care, or political activism, that are not remunerated in the wage economy, and thus helping to remove the sense of shame experienced by those who do this work when “unemployed.”

“C. Early Marxian: BI masks our basic species dependency and hence perpetuates our alienation from our species being. The fact of the matter is, we, as human beings, are dependent, “suffering” beings. We need other people. BI, with its promise of ‘real freedom’ perpetrates and intensifies our illusory independence.”

⁴ Philippe Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), Ch. 4, (hereafter *RFA*).

The obligation to work in exchange for income beyond BI, which most people will seek, should shatter any illusions about independence. The logic of this objection would lead one to put a price on every public good, giving out public education, for example, as a loan that must be paid back, rather than as a citizenship entitlement that affirms the worth of each as a person, not just as a worker.

The coercion to work is the core aspect of alienation. BI at a sustainable level is a step beyond alienation because it gives more workers the option to say no, and thus will exert some pressure on employers - whether capitalists or collectives of workers - to make the conditions of work more palatable. As work becomes more humane, the worker works more freely, and thus can become interdependent in a non-alienated way.

It is worth noting also that wage workers often depend on others for the relatively high wages they enjoy, and this dependence is masked by too tight an allocation of income in proportion to work. For example, particularly in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, the male wage earner implicitly was being paid for his own reproduction through the labour of a wife who was not remunerated, and who was economically dependent on the male in an invidious way. A basic income enabling homemakers to stay out of the wage labour market, and to be less economically dependent upon a male wage earner, is one way to acknowledge this unpaid labour and call attention to a kind of interdependence that has been masked, without turning housework into wage labour (the household wage idea). Important here also is the dependence of the money economy and its agents on informal, household, and other economies that cannot easily survive transformation into commodity form. Becoming aware of this sort of interdependence is also a step beyond alienation. (I'm a market socialist. But the only way the "socialist" in market socialism can be sustained against the alienating forces of the market is if the sphere of the market is clearly limited. The

market should not dominate the household, the media, education, health care, or politics).⁵

“D. Foucauldian: We should distinguish between genuinely progressive features of social democracy - universal free education, universal health care, universal pension coverage, universal provision of child care (or payment to people who want to care for their children at home), and those institutions that have attempted to mitigate the social costs of capitalism: long-term unemployment insurance and “humane” prisons. (Both of the latter can be understood in Foucauldian terms as mechanisms for keeping the working class divided, and for a liberal-conservative pseudo-politics to be played out in the electoral arena). BI belongs to the latter category.”

First, any of the “genuinely progressive” features of social democracy mitigate the social costs of capitalism, and can divide the working class. See Marx’s comment on Adam Smith’s early proposal for universal free education “in homeopathic doses” as a response to the effects of the division of labour on the moral, intellectual, and martial virtues of workers.⁶ Within capitalism, at a low (politically) sustainable level, perhaps BI would have a divisive effect - the “basic income apartheid” that Gorz warns against - but in a socialist context, it can be an important pillar of social solidarity, one of the entitlements that a socialist society can sustain more effectively than capitalism.⁷

Second, most other socialist ideas can be regressive within a capitalist context. Workplace democracy can divide the working class between the relatively well off workers in primary sector labour markets - e.g., airline pilots and mechanics - and the relatively worse off workers and unemployed. What we

⁵ See Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.

⁶ Marx makes this comment somewhere in *Capital*, but I don’t have the precise reference.

⁷ André Gorz, "On the Difference between Society and Community and Why Basic Income Cannot by Itself Confer Full Membership." In Philippe Van Parijs, *Arguing for Basic Income* (London: Verso, 1992).

have to address is how to put together a package of social programs that will bring everyone together in a commonly shared social movement, despite the potential for divisions.

Third, workfare, by establishing a discipline that is socially required but economically unnecessary, would seem to be the more Foucauldian version of welfare reform, not BI.

“E. Historical materialist: It is in fact true that it would be easier and cheaper to provide everyone with a BI (or its Rawlsian equivalent - an income floor beneath which no one would be allowed to sink) than it is to provide everyone with a decent job. It is in fact impossible to do the latter under capitalism. We have here another classic “contradiction” of capitalism: in undermining feudal privilege, capitalism generated the ideology that everyone should work - but its institutions, in demolishing slavery, serfdom and the guilds, made it increasingly impossible for many people to find work. Moreover, since wage labour requires unemployment as disciplinary mechanism, unemployment cannot be eliminated under capitalism. It can be done under Economic Democracy - though with difficulty. [Brief look at Solow: 1) market does not automatically create enough jobs; 2) many people are mentally and physically unfit for those jobs that are there and those that might be created.] But it is the historical task of socialism to clean up the messes left by capitalism.”

This task is furthered by empowering people to refuse degrading jobs. Most will work, because most will not be content with a minimum, but work won't be the only source of income or benefit. We also need to ask, looking down the road to the “higher phase of communism” whether the work ethic—especially that focused on paid work—is not one of the messes of capitalism. Marx's historical materialist scheme for transition to communism suggests that the principle of distribution according to need only comes after an extended period governed by a work ethic, and only after the division of labour has been overcome, abundance

has been achieved, and work has become “life’s prime want.”⁸ But to the extent that one approaches these conditions in certain respects under capitalism, can it not be possible to begin introducing need as a standard alongside work, and over time phasing out the latter while phasing in the former?⁹ Is this not part of the appeal of shortening the working day and the workweek? Does not a historical materialist approach to distributive justice support this over a deontological assertion of universal rights and obligations?¹⁰

“F. Rebuttles. “The claim that BI would remove the stigma of welfare is spurious. Every worker, looking at his pay stub, would see at once whether he was gaining or losing from BI. Distinction between helping those who cannot help themselves - species solidarity - and the “duty” to provide for those who do not want to work”.

It is important to take note, with respect to this point, of who would gain or lose from BI. Economist Anthony Atkinson calculates that, with some tweaking of the tax system, in England every child could receive 12.50 a week, and every adult between 17.75 and 18.25 a week, without increasing taxes overall. “With such a citizen’s income, the number dependent on means-tested benefits would be reduced by half a million. A third of families would be worse off in cash terms; 10 per cent would be virtually unaffected; and 57 per cent would gain. Among the latter would be many women.” An increase of about 10 per cent in the tax rates would more than double the basic income to nearly 40 a week and more than quadruple the number freed from dependence on means-tested benefits.¹¹ If the tax structure and welfare system in the United States is anything like that in

⁸ Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in David McLellan, ed. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

⁹ See Robert J. van der Veen and Philippe Van Parijs. “A Capitalist Road to Communism.” *Theory and Society* 15, no. 5 (1986): 635-55.

¹⁰ A minor comment on Rawls: he does not favor a minimum, but the maximization of the minimum. The principle Schweickart attributes to Rawls is favoured by William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

¹¹ A.B. Atkinson, “The Case for a Participation Income,” *Political Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (January–March 1996): 67-70, 69-70.

Britain, it is clear that this is a not insignificant benefit, and that most workers would gain, even without any increase of taxes on the richest 4 per cent who make as much as the bottom 51 per cent.

The worker who now looks at his pay stub often resents the small percentage of his taxes that goes to those who cannot help themselves (though in many cases with a distorted image of the recipients and an inflated notion of the percentage of the budget that goes to welfare). So much for species solidarity. We would be closer to this ideal if the benefits were universal, rather than dividing society into payers and receivers, typically along race and gender lines.¹²

“G. In sum: I see no good reason for society choosing to supply each citizen with a BI instead of committing to Rawlsian welfare payments to the needy to keep them above decent minimum - and I think there are good reasons for preferring welfare payments to BI.

“But even more than that, I think a genuine socialist alternative to capitalism should ‘abolish welfare as we know it,’ and undertake the difficult task redesigning our institutions so that every citizen can make a meaningful, productive contribution to the well-being of his or her fellow citizens. Not “real freedom for all”, but rather, “real work for all” – “real work” that allows us to develop our individual abilities and to contribute meaningfully to our collective being.”

A genuine socialist alternative should begin by acknowledging the ambivalent moral significance of work. On the one hand it is one of the key ways we contribute to society, integrate ourselves into it, find our identity, exercise our capacities for creativity, etc. On the other hand it is necessary, and one way or another human beings are constrained to labour in order to survive. The reality of work is that it shares in both of these aspects, some kinds of work more closely approximating the first, other kinds the second. The best summation I know of was made by Marx in *Capital*, Vol. III:

¹² On the gendered welfare state, see Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

“The actual wealth of society, and the possibility of constantly expanding its reproduction process, therefore, do not depend upon the duration of surplus labour, but upon its productivity and the more or less copious conditions of production under which it is performed. In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.”¹³

Economic Democracy addresses the rational regulation of our interchange with Nature “under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of” our human nature. Basic income is a step toward the realm of freedom, constrained in its extent by the realm of necessity as its basis. Real work for all and real freedom for all, those should be the long-term goals of socialism.

¹³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, excerpted in McLellan, ed. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 496–97.

Fortunately, these two goals are complementary. As Van Parijs argues, in comparison with employer subsidies that keeps up the pressure on workers to seek employment,

“UBI [universal basic income] makes it easier to take a break between two jobs, reduce working time, make room for more training, take up self-employment, or join a cooperative. And with UBI, workers will only take a job if they find it suitably attractive, while employer subsidies make unattractive, low-productivity jobs more economically viable. If the motive in combating unemployment is not some sort of work fetishism - an obsession with keeping everyone busy—but rather a concern to give every person the possibility of taking up gainful employment in which she can find recognition and accomplishment, then the UBI is to be preferred.”¹⁴

Schweickart does not say how he proposes to redesign our institutions so that everyone will have work, and I don't mean to suggest that he covertly favours employer subsidies. But we must be careful not to be so tied to paid employment that we propose even under socialism something akin to employer subsidies—subsidies to cooperatives might have the same effect *vis-à-vis* an unemployed worker—and in the process perpetuate “work fetishism.” Of even greater practical importance, should we oppose a reform that is feasible under capitalism, and could be continued and expanded under socialism, and thereby indirectly strengthen the movement for employer subsidies as the default option in the effort to reduce unemployment?

2. Basic income and liberal neutrality

Since the second part of this paper is framed in terms of “liberal neutrality” I should first clarify what I mean by this, and explain why it should be taken seriously. I'm using the term, as does Rawls, to refer to a theory of justice that is

¹⁴ Philippe Van Parijs, “A Basic Income for All,” in Philippe Van Parijs, et al., *What's Wrong with a Free Lunch?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 9. This book contains the articles in the aforementioned *Boston Review* issue on basic income, with a forward by Robert Solow and a preface by *Boston Review* editors Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers.

not biased toward a particular substantive conception of the good life. Immediately one might wonder whether such a theory of justice is even possible, or if it is, whether it would be so empty as to have nothing interesting to say about justice.¹⁵

I think both horns of this dilemma can be avoided if we understand the “neutrality” aimed for not to be absolute, but relative to the substantive and conflicting conceptions of the good that otherwise divide a political community. It is the standpoint one moves to, in the face of irreconcilable normative convictions, in order to achieve justice. Rawls himself conceives of it as an extension of the principle of religious toleration. European societies came to the realization that no reasonable universal agreement could be expected among the warring religious factions, and agreed to disagree. Moreover, this mutual toleration came to be a core liberal principle in each of the main religious traditions, so that these traditions themselves supported, by an overlapping consensus, the principle of religious toleration. So too, comprehensive metaphysical and moral doctrines about which reasonable people disagree should not be among the premises of the theory of justice; rather we should assume neutrality toward such doctrines, or in other words a principle of respect for differences.¹⁶

That said, the theory of justice is not devoid of moral commitments - such as the priority of justice, certain notions of what constitutes a person, the primary goods, and other ideas that people can agree upon despite their conflicting ideals of the good life. Nor is the theory of justice a mere *modus vivendi*. The neutrality of the theory is not a mere truce among warring parties; rather it is the result of incorporating into conflicting traditions a principle of toleration as central to those traditions themselves.

¹⁵ I, myself, once argued that such neutrality left the theory indeterminate with respect to some central questions of distributive justice, in "A Contradiction in the Egalitarian Theory of Justice," *Philosophy Research Archives*, vol. X, 1984, pp. 35-55.

¹⁶ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); see also Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

What this means of course is that in any contemporary society, perhaps any society at all, there will be people, and groups, who will not consent to justice. The theory won't speak for them or to them. I have in mind not merely hardened criminals, but more to the point, people whose conceptions of the good life preclude respect and toleration of other reasonable conceptions. No theory of justice can be expected to persuade everyone.

3. Neutrality, work and leisure

In Rawls's original formulation of the theory of justice, the primary goods that are the focus of distribution - those goods that one wants, whatever else one wants - included basic liberties, opportunity, wealth, income, power and authority, and the bases of self-respect.¹⁷ Absent from the list was leisure, until it was pointed out that this absence biased the theory toward the **Lazy**, those with a preference for leisure.¹⁸

To see why this is the case, consider the following. If we leave leisure off the list, and then assume further that the parties to the original position would choose the Difference Principle (DP) for the distribution of wealth, income, power and authority, the Lazy will be favoured over those with a preference for higher income available through work (following Van Parijs, let's call them "the Crazy" to avoid a bias in our discussion).¹⁹ DP stipulates that distribution should maximize the minimum for the least advantaged group. Now suppose over time there is an increment in total wealth and income. Those who live only on the socially guaranteed minimum - including the Lazy - will get the maximum sustainable share of this increase. The Crazy can protest that the Lazy - unlike those dependent on this minimum who are unable to work or to find employment,

¹⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

¹⁸ Richard Musgrave, "Maximin, Uncertainty, and the Leisure Trade-off," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 88: 625–32; John Rawls, "The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 17 (1988): 251–76, also published as Ch. 5 of *Political Liberalism*.

¹⁹ *RFA*, Ch. 4.

or to meet basic needs from their wages - are favoured on account of their conception of the good life, which involves a lot of leisure and low consumption.

To avoid this bias, Rawls added leisure to the list of primary goods, defined as “twenty-four hours less a standard working day. Those who are unwilling to work would have a standard working day of extra leisure, and this extra leisure itself would be stipulated as equivalent to the index of primary goods of the least advantaged.”²⁰ This entails that there is no right to income or wealth that is not conditional on willingness to work or inability to work.

Van Parijs has argued that Rawls, in the way he was addressed the original bias in favour of the Lazy, “swings all the way and introduces the opposite bias” in favour of the Crazy.²¹ Let’s go back to the hypothetical increment in total wealth and income, and this time further stipulate that the increase is due to some external good such as plentiful rainfall, or discovery of oil, rather than greater expenditure of labour. What happens to the least advantaged group - in particular those who don’t work at all - in the distribution of this increment? Their income will increase to the level of the least paid full-time worker, but workers on the whole will enjoy a higher proportion of the windfall, even though it resulted not from their labour but from natural good fortune. Is this not a bias toward those with a preference for paid work?

The point made here with respect to a natural windfall can be generalized to all wealth and income that results not from labour but from external assets such as land and there is, Van Parijs holds, “a non-arbitrary and generally positive legitimate level of basic income that is determined by the per capita value of society’s external assets.”²²

This level “must be entirely financed by those who appropriate these assets. If Lazy gives up the whole of his plot of land, he is entitled to an unconditional grant at a level that corresponds to the value of that plot. Crazy, on the other hand,

²⁰ Rawls, “The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good,” 257.

²¹ *RFA*, 90.

²² *RFA*, 99.

can be viewed as receiving this same grant, but as owing twice its amount because of appropriating both Lazy's share of land and her own."²³

There is a technical problem of how to assess the value of external assets, which I set aside.²⁴ The key point is that, although **some** wealth and income is due to labour, some results from the appropriation of external assets which, from the standpoint of justice, are common, and thus those who appropriate unearned wealth owe compensation to those who don't, which compensation can take the form of unconditional basic income. (It could also be given to all in kind, as free education, free health care, and a one-time lump sum grant, etc.). This income will typically fall between Rawls's bias toward the Crazy and his earlier pro-Lazy bias.

Van Parijs's position has numerous precedents, notably Tom Paine's proposal for a universal grant based on the rent of land, and Henry George's single tax, again focused on land and rent. Van Parijs proposes to widen the basis of the social dividend from land to include capital, and socially inherited technology. But, he claims, once one adjusts for incentive effects (which for a Rawlsian warrant inequalities when they are to the advantage of the least advantaged), the amount of basic income per capita that would be generated would be so small as not to be worth the trouble. (I think this conclusion may be too pessimistic, but won't argue the point here.)

Van Parijs's principle innovation is to widen the basis for basic income further to include **jobs** as assets.

"The crucial fact to notice is that, owing to the way in which our economies are organized, the most significant category of assets consists in jobs people are endowed with. Jobs are packages of tasks and benefits. Of course, for jobs to count as assets, they must be in scarce supply. As long as jobs are scarce, those

²³ *RFA*, 99.

²⁴ *RFA*, 99.

who hold them appropriate a rent which can be legitimately taxed away, so as substantially to boost the legitimate level of basic income.”²⁵

If jobs are treated as assets, the highest sustainable level of basic income could be very substantial in an affluent society.

But does justice require “real freedom for all” - entailing the maximum feasible BI? Returning to Rawls, recall that he conceives of justice as a set of principles arrived at through agreement among members of a society who share in the benefits and **burdens**, who conceive of society as an ongoing **cooperative** arrangement. Does liberal neutrality really rule out as perfectionist the expectation that all able-bodied people be willing to work in exchange for their share of the benefits? Rather isn't it central to the very idea of justice as a fair agreement that there be a bias toward the Crazyies? And isn't it to be expected that **reciprocity** be affirmed by moral traditions that form the overlapping consensus?

Interestingly, Van Parijs is willingly to concede this point, not by loosening his strict interpretation of neutrality, but by appeal to the conditions for social solidarity. With Rawls, he accepts, as a requirement of a theory of justice that it possess “stability” - that once justice is in place it should be reasonable to expect a just society to sustain and reproduce itself, with the necessary level of citizen allegiance and solidarity.²⁶ So he is willing to entertain the superiority of a “participation income” - guaranteed basic income that is **conditional** on some form of public service - over an unconditional BI.

“But it must be clear that the argument is neither about economic viability (a compulsory public service of sizeable length would reduce the economic potential for financing a substantial basic income), nor about ethical justification but about the sociological conditions for widespread allegiance to solidaristic justice.”²⁷

²⁵ *RFA*, 90.

²⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 496–504.

²⁷ *RFA*, 297n73.

In other words, the ethical justification still aims for neutrality between those who desire to contribute to society and those whose idea of the good life involves no such contribution, but in practice “the sociological conditions for widespread allegiance” would dictate reciprocity. It then remains to be shown sociologically that social solidarity really depends upon a generalized work ethic.²⁸

If one wants to argue more deeply that the core assumptions of the theory of justice should incorporate a bias toward the Crazy, one is in effect saying that Malibu surfers - the paradigmatic Lazies - lack moral standing in the community with respect to their conception of good life, in the same way that murderers and rapists as such lack moral standing. The latter are beyond the pale in any moral tradition worthy of consideration. But is it so obvious that surfers are?²⁹

Liberal neutrality does not - cannot - require neutrality toward any conception of the “good” that includes violating the bodily integrity or liberty of others. The question is whether the Lazy - whom one might also be tempted to call parasites - are in some analogous way injuring, harming, stealing from others.³⁰

The plausibility of this idea that non-contribution is harm may stem from the illusion that all of the wealth that results from labour is due only to that labour. (Even Marx, who holds that all exchange value is the result of labour, acknowledges that not all wealth is due to labour, since nature also contributes, sometimes lavishly and sometimes without any admixture of labour.) The illusion is compounded when labour is the principle source of wealth, but is combined

²⁸ Objections to a participation income, as attractive as it might seem in principle, are of a more pragmatic character. See below.

²⁹ I’m not sure which traditions they speak for, but there are many distinguished thinkers who have endorsed a right to unconditional income, including Bertrand Russell (In Praise of Idleness), Paul LaFargue (The Right to be Lazy), and Nobel economists James Tobin, Herbert Simon, and James Meade. Thus it seems hazardous to maintain that anyone who thinks this way adheres to a conception of the good life that is beyond the pale of liberalism.

³⁰ This objection is put forward by Eugene V. Torisky, Jr., “Van Parijs, Rawls, and Unconditional Basic Income,” *Analysis* 53:4, October 1993, 289–97.

with other assets that, in exchange, will yield to the worker (or whoever appropriates the product) more than the value of the labour expended (at equilibrium).

But once one grants that external assets also partially constitute and contribute to one's capacity for wealth creation, then the wealth that flows from labour employing these assets is only partly the fruits of labour and is also partly the consequence of **others**, society enabling the worker to produce. Van Parijs effectively blocks the idea that the Lazy are merely parasites by arguing that their basic income is essentially not a handout but compensation for their letting go of their per capita share of social wealth.

(This is not an argument for the capitalist's contribution. On the contrary, often the contribution of capital involves **no** contribution of the capitalist. From the standpoint of justice all such assets are collective property. Even when these assets are institutionalized in the form of private property, cooperative property, or state property, we must not lose sight of the requirement of justice to equalize the opportunities associated with control over such assets.)

“**Crazy** would be the ‘invader’ [in the broad sense of unfair taking from society] if she took the whole of (what looks like) her product instead of contributing to an endowment given to all in order to enable them as much as possible to pursue realization of their non-invasive (this time in the narrower sense of invasive) conception of good life.”³¹

Eugene Torisky tries to make the case that the Lazy have an “invasive” conception of the good life, not in the narrower sense but in a broader sense that everyone who receives support from society should give something in return. He thinks this idea of reciprocity is even handed:

“What liberal justice denies the Crazies of society, the benefits of mutual cooperation without contributing to it, is precisely what it denies the Lazies.”³²

³¹ Philippe Van Parijs, correspondence quoted in Torisky, 296.

³² Torisky, 296.

However, real libertarians might make an equally compelling claim to evenhandedness: it denies equally to Lazies and Crazies any **additional** benefits (beyond BI) without some contribution. And the real libertarian will ask, what is the basis for denying the BI to **everyone**, if not a perfectionist work ethic?

Torisky tries to argue that the Lazies are injured alike with the Crazies without a reciprocity condition: An “**unconditional** basic income ... goes too far, by exempting its recipients from the minimal cost of membership in society and thereby depriving them of the dignity and status of a member.”³³

But the recipients are free to participate - more free with a BI than without one. It is unclear how forced participation is more empowering and respectful than the mere freedom to participate. And, it might be said, BI, along with the affirmation of basic liberties and equality of opportunity, adequately affirms the dignity and status of each member.

As a final remark, anyone unpersuaded of the **justness** of BI with respect to liberal neutrality, either because of reasons favouring Rawls’s position, or because of a rejection of liberal neutrality as a premise may still be moved to support BI on pragmatic grounds.

Even if one were to favour a “participation income” in principle, it raises questions of how to define participation, who will monitor it, what the cost of such monitoring will be, including the price paid in the dignity of the recipients.³⁴ Does raising children count? Political action? Writing poetry? Only good poetry? (Suppose James Joyce had written *Ulysses* while receiving a BI. Would he have been considered a free rider? Probably worse by those who initially judged his book obscene. On the other hand, it is seldom questioned whether a person making and selling landmines is contributing, because his product has a market). Assuming that most people want to contribute to society, is it not better to endure a few real slackers in order to liberate the rest to contribute creatively and without

³³ Torisky, 296.

³⁴ On these points see Barry.

surveillance, than to try to catch the slackers, burden bureaucrats with arbitrary judgments, and exclude many genuine and needy contributors? The current means-tested system errs in the opposite direction, always failing to catch all the needy in the safety net. Should we not err on the side of generosity from the standpoint of a theory of justice that favours the least advantaged?