

**Redistributive Schemes that Skirt Poverty:  
Reconsidering Social Justice in Light of Van Parijs and Zucker**

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This paper has been accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Poverty*, which is published by Haworth Press. If citing, please do so accordingly. Portions of this paper were presented at the Third USBIG/Eastern Economic Association Annual Conference, Washington, DC, February 20-22, 2004; the Annual Meeting, Society for the Study of Social Problems, San Francisco, CA, August 15-15, 2004; and the Tenth Basic Income European Network Congress, Barcelona, Spain, September 19-20, 2004.

Abstract

This paper examines the unconditional basic income (UBI) and national share of income schemes respectively of Van Parijs and Zucker. It discusses the implications of each on notions of and reform efforts for social or distributive justice. The core critique is that neither Van Parijs nor Zucker come to terms adequately with absolute poverty when addressing issues of income inequality. Reducing income inequality, a worthy goal for a variety of reasons (e.g., equalizing access to political power, creating greater social harmony), may reduce relative poverty while nonetheless ignoring absolute poverty. The author argues that poverty reduction should remain the central focus of theoretical and practical initiatives justifying income redistribution. That is, attending to basic need is necessarily elemental, can be made consistent with the idea of a UBI, and enhances the force of the concept of social or distributive justice. The paper concludes with a brief sketch of a progressively unconditional guaranteed income scheme.

Key Words: Basic income guarantee, distributive justice, economic security, market economies, poverty

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On January 8, 2004, President Luis Inacio Lula de Silva sanctioned into law legislation instituting gradually a basic income for all Brazilians and making Brazil the first country to adopt a citizen's basic income (Suplicy, 2003). Witnessing the occasion was Belgian professor of Economic and Social Ethics at the Université Catholique de Louvain Philippe Van Parijs, the current secretariat of the Basic Income European Network, whose ideas regarding the universal basic income guarantee (UBI) have been the basis of contemporary related proposals and advocacy efforts throughout Western Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere. At the ceremony Van Parijs (2004) characterized the Brazilian citizen's basic income legislation as a federal dividend, "a way of sharing among all Brazilians, as a reward for an effort accepted by all, the gains from participation in a globalised economy that would otherwise tend to be monopolised [*sic*] by some sectors and some regions." Although the legislation left open questions regarding the level and extent of coverage, the income itself was to be granted unconditionally as a matter of right, as a function of the status of citizenship. As such, this legislation was in sharp contrast to trends in the U.S. and many Western European countries toward a more contractual basis of work-related obligations associated with needs-based time-limited cash receipt programs (Handler, 2002; Suplicy, 2002).

In this paper I examine the UBI and national income shares schemes respectively of Van Parijs (1995) and Ross Zucker (2001), associate professor of political science at Lander College. I discuss the implications of each on notions of and reform efforts for social justice. The core critique is that neither Van Parijs nor Zucker come to terms adequately, in my opinion, with absolute poverty when addressing issues of income inequality. Reducing income inequality, a

worthy goal for a variety of reasons (e.g., equalizing access to political power, creating greater social harmony), may reduce relative poverty (socioeconomic status based on one's position in relation to others in society) while nonetheless ignoring absolute poverty (socioeconomic status based on subsistence, a minimum standard needed to live). In short, I argue that reduction of absolute poverty should remain the central focus of theoretical and practical initiatives justifying income redistribution. This position is consistent with Sheahen (1983 & 2004), who more than two decades ago outlined one such plan for the United States and who continues to promote the right to economic security.

In part following Bowles and Gintis (1998/1999) and reaffirming Towle (1945/1965), I argue that the notion of basic or fundamental need should remain important when considering rationales and ways to achieve social or distributive justice. This is not to say that attending to basic need is sufficient to meet the ideal of social justice, but only that it is necessarily elemental (Dick, 1975), that it can be made consistent with the idea of the UBI (Norman, 1992), and that it enhances the force of the concept of social justice (Braybrooke 1987). Although not of one piece, social justice for purposes of this paper is confined to allocation principles that can be used to guide policies designed to achieve a more equitable distribution of resources than would be the case otherwise if left solely to market mechanisms (Caputo, 2000; Chatterjee & D'Aprix, 2002). I proceed by examining briefly the redistributive schemes and accompanying logic that Van Parijs develops in *Real Freedom for All* (1995) and in his *Boston Review* article "A Basic Income for All" (2000) and Zucker proposes in *Democratic Distributive Justice* (2001). I hope to show how they skirt poverty as a social problem. Subsequently, I examine the free-rider problem and basic human needs, arguing that advocates and policymakers should keep a focus on absolute poverty rather than income inequality as the more pressing social problem when framing issues

requiring redistribution of resources (Iyengar, 1990). I conclude with several principles to guide redistribution of resources and a sketch of a progressively unconditional guaranteed income scheme.

### **An unconditional income at the highest sustainable level: The political theory of Philippe Van Parijs**

Van Parijs works within a political libertarian framework that extols the productive, goods-producing capacities of capitalist economies. Libertarians generally eschew the notion of social justice. They view as socially just the distribution of resources which results from voluntary exchanges of legally obtained goods and services that occur within a legitimate sociopolitical regime. The primary role of government, in addition to the protection of life and liberty, is the protection of property rights. The libertarian view of the state is one that provides a neutral framework to ensure fairness in voluntary transactions, with individual rights trumping the common good. In such a scheme, the redistributive capacity of government is limited and the idea of welfare rights rejected (Caputo, 2002; Hayek, 1960 & 1976; Hospers, 1971; Nozick, 1974).

Van Parijs argues that all members of societies based on capitalist economies are entitled to an unconditional basic income (UBI) at the highest sustainable level. He expands the libertarian ideal about the permissible role of government to redistribute resources and to achieve social justice, not on the basis of welfare rights, but rather on the basis of enabling what he calls real freedom for individuals. “The main argument for UBI” Van Parijs (2000) notes “is founded on a view of justice.” He continues:

Social justice ... requires that our institutions be designed to best secure *real freedom* to all. Such a real-libertarian conception of justice combines two ideas. First, the members of society should be formally free, with a well-enforced structure of property rights that includes the ownership of each by herself. What matters to a real libertarian, however, is not only the protection of individual rights, but assurances of the real value of those rights: we need to be concerned not only with liberty, but, in John Rawls's phrase, with the "worth of liberty." At first approximation, the worth or real value of a person's liberty depends on the resources the person has at her command to make use of her liberty. So it is therefore necessary that the distribution of opportunity—understood as access to the means that people need for doing what they might want to do—be designed to offer the greatest possible real opportunity to those with least opportunities, subject to everyone's formal freedom being respected.

For Van Parijs (1995, p. 12), a free society is one "whose members can do all what they wish to do with themselves and with whatever external object they own *by virtue of an uninterrupted chain of voluntary transactions starting from an initial unrestricted private appropriation of objects previously unowned* [italics in original]." It satisfies three conditions (Farrelly, 1999): (1) there is some well-enforced structure of rights (security), (2) this structure is such that each person owns oneself (self-ownership), and (3) the structure is such that each person has the greatest opportunity to do whatever he or she might want to do (leximin or lexicographic maximin opportunity). The first and second requirements constitute formal freedom. The third, that everyone has the greatest opportunity, encompasses the *means* to do what one might want to do and forms the basis upon which government can be called upon to redistribute resources. By leximin or lexicographic maximin opportunity Van Parijs (1992) means that

...the person with the least opportunities has opportunities that are no smaller than those enjoyed by the person with the least opportunities under any other feasible arrangement; in case there exists another feasible arrangement that is just as good for the person with least opportunities, then the next person up the scale in a free society must have opportunities no smaller than the second person up the scale of opportunities under this arrangement; and so on (p. 467).

To settle potential conflicts arising from these three conditions, Van Parijs (1992) provides a rough guideline, namely that a free society should give priority to the security condition over self-ownership, and to the latter over leximin opportunity. This is to say that in a free society, the ideal socioeconomic regime is one that could afford, and would actually implement, the highest sustainable unconditional income subject to the constraint that everyone's formal freedom (that is, security and self-ownership) should be protected. Social justice is a matter of distributing possibilities, or freedom, not results, and real freedom focuses on those opportunities available to each individual (Van Parijs, 2003). Social justice is achieved in the free society to the extent government or the state ensures that those with the least opportunities have opportunities that are no smaller than those enjoyed by others with the least opportunities under other arrangements.

It should be noted that Van Parijs (1992 & 2003) is only secondarily concerned with a notion of freedom as choosing among alternative bundles of consumption goods. His concern is somewhat similar to but more narrowly construed than Sen (1990 & 1997) who proposed assessing individual claims not by the resources or primary goods people respectively hold but by the freedoms they enjoy to choose between different ways of living that they can have reason to value. Both Sen and Van Parijs accept the notion of a pluralist society in which people can reasonably disagree with what matters in life and both scholars respect a diverse set of

conceptions of the good life. Van Parijs's primary concern, however, is enabling individuals to lead their lives as they please. Hence, the UBI increases one's capacity for real freedom (that is, it increases one's means more so than would be the case otherwise to pursue what one wants). In effect, the UBI is not merely a means to freedom, but rather extends the freedom that a person actually has.

The UBI, however, does not effectively deal with one of Sen's major concerns regarding the relationship between means and ends, namely that of inter-individual variation. That is, the actual freedom to pursue ends depends on both the ends he/she has and the power she/he has to convert primary goods, which for Van Parijs would include the UBI, into the achievement of ends. Hence, despite the UBI, which reduces income inequality, variations related to sex, age, genetic endowments (for example, increasing fetal growth for given genetic endowments has been shown to have a significant positive effect on subsequent schooling – see Behrman & Rosenzweig, 2001; also see Buchanan, Brock, Daniels, & Wikler, 2000; Farrelly, 2004), raw talent, and many other features give individuals unequal powers to build freedoms in their lives.

A basic issue in regard to living one's life as one pleases is the question "What is the worth of liberty?" Van Parijs (1992) aptly notes this question in regard to Rawls. For Rawls (1971), "the worth of liberty" applies to persons and groups and "is proportional to their capacity to advance their ends within the [socio-political] framework the system [of justice] defines" (p.204). Permit me the following question: "Does the liberty of Malibu surfers supported by a basic income equal the situation of destitute individuals who in Van Parijs's scheme would also be supported by a basic income?" In the final analysis, I am going to answer "No" to this question and I shall return to it later, in the context of the "free-rider" problem that the UBI

condones but which the traditions of both capitalists and socialists shun (Farrelly, 1999). For the moment, let me say only that I find the notion of social justice tied to redistributing resources allowing individuals to pursue lives of Malibu surfers while concomitantly leaving other individuals bereft of basic goods and services such as food, clothing, shelter, and health care too limited (see Van Parijs, 1991). Bereft of such basic needs being met even after receipt of a basic income allotment, in my opinion, such individuals would not have their real freedom increased in any meaningful sense. Presently, however, I want to show how the UBI, as well as Zucker's equal share of national income scheme, skirt, in my opinion, the more pressing problem of poverty reduction.

Van Parijs is rather explicit about the relationship between the UBI and poverty. To his argument "that everyone should be paid a *universal basic income* (UBI)," Van Parijs (2000) adds "at a level *sufficient for subsistence*" [italics in original, available on-line]. Yet, when defining the UBI, he clearly states:

... nothing in the definition of UBI, as it is here understood, connects it to some notion of "basic needs." A UBI, as defined, can fall short of or exceed what is regarded as necessary to a decent existence. (Also, see Van Parijs, 1992, p. 472).

I suppose a "decent existence" need not encompass what might constitute a level of income sufficient for subsistence, but I would be hard pressed to be convinced of that. Van Parijs (2000) also claims that he favors "the highest sustainable such income, and believe[s] that all the richer countries can now afford to pay a basic income above subsistence." Seemingly at odds with Widerquist's (1999) characterization of guaranteed income schemes in general, that is, "they unconditionally guarantee that no one's income falls below the poverty level" (p. 388), in an apparent pragmatic gesture, Van Parijs adds:



“But advocates of a UBI do not need to press for a basic income at this level right away. In fact, the easiest and safest way forward, though details may differ considerably from one country to another, is likely to consist of enacting a UBI first at a level below subsistence, and then increasing it over time.”

In other words, en route to passage and implementation of the UBI, Van Parijs (2003) is willing to accept some compromises such as settling for less than subsistence or requiring some sort of participation or willingness to work as a strict condition. I am going to argue that this order should be reversed. That is, advocates should first press to bring to subsistence level all those who fall below it. Once success is achieved here, in graduated increments from lowest to highest incomes everyone above poverty can begin receiving an equal percentage of national income from whatever pool of resources remains for this purpose. The bottom line, however, is that equality-in-meeting-basic-needs takes precedence over equality-of-some-level-of-income for everyone.

Brian Barry (2000) maintains that what constitutes the highest level of basic income in any country cannot be determined and any attempt to do so would amount to guesswork. Further, he argues:

Many of the advantages that Van Parijs claims for a basic income scheme would be realized only if it were pitched at subsistence level (or higher). Thus, for example, the uncertainty that inhibits people from moving from unemployment benefit (and, even more, disability benefit) would be allayed only if the unconditional alternative were enough to live on. Similarly, only a basic income at (or approaching) subsistence level would enable people to take time between jobs, get more training, or start a new business. Again, workers can refuse “desperation” jobs and women can leave abusive husbands only if the alternative

income is adequate. The same goes for the possibility of engaging in full-time caring for children or for elderly or infirm relatives.

To the extent the basic income is adequate, however, it can, as Van Parijs (1996) argues, be rightly viewed as a “soft strategy for job-sharing, by providing all with a small unconditional sabbatical pay” (p. 65). As such, it would enhance the capacity of everyone to benefit. Nonetheless, once capacity to benefit is admitted into a formulation of social justice, as Van Parijs posits, I hope it will become clear later that equality-in-meeting-basic-needs of those who by definition are not meeting such needs takes unconditional precedence over equality-of-some-level-of-income for all. The likelihood of achieving, let alone sustaining, an adequate level nonetheless remains problematic (Braybrooke, 1987).

### **Ross Zucker: Equal Shares of the National Income**

I would now like to turn our attention to Ross Zucker (2001) and his equal share of the national income scheme. There are two basic components to Zucker’s normative logic for a guaranteed income and a third component that links the other two and forms a social theory of substantive democracy (Casadei, 2002). First, Zucker posits a theory of justice as due-ness, which accounts for inter-subjective aspects of personhood. He maintains property should go to individuals in proportion to their economic contributions, that is, for activities contributing to the value of commodities, not just for those activities producing a product. This is to say that consumers, and not just producers, contribute to the creation of value, and, as are producers, they are due a benefit for their economic contributions. Individuals as consumers are engaged in a social activity that contributes in a basic equitable way to the economic welfare of a

sociopolitical regime and in doing so are thereby entitled to some equitable level of the national income.

In reaching these conclusions, Zucker (2001) draws on neoclassical economic theory, which acknowledges the contribution of consumers to the value of commodities. Any activity according to Zucker “can qualify as an economically creative action if it contributes to the creation of the value of commodities” (p. 102). In the neoclassical theory of externalities, for example, non-market interdependencies between consumers and consumers, or between producers and consumers, warrant compensatory action. An external effect can exist whenever actions by economic agents bring without price marginal benefits or costs to others. Without price means that the economic agent does not bear the full marginal cost or benefit of his or her action. To the extent consumption by others alters the shape or position of another’s indifference curve (that is, the curve representing all combinations of two goods that make the consumer equally well off), an externality has occurred. Discussion of these and related basic economic concepts can be found in Hall and Lieberman (2005) and Gregory (2002). Neoclassical economic theory would support remedial action, such as taxes, in order to improve efficiency whenever such externalities occur. Zucker concludes, “The notion that interdependencies between utility functions can entitle consumers to remedial and compensatory policies constitutes a precedent for entitling them to benefits proportionate to their economic contributions” (p. 103). Zucker, however, does not provide a calculus for determining the value of one’s economic contribution. He leaves open-ended the question of how much or what level is one’s due as a consumer, and posits only that individuals should get an equal share of an unspecified amount.

Second, Zucker (2001) introduces a key concept, the economic community, in support of his normative argument for equal property. He maintains that community “can provide a moral

foundation for a principle of equal distribution of some income, because membership in a community intuitively warrants sharing” (p. 243). The economic society has the communal composition that morally warrants equalization of income. The economic dimension of society differs from other communal aspects of civil life. Zucker posits the economic community is an overarching community, not a holistic one.

In Zucker’s (2001) scheme, a holistic, civil market-based society has a tripartite structure. This structure comprises “a union with regard to the conditions of freedom of choice”, “an overarching union for the pursuit of wealth,” and “a concrete multitude seeking different particular aims and ends” (p. 252). Such a structure implies that “property is an equal right to an equal portion of one part of the total social [national] income and a right to an unequal portion of another part of this income” (p.251). An overarching union or community implies a limit on the extent of [economic] community within the national or civic [holistic] community in which individuals freely pursue their own ends (Casadei, 2002). This is to say that individuals have a right to claim a portion, but only a portion, of the national income.

Zucker (2001) notes that theorists are not in complete agreement in regard to distributive principles for regulating a community. Some, like Taylor (1985), albeit with a degree of ambivalence, posit that community morally entails equal distribution of relevant resources. Others, like Sandel (1982), hold that community can sanction unequal distribution if inequality advances communal purposes. Still others, like Waldron (1988), are morally neutral regarding the relationship between community and distribution. Zucker concurs with Taylor, with the caveat that a capital-based market economy should not be solely regulated by the principle of equal distribution. The tripartite structure of civil society is such that unequal shares of national income are warranted, along side some unspecified portion of equal shares. Hence, the source of

the right to an equal share or distribution of some unspecified amount of resources is community membership.

Zucker (2001) confines his discussion of equal distribution to a share of national income. For all practical purposes, the right to compensation as a consumer occurs within national boundaries. Zucker does not address whether or not the right to an equal share of national income would apply to non-citizens of a country and he is also silent in regard to handling international compensatory claims. In an increasingly global economy, for example, would consumers in one country have a right to a share of the national income of other countries whose goods they consumed and thereby added value? The logic of Zucker's argument would necessitate a positive response, although how such a scheme would be fairly implemented remains problematic. Despite these difficulties, Zucker's emphasis on community within the context of nation-states with market-based economies has merit.

As I suppose any Keynesian would acknowledge and as the recent U.S. experience with recession would affirm, consumer demand is an essential component in increasing productivity. What Zucker (2001) adds to demand-side realities is a normative component of reciprocity to capitalism. That is, consumers are thereby entitled to a share of market rewards, presumably limited to economic remuneration, beyond those associated with specific buying and selling transactions (p. 79). Since productive activity is not entirely cooperative, however, as previously noted equalization of total income is not warranted in Zucker's scheme. Only some unspecified equal portion is warranted.

Third, for Zucker, democracy must include economic as well as political rights. That is, substantive economic rights are not merely conducive to democracy; they are constitutive of it. This is so because as democracy internalizes justice and becomes obliged to maintain it, it

acquires moral commitments that define its ruling tasks. These moral commitments entail many substantive rights, such as property rights, which (in the Liberal democratic tradition, as I understand it) are necessary conditions for the freedom of will in relation to things. Zucker (2001) summarizes the connection between democracy and distributive justice in the following, original way:

As a condition of basic freedom, the redistributory property right accrues the supreme ethical worth possessed by other rights of basic freedom. Having supreme ethical worth, the redistributory property right is indispensable to the core of a democracy that internalises [*sic*] justice. As such, it belongs among the constitutional essentials of a republic and cannot be removed without diminishing the democratic character of the republic” (p. 292).

Casadei (2002) notes three areas that need more extensive treatment: the question of *membership* and the relation between democracy and the politics of difference (mentioned in passing, Zucker, 2001, p. 271. See Paden, 1998; Fraser, 1995/1998; Young, 1990); the global context of economic processes, also affecting national ones; and, finally, the “status” of those individuals who for various reasons are excluded from the economic and productive process, though needing access to resources. I would add four more. First, further examination of implications regarding the claim that one is due a share of the national income in some proportion to one’s consumer-related contribution to it is warranted. This is so because, following Dick (1975) “...in fairness the value of one’s contribution should be independent of the value of the resulting product” (p. 263). Zucker’s account seems to imply not equal but differential shares of the national income, contingent upon how much one consumes. The more one consumes and thereby contributes to fostering additional production of goods, the greater the share of the national income one is due. One might also question, as Dietsch (2002) does, that markets already reward consumer behavior since they get the goods they want and at prices they

are willing to pay. Assuming markets function reasonably well to supply goods at their lowest possible prices, all things considered, does not the difference consumers might have paid otherwise suffice as remuneration? What makes further remuneration a moral imperative? Are we not double-counting the economic value thus created?

In regard to the second area of Zucker's scheme needing expansion, one might question the "communal" aspect of the economic community. Zucker (2001) takes one characteristic of communities in general, whether holistic or overarching, namely common purpose, and uses it as the sole criterion of what makes a community a community. It will be recalled that the overarching economic community has as its common purpose increasing wealth. Despite his effort to identify the economic community as a component part of the civil or national community, Zucker nonetheless analytically extrapolates from the part to the whole. This is unfortunate, because it forces him to abandon or move away from the classical assumption that community presupposes conscious intention in regard to the common interest. In Zucker's scheme, individuals are rewarded for unintended consequences of their actions (Dietsch, 2002).

The third area that warrants expansion concerns the issue of poverty. Zucker (2001) clearly differentiates his national income share scheme from poverty reduction. He notes that welfare policies, whose aim is poverty reduction, "may be motivated by genuine humanitarian sentiments, but they do not," in his view, "have a particularly egalitarian purpose or consequence" (p. 254). Although Zucker claims that the right to an equal distribution of part of the national income seeks to define a minimum income, he provides no indication or guidelines as to what constitutes such a minimum. Zucker is silent about the adequacy or amount of income that his share of national income scheme would produce. He is primarily concerned with developing an ethically valid degree of income equality. This emphasis is unfortunate because, in

my view and that of others noted above, the limitations of his scheme detract from what might have been a more compelling case not only for income inequality but also for poverty reduction. His silence about the adequacy or amount of income that his share of national income scheme would produce subjects him to many of the criticisms raised above in regard to Van Parijs's UBI.

The fourth area of Zucker's scheme that warrants elaboration is that of incentives. When discussing his vision of substantive social democracy, which incorporates principles for an equal share of national income, Zucker (2001) acknowledges that the "incentives relied on to increase productivity would be modified" (p. 275). A reduction of income differentials, at least to some extent, would invariably accompany a redistribution of shares of the nation income. How this would affect the incentive structure for increasing economic productivity remains unanswered. Would recipients of their share of national income be any more or less likely to participate in economic productivity in ways beyond those afforded by consumption? Would they be less likely to work? What is the differential weight attributed to productivity by work and by consumption? What, if any, is the nature of a tradeoff between the two? Zucker for the most part leaves these latter questions unanswered, but he nonetheless seeks to resolve the free-rider problem by establishing a causal link between consumption, in which everyone partakes, and productivity, from which everyone benefits to some degree. In such a substantive social democracy, no one is a free rider in a strict sense. In my opinion, as shown below, Zucker's notion of consumption, albeit ambiguous and broad, is a necessary corrective to the UBI as proposed by Van Parijs.

### **The free-rider problem & basic human needs**

It is now time to turn our attention to theoretical and practical problems in regard to free riders, human needs, and reciprocity. At issue is increasing the likelihood of public support for



redistributing legally acquired income. Is income redistribution more likely to occur and have greater public appeal in the absence of reciprocity or when targeted to individuals and groups deemed in need with some reciprocal expectations? A related issue concerns the role that social institutions play in creating an atmosphere where ideas like the UBI and a national share of income scheme meet ideological and political opposition. What might advocates of public forms of appropriate responses to people in need, for example, effectively do to offset the drumbeat of presidential administrations that have increasingly sought to address social problems with market-reliant solutions since the Reagan administration of the 1980s (Gilbert, 2002)? Answers depend on the nature of the programs, the administrative and fiscal capacities, as well as on the related climate of opinion of the sociopolitical regimes in which they are implemented.

How important is reciprocity in primarily market-based economies when the issue is redistribution of income? Zucker and Van Parijs have contrasting views, the former being the more positive of the two. As noted, Zucker (2001) argues that individuals as consumers achieve reciprocity by virtue of their participation in the economic community of a sociopolitical regime. For Van Parijs (1998/1999), on the other hand, the expectation of reciprocity implies welfare-state paternalism that decreases individual freedom to do what one wants and is often accompanied by undignified treatment when determining eligibility and meeting work-related or other requirements. Although Zucker makes a case for reciprocity, he does so with the prospect of equalizing income, not the humanitarian concern of poverty reduction, in mind. Although Van Parijs eschews reciprocity, he nonetheless sees the UBI as a viable steppingstone in ameliorating the plight of poor persons. To what extent is the motivation to reduce income inequality broad enough to garner the support of the public at levels sufficient to meet basic human needs?

In their research on the evolutionary basis of altruism, Bowles and Gintis (1998/1999) provide some insight, albeit arguable (see Haveman, 1998/1999), to help get a handle on this question. Their work suggests a foundation for cooperation and sharing in two basic human motives--*strong reciprocity* and *basic needs generosity*. Their summary is worth quoting at length:

“Five generalizations sum up the relevance of these experiments to the problem of designing and sustaining programs to promote economic security and eliminate poverty. First, people exhibit significant levels of generosity, even towards strangers. Second, people share more of what they acquire by chance rather than by personal effort. Third, people contribute to public goods and cooperate in collective endeavors, and consider it unfair to free-ride on the contributions and efforts of others. Fourth, people punish free riders at substantial costs to themselves, even when they cannot reasonably expect future personal gain from doing so.

...[F]ifth, ... each of these aspects of reciprocity becomes more salient when the social distance participants perceive among themselves is smaller. This last generalization may help explain why inequalities are so readily sustained even among apparently generous publics. Economic inequality--particularly when overlaid with racial, ethnic, language, and other differences--increases social distance, which in turn undermines the motivational basis for reaching out to those in need...

...[W]e suspect the following to be true as well: egalitarian policies that reward people independent of whether and how much they contribute to society are considered unfair and are not supported, even if the intended recipients are otherwise worthy of support, and even if the incidence of non-contribution in the target population is rather low. This would explain the opposition to many welfare

measures for the poor, particularly since such measures are thought to have promoted various social pathologies.

One of the implications of Bowles and Gintis's (1998/1999) work is that decreasing income inequalities increases beneficence toward those in need. An increased willingness to meet need, however, is contingent upon some level of contribution of recipients. Van Parijs would have us believe and act on the notion that reducing inequality increases the likelihood of people's willingness to support the UBI even if that left many individuals and their families below poverty. As noted, Zucker is silent in regard to how his equal share of a national income scheme would affect poverty per se. To the extent either scheme reduces income inequality, however, the implication is that poverty reduction would follow. Such logical possibilities fly in the face of practical fiscal realities that would invariably leave many persons and their families in poverty. In these instances, equality-in-meeting-basic-needs should take precedence over equality-of-some-level-of-income schemes (Braybrooke, 1987; Towle, 1945/1965). As Braybrooke notes, such schemes based on notions of justice as equality lose their moral force and practical meaning when significant numbers of people are denied basic needs. He asks, "In particular, will it not be a powerful argument against any conception of justice that it would tolerate some people's needs not being met, when there are resources to meet them?" (p. 132). Equality-in-meeting-basic-needs first would not only remove the threat such a question poses to adherents of UBI schemes, it would also vindicate them.

I do support UBI and national share of income schemes in principal. Consistent with Braybrooke (19987), however, I would argue to reverse the emphasis, to switch the means and ends. That is, instead of giving priority to awarding everyone within a national economy an unconditional income, I recommend legislating and retaining it as a long-term goal while giving

poverty reduction priority. This position is consistent with Sheahen (1983 & 2004) who more than twenty years ago articulated the rationale and feasibility of a guaranteed income for the U.S. and who remains an ardent advocate of such a scheme. Sheahen promotes an economic redistribution scheme with nearly universal coverage, but limited eligibility to those whose income falls below a “break even” point, with a minimum income set at the poverty level. Unlike Sheahen, however, I am also claiming that reciprocity is consistent with a concept of social justice that also accounts for meeting basic need.

Here, Zucker (2001) is helpful. In his share of national income scheme, the idea of consumers’ contribution to wealth production, via increasing the value of commodities, establishes by definition a reciprocal relationship. By consuming, an individual contributes to the economic welfare of a sociopolitical regime in the form of sustained economic growth and is thereby due a share of the national income. I concede that Zucker’s is a broad view of contribution, an expansive concept of reciprocity. Nonetheless, by unhinging reciprocity from paid work, it constructively, in my opinion, addresses the free-rider problem. In Zucker’s scheme there are no free riders in market-based sociopolitical regimes, since everyone consumes and thereby contributes to national wealth. Hence, the equal share of national income scheme has the potential to mitigate the social animosity that could arise on the part of paid workers who might otherwise view other recipients as parasites (Noguera, 2002).

Smith (2002) has also argued for a more expansive notion of contribution in his defense of justice as reciprocity. In his broadest and perhaps weakest argument, Smith contends that those who are unable to meet their basic needs nonetheless contribute in the sense that others can learn from them. Narrowing his scope but strengthening his argument, Smith concomitantly makes a compelling case for a more expansive view of contribution. Consistent with feminist

scholars, he argues that, for example, society benefits when it makes provisions for poor single parents. Such provisions enhance single parents' capacities to contribute to society by reducing some of the burdens associated with raising children. Unlike the U.S., the citizens of many European welfare states also know this, having legislated policies and implemented programs to these effects accordingly (Alesina & Glaeser, 2004). A broader notion of what constitutes contribution can thereby eliminate many of the draconian work requirements associated in the U.S. with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Meeting their needs with cash and other forms of assistance will enable poor single parents greater latitude to fulfill social responsibilities associated with raising children, while also acquiring requisite education and skill for higher paying jobs than would in all likelihood be the case otherwise.

I have stated my case for the priority of meeting basic needs and poverty reduction vs. reducing income inequality per se in secular humanistic terms. This is consistent with the historical interpretation that guaranteeing aid to poor persons in a modern idea, developed over the past two centuries (Fleischacker, 2004) In this time of increased sensitivity to the relationship between faith and public policy, however, it seems only appropriate to note in closing that principles upon which my arguments have been made can be viewed as consistent within many religious traditions (e.g., Bane & Mead, 2003). Following Father John Ryan, whose *Distributive Justice* still has resonance after 80 plus years, I am essentially positing as a first principle of economic justice that the basic needs of poor individuals transcend in moral importance more affluent individuals' preferences and desires that go beyond meeting basic needs, especially those that might be associated with conspicuous consumption. This canon of need is affirmed, as Gilbert (2001) notes, in religious and philosophical traditions from Plato to the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures. It is based on the idea that all human beings are worthwhile. That is,

while some things are to be used for instrumental purposes, human beings are not to be used as means to some higher end: They are ends in themselves. Given that many faiths and human secularism adhere to such a basic principle as the intrinsic worth of individual human beings, the multiplicity of related non-governmental agencies has an important role in advancing public or government support for such a program. At the very least, they can break the cycle of contemporary rhetoric cemented in the 1980s by the Reagan administration, which had asserted that government was the problem not the solution. They can also provide a more factual basis to counter the proliferation of publications from pro-market solution think tanks. In doing so, they can thereby help rekindle a spirit of social reform in which government, especially at the national level, played a vital, constructive role in meeting the plight of people who are currently poor and who are likely to become poor.

Finally, providing what Van Parijs (1995) calls real freedom for all and what is implied in Zucker's (2001) equal share of national income scheme, namely an unconditional guaranteed income, is morally contingent on first meeting the basic human needs of all persons in a sociopolitical regime. In market economies, the production of more costly goods that command high profits often mean that lower cost goods are less available and that prices in general could be higher than would be otherwise, thereby eroding the purchasing power of low-income people or otherwise depriving some of the opportunity to meet basic human needs in a convenient way. Thus, the "just deserts" of more affluent persons may have to be sacrificed to meet the more urgent needs of others. Given that basic needs vary, redistributive schemes such as the UBI or equal share of the national income would inadequately address the needs of too many vulnerable people than would be the case otherwise.

Let us devise a scheme that meets basic needs, thereby diminishing the vulnerability of poor persons (Braybrooke, 1987), *en route* to an unconditional income for all. Although the specifics of what such a program would look like, however, go beyond the scope of this paper, there are precedents that can serve as a basis for such a scheme. These precedents include the Family Assistance Plan proposed under the Nixon administration (Caputo, 1994), the progressive negative income tax scheme proposed by Block and Manza (1997), a modified Alaska Permanent Fund, a state-run investment savings account that pays equal annual dividends to every Alaskan citizen created in 1976 by a voter-approved amendment to the state's constitution (Bollier, 2001), and Brazil's Citizen's Income legislation (Suplicy, 2003).

A scheme that aimed at poverty reduction *en route* to an unconditional income for all might start with a publicly debated and eventually acceptable determination of what percentage of the national income should go to this effort. Sastry (nd), for example, suggests that 10 percent of a country's GDP be devoted to such a purpose. From there, principles associated with a progressively unconditional guaranteed income should be implemented. This would entail a determination of what proportion of the national income set aside for the guaranteed income would be required to address poverty first. The goal here should be to lift as many individuals and families as possible above national level poverty thresholds. Money left over should then be directed to those in the next highest tier of income earners and their families and so on until all resources devoted to this purpose are exhausted. In economically flush times it is conceivable that the proportion of the national income earmarked for such a program would be sufficient to enable everyone to receive an equal share. In economic downturns, the most affluent tier of individuals and families would either receive checks of smaller amounts or receive no checks, and so on down the economic ladder as resources are further depleted. Advocates, scholars, and

others interested in the UBI as a means of achieving social justice can benefit from visiting the World Wide Web sites of the Basic Income European Network (BIEN) located at “<http://www.bien.be/>” and of the United States Basic Income Guarantee (USBIG) located at “<http://www.usbig.net/>”.

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