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Political philosophy guide to social deliberation about unconditional basic income

Abstract

Recently, the idea of unconditional basic income (UBI) has emerged in several countries and/or regions, and the dispute is usually rather fierce. During this decision-making process, political communities have to form opinions about the most important values of the community. We believe that defining this vision of the political community must be based on comprehensive and rational social deliberation instead of fetishising or demonising an instrument. That is why it is especially important that members of the political community see the values behind the pro-UBI and anti-UBI social visions and those considerations of social justice which are for and against UBI clearly.

In our paper, we undertake to bring to the surface those basic intuitions about social justice which are behind the pro-UBI and anti-UBI social visions. In other words, we will explore the often unspoken presuppositions held in the worldview of the supporters as well as the opponents. About UBI, rational discourse can be formed only when the parties realize and understand each other's reasons, and stop ignoring or underestimating the importance of these. Without these kinds of (exploratory) analyses, the debate about UBI can easily become irrational and fruitless, which is how the parties miss the point. We expect our philosophical guide to help the arguing parties to see through the dialect of the debate, and to articulate their standpoints better.

We think that the philosophical debate about UBI is determined by five essential questions. (1) Do the interest of the private sphere or the interest of the political community have priority? (2) Is it the individual or the community who is primarily responsible for poverty? (3) In the case of welfare benefits, should the state follow the principle of need or the principle of universality? (4) During redistribution, should the state apply the principle of reciprocity or is the state not in the epistemic position to apply the principle justly? (5) Should the right social policy ensure the opportunity to participate in the labour market or ensure the opportunity to be left out of the labour market? In our paper, we will examine these questions one by one.

Introduction

We define unconditional basic income (UBI) as the following: UBI is *income* which is *regularly* paid by the political community and is sufficient for *basic needs*, and *every* member of the political community is *unconditionally* and *individually* entitled to it.

This definition – as the number of italic words suggests – has six essential points. (1) Everyone gets UBI. (2) Everyone gets UBI in cash, not in food or in any other goods. (3) UBI is paid to individuals and not to families or households. (4) UBI is sufficient to cover the costs of food and housing but it is not enough to buy luxury items. (5) UBI is paid regularly (monthly, weekly etc.). Regularity differentiates UBI from other conceptions like citizen's stake, which grants every qualifying young adult a once-in-a-lifetime, significant sum of money to help achieve their life-goals. For instance, they can finance their higher education, but can even risk it by gambling (Ackerman – Alstott 2000). (6) Everyone is entitled to UBI unconditionally, independently of needs and intention to work. Therefore, UBI is different from social security payments, such as unemployment benefits or family allowance. This is also why UBI is different from other basic income concepts, whereby the transfer of basic

income depends on socially useful work (e.g. teaching marginalized children; caring for the elderly etc.), or taking part in political activism (van der Veen 1998).

Recently, the idea of UBI has emerged in several countries and/or regions, and the dispute is usually rather fierce. The debate focuses typically on two issues: the first question is practical and depends on the given country or region: is UBI *financially sustainable* in the current economy? The second question is philosophical and general: is the redistribution of goods required by the concept of UBI *just*? In our paper, we only deal with the latter question, so you will not find any economic calculations here.

Although we both sympathize with the concept of UBI, we are also sceptical about conclusive philosophical arguments about whether it is just or not to introduce UBI. There are no conclusive philosophical arguments in any area of philosophy; there is not a single philosophical problem in which there is widespread consensus among philosophers (Bourget – Chalmers 2014). We think that, similarly to other areas of philosophy, our basic intuitions can *differ* in the case of UBI as well. Moral intuitions about social justice differ from person to person (including professional philosophers).

Despite the fact that there are no conclusive philosophical arguments on either side of the debate, sooner or later, every political community has to decide whether they want to live in a society where there is UBI or they do not. During this decision-making process, political communities have to form opinions about the *most important values* of the community. We believe that defining this vision must be based on *comprehensive* and *rational* social deliberation. That is why it is especially important that members of the political community see the values behind the pro-UBI and anti-UBI social visions and those considerations of social justice which are for and against UBI clearly. As Amartya Sen states: 'informed and unregimented *formation* of our values requires openness of communication and arguments' (emphasis in original) (Sen 1999, 152).

We should beware of one thing only, and we cannot emphasize this enough: demagogic proclamations. Two examples: 'without UBI, we are slaves to the labour market' – we often hear this slogan, which – according to many – justifies the necessity of introducing UBI; what's more, its inevitability. Another example: 'it is the greatest injustice and waste to give UBI to the rich' – we can hear this just as demagogic (also showcasing the misunderstanding of the concept of UBI) 'argument' as well, which proves the obvious absurdity of UBI for many. Well, these are the skin-deep and instinctive proclamations, from which we have to stay away when we want to make a commitment regarding this crucially important decision. The most disturbing aspect of these public debates is that, instead of rationally comparing pros and cons, the fetishism/demonism of an instrument takes place.

In our paper, we undertake to bring to the surface those basic intuitions about social justice which are behind the pro-UBI and anti-UBI social visions. In other words, we will explore the often unspoken presuppositions held in the worldview of the supporters as well as the opponents. About UBI, rational discourse can be formed only when the parties realize and understand each other's reasons, and stop ignoring or underestimating the importance of these. Without these kinds of (exploratory) analyses, the debate about UBI can easily become irrational and fruitless, which is how the parties miss the point. We expect our philosophical guide to help the arguing parties to see through the dialect of the debate, and to articulate their standpoints better.

We think that the philosophical debate about UBI is determined by five essential questions. (1) Do the interest of the private sphere *or* the interest of the political community have priority? (2) Is it the individual *or* the community who is primarily responsible for poverty? (3) In the case of welfare benefits, should the state follow the principle of need *or* the

principle of universality? (4) During redistribution, should the state apply the principle of reciprocity *or* is the state not in the epistemic position to apply the principle justly? (5) Should the right social policy ensure the opportunity to participate in the labour market *or* ensure the opportunity to be left out of the labour market? In our paper, we will examine these questions one by one.

Before doing that however, we would like to add two unravelling comments to these questions. Firstly, every question states an alternation and it is easy to guess that the first option is preferred by the opponents of UBI, and the second option is preferred by the supporters of UBI. It is important to see that even if someone always chooses the pro-UBI answers, it is not necessarily the case that she or he will be committed to UBI. These pro-UBI options are only *necessary criterions* of supporting UBI and not sufficient ones. These options do not favour UBI unambiguously against any other equality supporting redistribution policy., i.e. the stated option-pairs are not exclusive.

Secondly, it is possible that some people will sometimes sympathize with the pro-UBI, and sometimes with the anti-UBI options, that is they do not buy either 'package' as a whole. But that is not surprising. Between the elements of the two 'packages', the relation is natural and yet, they do not have a conceptual or logical relationship.

I. The 'interest of the private sphere' *versus* the 'interest of the political community'.

1.

Many firmly believe about social justice that the interests of the private sphere have priority over the interests of the political community, because only private owners are entitled to make decisions about private ownership.

The argument goes as follows: in most cases, the ownership of resources is well-defined; they are in the possession of private or legal persons. The owner of the given resource is entitled to decide whether she or he barters, sells or hands over the given resource. In other words, every change in ownership depends on the transactions between private or legal persons. Thus, the pattern of distribution is the result of different individual choices.

The two most important institutions through which people make transactions are the market and the family. You can acquire the ownership of a resource in two ways: you can buy it on the market or you can get it from family members/friends as a gift or inheritance. Only these transactions are just transactions; they are the principles of *justice in transfer* (Nozick 1974).

All this stands for the labour and stock markets. These two are the institutions where you can acquire income. On the labour market, people offer their labour force, and companies and/or the state buys it. Thus, if someone wants to acquire income (besides as a gift or inheritance), she or he has to enter the labour and/or stock markets and put up her or his workforce and/or capital goods for sale. (We should realize that an individual's ability to work is also a resource, which can be bought or sold, and only the given person has the right to make decisions about it (Dahms 2006).

Consequently, the distribution of resources will depend on the value of the labour force or capital goods as perceived *by others* (Van Parijs 1997). If the market assigns high value to the work of a software engineer, then the work of the software engineer will be rewarded by a high salary. Thus, the software engineer will own more resources (i.e. money), but she or he

owns her or his high income *rightfully*, because she or he acquired it according to the principles of justice in transfer.

In other words, the distribution of resources is just when it is the result of transactions in accordance with the principle of justice in transfer, thus just distribution depends only on the *history of transactions* (Nozick 1974). Of course, with the principle of justice in transfer, very different patterns of distributions can come into existence. If a resource has high perceived value, then its owner will acquire more resources than others, and the distribution will become unequal. Some people will own more, some people less, some people will be better-off, some worse-off, but this does not mean – and that is the point – that distribution is unjust.

State institutions can only interfere with private transactions in special cases. Their only task is to correct the operation of the institutions (family and market). If these institutions do not work according to the principle of justice in transfer, then (and only then) can the state correct their operation. Thus, it is the duty of the state to ensure that the unjustly acquired resources will be redeemed. But – we cannot emphasize enough – state intervention is justified only when someone acquired her or his goods undeservedly (by stealing, cheating, keeping others out of the exchange violently, etc.).

Besides the fact that this distribution is just, it is also effective. Why? Because when the state wants to change the distribution of resources acquired according to the principle of just transfer, then this *eo ipso* will cause lower efficiency (Johnston 2005). With redistribution, the state will take away resources from those who can use their means effectively (including their work force and expertise), and will give to those who can use their means less effectively. So, if we let the interests of the private sphere prevail, then the effectiveness of using resources will be altogether higher than in the case of state intervention.

In short, it is just, moreover downright beneficial that most of the decisions which influence the distribution of resources (and thus the life of the society) are *kept out* of social decision-making (MacGregor 2005). That is why the private sphere and private interest have priority and that is why UBI is a misguided (unjust and ineffective) concept.

2.

However, in spite of many people's opinion that the above-mentioned view does not have any alternatives, we can think in another way. Namely, the justice of distribution does not depend on the principle of justice in transfer in the Nozickian sense, or on the effectiveness, but on the *pattern of distribution*. Thus, the pattern of distribution has to be just and bring it about that distribution is more important than the interests of the private sphere.

There are more concepts about the justice of distribution (for instance: Dworkin 2000; Parfit 1997), but only two are worth emphasizing regarding UBI. According to the first one, it is the duty of the state to give everyone *equal opportunities* to compete for 'more than enough'. This means that if someone has more external or internal difficulties than the others (for instance: born into a family without fortune, or have a chronic illness), then she or he must be compensated and society must provide them opportunities equal to the other members of society (Anderson 2004). And given that the political community fulfils its obligation to provide equal opportunities, it depends on the individual if she or he wants to live with the opportunity or not.

According to the other (related to the previous) concept of just distribution, the aim is to provide every member of the political community with *real freedom* to pursue their own idea of the good life (Vanderbourgt – Van Parijs 2005/2007). On the one hand, the state must

secure the formal freedom to safety and to own oneself to everyone. On the other hand, the state must guarantee that there are no barriers to the lack of external or internal resources before individuals.

Contrary to the previous approach, ensuring the just distribution is not the task of the stock market or the family, but the political community. Consequently, a political community does not just correct or mend the actual distribution, but it has a *decisive* role in defining it. As we saw, the patterns of resources acquired according to the justice in transfer in the Nozickian sense can be very different. Often (what is more, almost always), they differ from the equality required by the conceptions of equal opportunity or real freedom. Thus, it is the duty of the political community to secure and sustain the existence of equal opportunities and real freedoms. In other words, the state has to provide not just formal and political rights, but economic ones (for instance the right to UBI) as well.

From this perspective, in the case of utilizing natural and social resources, *every individual's claim* for the opportunity of the good life has priority over the interests of the private sphere. In this sense, providing equal opportunities and real freedom is more important than the effectiveness of resource use. Of course, this does not mean that we should eliminate the institution of private ownership. It means that private ownership has a secondary role compared to justice in distribution.

3.

The front lines are clear. If you think that the interests of the private sphere and justice in transfer go ahead of the interests of the political community and the just distribution of resources, you must reject the concept of UBI. If the opposite is true, you can sympathize with the idea of UBI.

II. 'The individual's duty to be economically self-supporting' *versus* 'the duty of the political community.'

1. It is the basic conviction of many that if someone is in a bad situation, then the individual herself or himself *is mainly responsible* for this. She or he did not develop her or his human capital, missed participation in education, did not internalize the work ethic of the majority of society, did not keep discipline at work, was not flexible enough with the requirements of the labour market and the list goes on. As Christopher Jencks writes: '[f]ew victims are completely innocent' (Jencks 1992, 88).

Thomas Malthus represents the same point in his famous classical work about population, from which we quote a longer paragraph below:

> When the wages of labour are hardly sufficient to maintain two children, a man marries and has five or six; he of course finds himself miserably distressed. He accuses the insufficiency of the price of labour to maintain a family. He accuses his parish for their tardy and sparing fulfilment of their obligation to assist him. He accuses the avarice of the rich, who suffer him to want what they can so well spare. He accuses the partial and unjust institutions of society, which have awarded him an inadequate share of the produce of the earth. He accuses perhaps the dispensations of providence, which have assigned him a place in society so beset with unavoidable distress and dependence. In searching for objects of

> accusation, he never adverts to the quarter from which his misfortunes originate. The last person that he would think of accusing is himself, on whom in fact the principal blame lies, except so far as he has been deceived by the higher classes of society (Malthus 1798/1985, 135).

This is quite simple. Every adult has the moral responsibility to obtain the resources needed for her or his livelihood and not to expect others to do it for them. Of course, there are exceptions. Nobody expects someone who is permanently ill, or had a serious accident to look after herself or himself. But if there are no exculpatory circumstances, then it is the individual's responsibility to take care of her- or himself.

From this perspective, it is a right and just social practice that the more someone fulfils the expectation of economic self-support, the more she or he does well on the stock and/or labour market, and the higher social prestige they are entitled to. And the opposite applies as well: it is a right and just social practice that those who do not fulfil the duty of self-support and cannot find paid employment or need social support have lower social prestige.

We should not misunderstand. It is not 'living from subsidies' which results in low social status. Failing the norm of economical self-support through her or his *own fault* causes society to attach lower value to the given individual. As Chack-Kie Wong argues: 'the perception that the possession of certain personal attributes, e.g. the inability to compete or the inability to pay, by the beneficiaries seems to constitute the basis of the hierarchical categorization of social status' (Wong 1998, 128). So, the low social status of those who live on social support does not come from unfortunate circumstances, but rather from their *inner qualities*. This is well-shown in the fact that those who need benefits because of real external circumstances (for instance because of an accident or illness) do not have to face negative judgement; they do not lose (or at least just partly) their social prestige. Thus, all this confirms that social benefit to those who violate the norm of economic self-support can only be charity, which is the sign of compassion on the part of state institutions.

Accordingly, a social policy is right if it motivates people to be economically self-supporting, thus, social benefit must be low, short in duration and it must be hard to get. All this is not about insensitivity and lack of empathy. The easily attained, lavish and long-term benefits – it is easy to see – form addiction in the beneficiaries and this addiction should be avoided. It is not good to any social group if its livelihood depends exclusively (maybe throughout several generations) on social benefits.

In other words, the lavish, easily attained and long-term benefits are 'perverse incentives' (Arneson 1997, 335); spur (even if unconsciously) the beneficiaries to rely on these subsidies and to not fulfil the norm of economical self-support. As Jon Elster writes: '[a] reform that creates a security net under the competitive market will also lead to *more* people needing the net, by reducing the incentive to survive without it' (Elster 1986, 711, italic in the original). Not to talk about the outrageous injustice that to finance these social benefits is the task of those who fulfil the norm of economic self-support.

2.

Despite the fact that the above-mentioned view is unquestionable to many, there is another way to think about the issue. Accordingly, if an individual cannot find paid employment and cannot fulfil the requirements of economic self-support, then (often) it is not she or he who has responsibility, but rather the current social and economic environment. It is the failure of the political community if the community does not eliminate this unfortunate environment. Thus, welfare benefits from the state are not charity but constitute the *duty* of the political community. Those who emphasize the charity perspective of the state prove to be

insensitive, or even ignorant about the fact that living in poverty is like being trapped, which shows quite a different picture than the above-mentioned argument would allow for.

People who live in extreme poverty have to fight several drawbacks. Typically, they get the worst job offers, which results in questionable contracts, irresponsible employers and uncertain payments. Their fear of losing their jobs contributes to this, and if that happens, they have to go through several lengthy, sometimes humiliating bureaucratic procedures in order to be entitled for unemployment benefits. Thus, the benefits of being in employment are uncertain, and so, unemployment benefit or other social benefits mean much greater security (Anderson 2004).

We also have to take into consideration the fact that a part of the negative circumstances is *psychological*, such as bad habits acquired during childhood, learned helplessness or decreasing cognitive capacities (Todaro – Smith 2015). For instance, because of daily financial problems, people living in extreme poverty have lower cognitive capacities to do anything else than thinking about financial problems (Mani et al. 2013). All these facts taken together show a picture where, in contrast to the previous approach, people living in poor circumstances are responsible for neither their external circumstances, nor their internal attributions.

The described factors are interrelated, and they can cause a downward spiral. For instance, if someone lives in an unhealthy environment and acquired a bad pattern of behaviour as a child, then they will not be productive and will hardly find a job. And, even if they do, they will be less likely to keep it. And if they lose their job, this will lead to lower self-esteem and even worse financial problems. The situation is the following: the chance that someone is able to walk out of their bad situation depends on internal and external factors, which fall *outside the person's control*. As a result, it is the duty of the political community to compensate the effects of the poverty trap and to do everything to make sure that these people have a real chance in life.

And there is something else to consider. The kind of welfare policy which is ungenerous with welfare benefits has a completely different effect on people in moderately bad situations than those in the worst one. A low-level welfare benefit can motivate people in moderately bad situations to be economically self-supporting. It can bridge the gap between two jobs and can supplement low wages. But for people living in the worst situation, with hardly any chance to find a job, and who have not had a job for a long time, low and short-term welfare benefits can have catastrophic results (starvation, being forced into crime etc.).

In other words, the ungenerous welfare benefits fail to help exactly those who are in the worst-off situations. Thus, it seems reasonable to give generous welfare benefits to those who are just in a 'moderately bad' situations, *horribile dictu* also to those, who are not in need at all, than the opposite, i.e. to leave those in the lurch, who are in the greatest need for help.

3.

The front lines are clear. If you think that it is the individual's responsibility to achieve her or his economic self-sufficiency and she or he has the responsibility for failing this norm, then you will almost certainly not sympathize with the idea of UBI. But if you think that the individuals' bad economic situation is the result of factors outside of her or his control, and these factors must be compensated by the political community, then you can view UBI as one of the solutions.

III. 'The principle of need' *versus* 'the principle of universality'

1.

According to many, the most important principle of distributing welfare benefits is the *principle of need*, which is one of our most basic moral convictions. Let us see the following example: if an old woman or man cannot cross the street alone, then she or he needs help and we all feel our duty to support them. But when someone is capable of doing it alone, help is unnecessary, and it is sometimes even harmful or violates human dignity to interfere.

In fact, the principle of need is the conjunction of two statements. The first one is that only those in need are entitled to get welfare benefits. Being chronically ill, having had a serious accident, losing someone's job beyond her/his own fault, raising children, caring for a family member etc. are all situations in which it can be expected that the political community will support the person in the form of welfare benefits. The second one is that if there is plenty to bite on for someone and they are not in need, then they are not entitled to any help, i.e. welfare benefits.

In other words, those who are in need must be supported because this is solidary and just, and conversely, helping those who are better-off is unnecessary and unjust, and it is equal to wasting common resources without rhyme or reason. All this is so plain and self-evident that it is not worth explaining it any further.

2.

Despite the fact that the principle of need is indeed a deep-seated moral principle, we do not necessarily have to commit ourselves to it without any further considerations. We can think the following: the principle of welfare benefits is not based on the need but the *principle of universality*. A welfare benefit must be independent of whether the person is in need or not.

You can argue in favour of universal benefits in at least two ways. Firstly, you can argue on a *consequentialist* basis. According to this, the results of universal benefits are better than the results of benefits based on need. Universal benefits – in contrast to needs-based benefits – do not stigmatize (because it is for those who are worst-off and for those who are better-off as well), it is certain that nobody is left out of the support (since everybody gets it); it provides security (because the transfer does not depend on the decision of an authority), or incur fewer administrative costs (because you do not need an apparatus to establish who is in need).

The second argument is more important however. According to this, everyone has the right to receive universal benefits *independently* of their needs, because everyone has an equal right to have a share from the resources of the Earth. According to this concept introduced by Thomas Paine (Paine 1769/2010) and utopian socialists, e.g. Thomas Spence (Spence 1791/2004) and Charles Fourier (Fourier 1836/1967), all the external resources of production are originally natural resources which were without owners. As a result, the just distribution of natural resources would occur if everyone received an equal share of these resources.

Obviously, the argument does not work in its original form because redistribution of natural resources would face many difficulties. One of the difficulties is that we cannot distribute these resources like we do a cake. All this would be not only ineffective, but virtually impossible as well, because of the special attributes of certain natural resources (for instance common pool resources or genetical sets). Another difficulty is the problem of the value added. It is hard to see how we could make a difference between resources in their natural state from those which already bear somebody's work on themselves, or are the result

of cooperation among several people and thus have higher value. A simple example is when the value of the cultivated land is not equal to that of the uncultivated property.

However, we can keep the original spirit of the argument. We cannot distribute natural resources in themselves, but we can distribute the *profit* of natural resources in the form of some kind of perpetuity. According to this, those who currently benefit from the natural resources of the Earth have to pay some kind of rent to those who are also the *rightful owners* of resources, but right now they are not beneficial owners.

This rent or perpetuity is embodied by the idea of UBI. Namely, UBI according to the principle of equal share of resources is a universal right of everyone, independently of the financial situation of the individual. Thus, UBI must be given not because somebody needs it, but because according to the principle of equal share, it is due to everyone.

3.

The front lines are clear. If you think that we have to provide help only to those who are in need, and when somebody is not in need then help is unjust and wasteful, then certainly you do not sympathize with the idea of UBI. But if you do not think about universal benefits as self-contradictory ideas in themselves, then you can appreciate the concept of UBI.

IV. 'Principle of reciprocity' *versus* 'epistemic closure of the state'

1.

Similarly to the principle of need, many have the following basic moral conviction: 'if you get something, then you have to give something'. This principle when applied means that the welfare benefits provided by the state (for instance unemployment benefit), or certain services (for instance healthcare) require some kind of compensation by those wo benefit from them. We call this principle the *principle of reciprocity*. Allen Buchanan defines this principle as the following:

> (1) Justice is a matter of desert
> (2) Only those who contribute deserve a share of the cooperative surplus.
> Therefore,
> (3) Only contributors have a right to a share in social resources.
> (Buchanan 1990, 244)

Or, look at the following argument by John Rawls (Rawls 1988): those who do not work, but would be able to have unlimited free time. Now, free time belongs to the group of economic and social advantages. In other words, those who do not work but could do just prefer free time to income-making activities. It is a mistake to regard them as being in need and it is unjust to give them financial benefits.

Those who are supported by the political community but refuse to contribute to the common good violate the principle of reciprocity. To put it simply, 'it is unfair for able bodied people to live off the labor of others' (Elster 1986, 713).

Moreover, contribution to the common good is our duty because we, as children, benefit from several common goods (for instance education), which were produced by elder members of society. Thus, if we reach adulthood, we have to return what we received. That is,

solidarity means mutuality. To put it strongly, universal benefits are ‘a recipe for exploitation of the industrious by the lazy’ (Elster 1986, 713). In the words of John Rawls, ‘do not feed the malibuan surfers’ (Rawls 1988, 257). Or, to quote Hawaiian Senator Wadsworth ‘[t]here must be no parasites in paradise’ (quoted by Moynihan 1973, 32-34). The Dude from *The Big Lebowski* should not bowl as he wishes.

From the perspective of state institutions, the principle of reciprocity means work-requirement. The individual should make her- or himself available on the labour market. The ‘how’ of this compensation differs country to country. In some places you cannot refuse the acceptable job offers and have to show evidence of job searching. In other places, you have to do some kind of socially useful work, and may take part in some kind of obligatory training. And if someone does not meet the norm of reciprocity, the community withdraws its support rightly. There are countries where continually rejecting job opportunities offered by the employment office means you may not receive unemployment benefit.

2.

Despite the fact that the principle of reciprocity is a basic moral intuition of many, we have to see that it is *almost impossible* to apply the principle in an unbiased and correct way. We need an especially complex investigation to decide whether someone is really responsible for being uneducated and not being able to sustain themselves on the labour market. Only an especially complex investigation carried out case by case can reveal how great *the personal cost of conformity* is (Arneson 1997).

Let us think about it. Genetical and social inheritance is totally out of someone’s control. She or he cannot be held responsible for these. It is also hard to argue that some people have greater real freedom to achieve their life-goals than others. Even if there is something like free will in the metaphysical sense, that is – in the words of Helen Steward – a person is able to make a fresh start, people are very different in the type of barriers when it comes to fulfilling social expectations. Thus, behind the fulfilment of the norm of reciprocity (or any other norm required by the majority of society) are performances which differ from person to person. The amount of the personal cost of conformity obviously depends both on external circumstances (for instance the neighbourhood you are born into) and on psychological attributes (for instance what kind of decision-making and decision-following abilities you learn from your environment as a child).

In other words, we can rightly talk about someone’s merit if *we know* what cards were dealt to him by fate. But these cards are exactly those which are beyond the reach of the investigation of the state. What is easy for someone can be a hard fight for others. While studying and progress in school go without any serious hardship for some, for others it can be a huge struggle. While some people see effective money management strategies as children (avoiding overspending, saving for unexpected events etc.), others grow up among bad patterns (overspending, preferring immediate pleasure to saving up etc.). It is easy to see that for the latter person, it is much harder to make good financial decisions in her or his adulthood.

Now (and that is the point) extremely little information is available to the authorities to judge the personal costs of conformity *trustworthily* in individual cases. In other words, the state is *epistemically closed out* of stating something like this rightly: ‘X.Y. person *is responsible* for her or his worst-off situation’, or ‘X.Y. person *does not deserve* support’. These kinds of statements can hardly or not at all be justified. Often even the closest relatives and friends cannot see the situation clearly. We have good reason to be *agnostic* when we assess our fellow men’s merit. As a result, the system of welfare benefits which secures the resources to meet basic needs for everyone is much more than the simple means-testing

version of the welfare system. To summarize, the support system which is based on human dignity and not desert is more right than any other version.

3.

The front lines are clear. If you think that a benefit is deserved if someone gives something back to community in return, then it is unlikely that you are an enthusiast about UBI. However, if you think that the state cannot judge trustworthily either what kind of cards were dealt by fate, or what the cost of doing something for the community is for an individual, and that is why you think we should be agnostic, then you can sympathize with the idea of UBI.

V. 'Participation in the labour market' *versus* 'Being left out of the labour market'

1.

Many people think that because of the fact that you can get income to secure your livelihood on the labour-market (and stock market), the right social policy is to set the aim of *full* (or at least as high as possible) *employment rate*. The following economic policy is to create job opportunities and accelerate economic growth in order to create job opportunities. The state has the task of ensuring the appropriate functioning of the labour-market and representing both the employers' and employees' interests. These are legal constraints about minimum or maximum wages, work environment and working hours.

Having a paid job is a social prestige and it defines the individual's identity. If we meet someone, one of our first questions will almost certainly be about the other's work; we place them on our 'social map' based on their relationship with the labour market. For instance, Wong argues that

> [t]he non-employed such as the retired and housewives are generally regarded as less socially prestigious than the employed. In other words, their relation to the market system judges them (Wong 1998, 126).

Moreover, a paid job is the means to social integration. It does not only provide opportunities to make a living, but to personal development; to improve social relationships, and to contribute to the common good and earn a social status as well. Thus, the highest possible employment rate is in the interest of all political communities.

In this perspective, the value of work is defined by the market value thereof. A job is not valuable because the worker herself or himself thinks so. A job is valuable because it has value for someone else. If a job has value for someone else, then this someone else will be willing to pay for it. And the higher the amount the other person is willing to pay, the higher the value of the job.

2.

Your opinion may be different. You can think – in opposition to the idea of full employment rate – that the real task of the state is to give everyone the opportunity to *be left out of the labour market*.

Why? Because we have to look at paid job opportunities as a *scare resource*. Why? Either because the prediction – though many argue against this – about the decrease of demand for human labour force due to technological progress will come true, or, due to technological progress, the labour market is in transition, and there is higher demand for

certain types of jobs and lower demand for others. Or – and we think this is what is most important – because infinite economic development and job creation have ecological limits.

You should see that clinging to full employment and job creation is not always effective, it easily backfires. It is easy to imagine that to create and sustain a low value-added workplace costs significantly more than paying some kind of universal benefit. If state institutions have to sustain workplaces where individuals who are not able to get a job themselves on the labour market (because of being unmotivated or incompetent) are employed, then it does not promise too much profitability. Moreover, long-term negative prejudice can be formed against the moral of these workers and against the state of affairs in the public sector in general (Vanderbourght – Van Parijs 2005/2007).

Instead of clinging to full employment and job creation, we should start from the following conception: paid jobs are only scantly available and not everyone can partake in them. Now, if this is true, then the state has two tasks. Firstly, the state has to provide the opportunity to be left out of the labour market and the real option not to take a paid job (Offe 1992). Secondly, the state has to distribute the currently available paid job opportunities, so that more people can take part in the labour market. That is, state regulation has to support shorter working hours and part-time jobs.

We should not misunderstand. This conception is not about splitting the political community into two; people in the labour market and people outside of the labour market. Rather, this concept is about to flexibly change between different constructions of paid and unpaid activities during a lifetime. For instance, spending a few years in a paid job, after which spending a few years studying or retraining, then a few years in a part-time job due to having children etc.

It strongly belongs to this conception that the real value of work is not the same as the market value thereof. The value of work is not defined by how much others are willing to pay for it. Unpaid work (childcare, creating art, taking part in civil society etc.) has *the same* social status as paid activities. With all this, political community actually admits that the judgement of the market is not always right. The fact of what kind of activity the market values depends on several contingent factors (culture, technology, fashion, political situation etc.). Think about for example, how little nurses in hospitals earn, and how much those people earn who make YouTube videos about putting mobile phones in a blender or unwrapping Kinder-eggs and who also hit several millions (!) of views. So, the role of universal benefit is to complete or ensure the livelihood of those who perform activities valued too lowly or not at all by the labour market.

It also follows from this conception that the acceptable job offers are not only defined by the state, the judgement about job offers depends on the individuals as well. If there is UBI in a political community, then nobody is forced to accept any job in order to make a living. Everyone has a bargaining position against employers. Everyone can decide her- or himself what kind of work she or he wants to do, because staying out of the labour market is a real option.

3.

The front lines are clear. If you think that it is important to perform well on the labour market and to ensure a full employment rate, then you cannot sympathize with the idea of UBI, because UBI makes it an option to stay out of the labour market. But, if you think that not everyone can get a paid job and the unpaid job made outside of the labour market is as valuable as paid work, then you can support UBI wholeheartedly.

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