

# Basic Income and Social Justice

An Analysis for the BIEN-Congress<sup>1</sup> in Dublin 20 June 2008

If you and me and all other human beings can feel dignified in what we do and think, society is equitable. This thesis of the present paper is related to article 1 of the *Basic Law* for the Federal Republic of Germany (i.e. the *German constitution*) according to which „[h]uman dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.“ How can governments both respect and protect the dignity of each individual? The search for an answer or just society is frequently the im- or explicit reason to study the basic income option.

According to most participants of the Basic Income Earth Network Congress in Dublin on 19 to 21 June 2008, basic income is helpful in striving toward the major social ideals such as liberty, equality, and solidarity. Talking about its merits and how it can be financed is more efficient for realizing social justice than defining or defending abstract concepts of social justice, or alter again and again the one or the other measure of the existing welfare state, the labor market, taxation, and other policies. Already the title of this BIEN Congress implies a notion of social justice: „Inequality and Development in a Globalised Economy. The Basic Income Option.“ While inequality has a negative connotation, development usually has a positive one. The notion „Globalised Economy“ must not only describe an unalterable fact; some applaud it, others reject it and still others are driven into resignation by it. Therefore, some want it to be reversed, others defend it as a major achievement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; still others fight for it as a goal or ideal.

In order to deal with various judgments about our present situation and the most efficient, suitable or just welfare measures that go with it, I will first look at the mentioned issues from a scientific and philosophical viewpoint. A frequently used method to approach such complex issues as basic income, social justice, and their relationship is comparison. Therefore the second part of this study will compare the welfare state to the basic income state and to the basic income economy. There I will demonstrate why unconditional basic income goes together better with human rights than the conditional Welfare State. Although the way it is financed is an integral part of evaluating any social measure, the question which taxes go along best with basic income I cannot include in this short analysis (cf. e.g. Hardorp's publications and Presse's contribution to the BIEN-Congress 2008). I also postpone expositions of how the three ideals of the French revolution relate to each other and to social fields, and whether basic income has certain preconditions like a high degree of automatisations, organizational efficiency, or legal and monetary stability.

## I. Methodological Issues

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1 BIEN is now the acronym for Basic Income Earth Network. Before 2004, BIEN stood for Basic Income European Network. It organizes a bi-annual earth-wide congress on the material dimension of justice.

The congress theme arouses not only diverse feelings and corresponding actions, but also questions, e.g.

- 1) How (un)equal should resources be distributed to further developments?
- 2) Are the economy and civilization already globalised or still developing toward globalisation?
- 3) What kinds of developments are still possible once globalisation is achieved?
- 4) Are there other options beside basic income to face the challenges of growing financial inequality, of insufficient personal, political and economic development, of global destruction and depletion of natural resources etc.?

These questions and feelings associated with social justice, globalisation or inequality can provoke endless political discussions and measures. They tend to lead to useless conflicts without preceding methodological and philosophical reflections. Philosophy is not outdated or restricted to the study of its own history as long as new questions arise that cannot easily be classed into an existing specialty or moral framework. This implies these tasks of philosophy and methodology:

- (a) identifying disciplines as scientific by stimulating and guiding methodological and historical discussions (philosophy of sciences including the history of sciences);
- (b) setting up new (sub-)disciplines by finding and classifying new questions (philosophy of „interdisciplinarity“, i.e. of structuring and disciplining the many interdisciplinary discourses, investigations, congresses, institutes etc. They all prove that the specialties or fields cannot capture the whole of reality as long as there is development and the various fields are interdependent;
- (c) dealing with the relationships between science, religion and the arts, between the true, the good and beauty, between statements of fact, of value, and of taste etc. in order to develop a *weltanschauung*;
- (d) reflecting on itself in order to avoid the infinite regress of a philosophy of a philosophy of a philosophy .... Parts of this self-reflection are logic, linguistics, and the history of philosophy. History in this context refers not only to the past but also to possible futures. It reveals how consciousness changes;
- (e) Clarifying concepts, explicating presuppositions, developing theories of knowledge and science.

### ***Methodology and Social Philosophy***

	method	object	aim
philosophy	systematizing questions their contexts and developments	concepts, terms, interdisciplinary fields, this table	truth and ‚practical theory‘, acting on the basis of insights
Social Sciences in general (sociology)	(self-)observation of humans in groups	society including social scientists	reasonable actions, ‚living‘ social entities
politics and/or economics	(self-)respect, avoiding fallacies like premature generalizations, irrelevant or misleading sta-	individuals as social beings, institutions, needs and resources	institutionalizing social justice/ meeting needs: legal equality economic solidarity

	tistics...		creative freedom
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The BIEN congresses and most basic income discussions evince that evaluating, introducing or rejecting basic income involve many disciplines:

- A) Legal and political scientists ask: is basic income a basic human right or a presupposition for the realisation of all human rights?<sup>2</sup>
- B) Economic scientists ask: how can it be financed without endangering its goals like development and social justice? How does it affect what is called the labor market?
- C) Psychologists are interested in the extent to which basic income (de)motivates people to work in a social context.
- D) Philosophers and sociologists of science: How will basic income affect the freedom and independence of research and teaching?
- E) Most other disciplines could be added.

Having classed questions into various disciplines, philosophy brings the results back together. Only from a comprehensive or philosophical view can individuals like managers, politicians, and groups like schools, firms and governments, make not only rational but also reasonable decisions.

As implied in point c) above, philosophy also deals with the issue of value-free science. Can individual justice (morality, righteousness) and social justice (equity) be part of science or are they part of religion? Just as religion can be a subject or object of science, value judgments can be analysed (cf. Reynolds & Healy 2008). Calling for value-free science is a kind of meta value-judgment on value judgments. In fact, preferring the truth over error or guessing and the wish to contribute to the growth of science is as much a value judgment implied in all science as the judgments resulting from the fact that science itself is part of changing society. Even scientists (including philosophers) need some kind of income to survive and to research, they have to respect the laws, rest and sleep etc. Therefore the issue at hand is also a methodological question: What kind of welfare arrangement is now better suited to finding the truth: the Traditional Welfare State (TWS) or Basic Income (BI)? On the other hand, scientists influence how people think, feel and act, both by what they publish and how they live as consumers and citizens. Scientists are models as long as we live in a scientific age. Consequently, scientists both cause social, technical, and moral change and are affected by it.

## II. The Welfare State and Basic Income (Clarifying Concepts)

A government or an economy without any kind of welfare measures is unlikely to attach to human dignity much importance. Furthermore, if we respect the UN-declaration of human rights, we cannot choose between having the right to a decent state of living or starving to death<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. my summary of the panel discussion with Prof. Götz Werner, Prof. Dr. Helge Peukert, Ministerpräsident Dieter Althaus etc.: „Grundrecht Grundeinkommen? Zur Podiumsdiskussion vom 30. April 08 an der Universität Erfurt“.

<sup>3</sup> Article 25 does not refer to a minimum but to an adequate standard of living: „(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food,

Economists and other scientists, politicians and judges, voters and all citizens, however, can choose between the traditional welfare state (TWS) and basic income schemes (BIS).

It is difficult to describe the essential features of the Welfare State for these reasons: welfare measures are often debated in campaigns, their effects are difficult to quantify, a large variety of traditional Welfare States exists, and most of them are changing their institutions more and more frequently. The three main interpretations of the idea of a „Welfare State“ according to Wikipedia (March 17, 2008) are a helpful starting point. [I classify some statements in square brackets.] A Welfare State is

- 1) the provision of welfare services by the state. [*political aspect*]
- 2) an ideal model in which the state assumes primary responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. [*scientific aspect*]
- 3) the provision of welfare in society. In many "welfare states", especially in continental Europe, welfare is not actually provided by the state, but by a combination of independent, voluntary, mutualist and government services. [*social aspect*]

The term „welfare system“ does not mean that the various social expenditures complement each other systematically. Looking at the over 100 kinds of social welfare provisions in Germany (Althaus 2007, 7), it is not easy to systematize them in a meaningful way. In this comparison with basic income it is helpful to classify them according to the strings attached to them: how strong is the work requirement, how narrow the means test? The same person might get some benefits in one country and not in another. To go into details would be the task of extensive research projects.

Fortunately, already the notion of basic income helps to clarify what welfare society is all about. Let us take as starting point the definition of the BIEN to which Wikipedia (spring 2008) refers: „A basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement. It is a form of minimum income guarantee that differs from those that

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clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.“ (Who can control the markets, social and natural catastrophes etc.?) In section (2) this is extended to mothers and in article 26 to education. Whoever calls for a socio-cultural minimum can refer to „Article 27:

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

All these human rights are void if there are (world) wars. Therefore a peaceful social and international order is a human right according to article 28. The next article relates the rights to duties. „Article 29.

(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.“

now exist in various European countries in three important ways:

- (a) it is being paid to individuals rather than households;
- (b) it is paid irrespective of any income from other sources;
- (c) it is paid without requiring the performance of any work..."

The BIEN mentions many reasons that support this policy measure. I systematize the main reasons in [] in order to relate them to the central ideals of social justice:

- A) General Reasons: Liberty and equality, autonomy from bosses, husbands and bureaucrats, community and common ownership of the Earth, health care and prevention, the promotion of (adult) education, and especially the dignity of the poor and of all human beings [freedom];
- B) Economic Reasons: efficiency and equal sharing in the benefits of technical progress, the flexibility of the labour market and the fight against inhumane working conditions, the viability of cooperatives and the furthering of entrepreneurship [solidarity];
- C) Political Reasons: against the desertification of the countryside and against interregional inequalities, for better relations between the state and the individual, for democratic participation and voluntary work etc. [equality]

The existing Welfare States contain elements of basic income and a region opting for basic income is likely to be left with some features of its former Welfare System. For analytical purposes, however, I will juxtapose these two ways of preventing people from starving, freezing, and maybe dropping out of society. To broaden the common analysis I will present two kinds of basic income: in the one the state provides it and in the other the economy.

### Traditional and Basic Income Social Systems

	<b>existing Social Security</b>	<b>BI by the state (pensions for all)</b>	<b>BI by the economy (social dividend)</b>
<i>Who receives it?</i>	households in need	all citizens (permanent residents)	all regular consumers
<i>On which conditions?</i>	ready to accept work	not in conflict with the law	and not endangering sustainability
<i>For what purpose?</i>	to be reinstated into the labor market	to realize human rights	and to balance supply and demand
<i>Costs in Germany in 2006</i>	over 700 bn€ in 2006 for all social benefits	could be the same, i.e. around 730€ pppm	% of sales and profits
<i>How financed</i>	from taxes and contributions	preferably from an expenditure tax	economic association(s)
<i>remarks</i>	increasing bureaucracy, decreasing equity	more freedom, equality and clear solidarity	direct solidarity without tax levy

Both the market economy and the Welfare State survived a lot of changes and reforms, even wars and natural catastrophes. The constant increase in unemployment, however, brought both into difficulties. More and more scholars and politicians try to synthesize social and economic policy in or-

der to find equilibria on commodity and factor markets, between those who are overworked and those who cannot work. People are concerned about the widening gap between those who get richer and those who get poorer even when and where social budgets increase.

There is, as mentioned, already a basic income part in Traditional Welfare Systems (TWS) that somewhat stabilizes these systems. Benefits or allowances for children are often unconditional, those for senior citizens are not tied to work requirements.<sup>4</sup> However, they are rarely aimed at some kind of minimum, be it the socio-cultural or the existential minimum, i.e. around 60 or 50% of the average net income per citizen. Although this raises the questions how high basic income should be and how it could be financed, let's analyse here the strings attached to the subsidies of the TWS because attaching these strings is not for free.

### III. Are There Just Means Tests?

A very common objection to any kind of government subsidies is that the recipients not really need it. In order to deal with whether means tests are or can be strict and efficient enough it is helpful to distinguish between voluntary and essential governmental activities. A government can decide to run a railway system, an airline or postal services or not. Then we can argue whether it is justified to charge e.g. children, housemen, unemployed, or senior citizens special prices. However, it is an essential task of any government to protect the citizens as physical and mental beings. So the police protects everybody without asking whether a citizen could have paid his private security forces. Similarly, everybody is entitled to human rights, no matter how poor or rich she or he is. If the dignity of man is inviolable according to the cited art. 1 of the German constitution, then the government has to protect it without asking whether any person really needs this protection.

I argued elsewhere (Hanel 2008a) that basic income is the material aspect of man's dignity. In a market society, nobody can live in a dignified way and make use of his human rights without disposing over some kind of basic income. Why is it impossible to devise a perfect means test without violating at least some human rights?

- 1) Means tests contradict the individuals' right to privacy;
- 2) People not claiming all the social benefits and tax breaks they are eligible for count in the millions in a bigger country like Germany with 82 million inhabitants;
- 3) On the other side, there are also people who make themselves poorer than they are to receive more of their share.
- 4) Means tests require furthermore that the social agency knows whether in future an individual or a household will earn more or less, get money from others through inheritance, lottery, friends or partners. How sturdy are your house, relationships, health etc.?

Given such human inclinations, smartness, and unanswerable questions, human rights can only have a fairly secure basis by means of basic income. If we consider complete biographies, it becomes clear that there cannot be a perfect distribution of welfare measures according to need or any kind of ethical criteria. Only the extremes are obvious: We should not have less or more money and wealth as is good for our individual development as personality (cf. art. 2 of the German con-

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<sup>4</sup> Let's call benefits conditional payments and allowances unconditional payments by governments. In this sense, allowances only depend on age; they *allow* children to be liberated from means tests and the work requirement. Who wants to *benefit* from government money has to do something for it.

7/10: Hanelq@gmail.com in Germany/99817 Eisenach on Basic Income and Social Justice, as of 15 July 08  
stitution).<sup>5</sup> This implies a basic income and high taxes on inheritances (cf. James Buchanan).

#### **IV. Can Required Work be Efficient and Constitutional?**

Every educator knows that when children study voluntarily they do better than when they are forced to do so. This is quite obvious in any kind of work as well. Slavery was abolished not only because it was inhumane, but also because it was less efficient than employed labor. Self-employed people usually work still harder than those who are told what to do by an employer.

Why are such obvious facts ignored by those who call for, institutionalise and execute work requirements? Usually they have two pictures of human beings, as Götz Werner tells his audiences: one of themselves and another of most other people. Why do we tend to assume that we give more to society than we get back? Reasons include that we do not fully understand or accept the many and changing welfare measures, their financing, the tax system, insufficient democratic participation and empathy. (Cf. Franzmann 2008, and [www.waswuwerdenSietun.de](http://www.waswuwerdenSietun.de) ... = what would you do (if you received an unconditional basic income today)

Moreover, work requirements contradict human rights. In Article 12 the German Basic Law guarantees occupational freedom and prohibits forced labor:

„(1) All Germans shall have the right freely to choose their occupation or profession, their place of work, and their place of training. ...

(2) No person may be required to perform work of a particular kind except within the framework of a traditional duty of community service that applies generally and equally to all.

(3) Forced labor may be imposed only on persons deprived of their liberty by the judgment of a court.“

I do not have the right to be gainfully employed in the profession I choose but I have the right to perform this professional calling. Furthermore, if the state makes me to accept any work no matter how low it is paid, slavery is only a limiting case of such a ‚work‘ requirement. Therefore only by means of a basic income without work requirement can we realize this „professional right“.

#### **V. Conclusion**

Unconditional basic income can enhance social justice on several human and social conditions, e.g.

- In surviving human beings develop a feeling of dignity and a notion of social justice;
- education aims for broad social understanding and initiative people<sup>6</sup>;
- taxation and regulations become understandable and acceptable;

These conditions of unconditional basic income are also implied by it; they are no prerequisites.

Only if somebody cares for me as a child unconditionally, can I become aware of my dignity. Only if my educators have some income before they can prove to be able to further me, can I pick up

<sup>5</sup> In article two of the German constitution the primacy of the individual over any kind of community, group or state is stressed: „Every person shall have the right to free development of his personality....“ This implies most other human rights: the freedom of faith, of consciousness and of creed (article 4), the freedom of expression (5), the freedom of movement (11) etc. How can I realize these rights without some basic income? Although a lot of rich people do not lead a healthy life, it is also true that „the right to life and physical integrity“ needs some financial means.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Althaus (2007) citing Victor Hugo: Nothing is so strong as an idea whose time has come.

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from them some notion of social justice. The same is true for social scientists, civil servants and politicians that work on efficient and acceptable taxes and social systems.

All this implies that to work (in the wide sense of the concept) and to receive an income are two separate things (Steiner 1919). Those who are (still) payed in the beginning of the period for which they work receive income to be able to work. Then income does not reward for past achievements but it provides the material side of the right to work, of human dignity and social justice. Because we are not born as fully functional adults, we always receive first before we can give. All these allusions suggest that social justice calls for basic income in the 21st century. Individuals are still becoming more and more autonomous and self-motivated and production becomes more and more automated. In short, basic income is the social aspect of labor-saving technological change (Hanel 1996) and of autonomous individuals.

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