

Basic income, social justice and freedom

Report from a symposium on themes from the work of Philippe Van Parijs

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On 11 March 2009, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation hosted a symposium jointly organised with the University of York's School of Politics, Economics and Philosophy. The aim of the symposium was to discuss the work of the eminent political philosopher Philippe Van Parijs and, in particular, Van Parijs' argument for the introduction of a basic income: that is, an income unconditionally paid to all without work requirement or means test. This paper summarises the content of the symposium.

Key points

- Why are means-unconditionality and work-unconditionality important?
- Is basic income preferable to basic capital?
- What are the egalitarian and libertarian arguments in favour of basic income and basic capital?
- How does current government policy fail to address time and income poverty?
- How can basic income alleviate time and income poverty?
- Is basic income paternalistic?
- Is Van Parijs' approach to disability adequate?

Introduction

Over the past three decades British governments have moved away from the philosophy of universalism which once underpinned the welfare state. Targeting and selection are fast becoming the norm while benefits and services guaranteed to all as a matter of right are becoming the exception. The welfare-reform bill currently going through parliament – which, among other things, insists that mentally ill people and single parents with children as young as three must be available for work before becoming eligible for benefits – is indicative of this trend.

Similar trends can be found in other countries, most notably in the US. For example, in 1996 Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. This act narrowed the eligibility criteria for various welfare programmes to the very needy, limited the receipt of benefits to five years, and insisted that all recipients undertake work or work training.

This move away from universalism is resisted by many on the left. It is resisted particularly fiercely by the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) – a network of activists and intellectuals committed to the introduction of a basic income, that is an income unconditionally paid to all, at the highest sustainable level, on an individual basis, without work requirement or means test.

Basic income is not a new idea. The first technical article on the subject was published in 1967 by the Nobel Prize-winning economist James Tobin (Tobin *et al.*, 1967), and in 1972 George McGovern endorsed the idea (which was then referred to as a ‘demogrant’) in his presidential campaign. Basic income has been gaining political ground in Europe since the late 1970s and now features prominently in the manifestos of several political parties. The state of Alaska adopted a basic income scheme in

1999, distributing to all its residents an equal share of a portion of its oil revenues (Van Parijs, 2003).

According to its proponents, basic income is the most effective way of reconciling capitalism and social justice. According to Philippe Van Parijs, intellectual figurehead of BIEN, it provides each person with ‘real freedom’, that is, not only the right but also the means to pursue one’s conception of the good life (Van Parijs, 1997 and 2005). I will return to freedom-based, and also equality-based, arguments for basic income in the next section of this article.

In most versions of the proposal, a basic income is ‘basic’ in the sense that it provides ‘something on which a person can safely count, a material foundation on which a life can firmly rest’ (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 35). It is not necessarily large enough to satisfy basic needs. And, to the degree that it does not, proponents do not advocate basic income as a replacement for all existing conditional transfers. They think, for example, that basic income should exist alongside disability compensation (Van Parijs, 2003, pp. 8–9). But they also believe that many existing benefits could be abolished, or substantially reduced, at least once a basic income is implemented at a sufficiently high level. This consideration goes some distance in easing concerns regarding the cost of funding a basic income (Van Parijs, 2003, pp. 22–23).

Why is means-unconditionality important? Van Parijs provides three reasons (Van Parijs, 2005, pp. 8–10). First, in the absence of a means test it is highly likely that take-up of benefits will be significantly higher. ‘Fewer among the poor will fail to be informed about their entitlements and to avail themselves of the benefits they have a right to’ (Van Parijs, 2005, p. ⁹). Second, in the absence of a means test there will be none of the social stigma usually associated with the

receipt of benefits. And third, without means testing two central aspects of the unemployment trap can be avoided. One aspect of the unemployment trap is generated by the fact that, under existing means tested schemes, welfare payments are interrupted when the recipient enters employment. Sacrificing safe and regular benefits for the sake of a job which may prove to be untenable is often regarded by the unemployed as a dangerous move. Since basic income is not interrupted when entering employment, doing so does not entail the same risk as it does under existing schemes.

The second aspect of the unemployment trap is generated by the fact that, under the present system, one may well be better off on benefits than in low-paid employment. There is thus little incentive to take up work. However, because the level of basic income remains constant whether one works or not, one is bound to be better off employed than unemployed.

But, according to Van Parijs, means-unconditionality is not enough. In the absence of work-unconditionality it fosters the expansion of low-paid, degrading and exploitative jobs. Work-unconditionality obstructs this expansion. It provides the poor with the means to be discriminating; to accept those jobs which act as stepping stones to greater opportunities, and to reject those which lead only to dead ends (Van Parijs, 2005, pp. 12–13).

Having provided a brief introduction to basic income, I turn now to the 11 March symposium. The next section outlines Stuart White's discussion of the respective egalitarian and libertarian merits of basic income and basic capital; section three (*Time and income poverty*) summarises Tania Burchardt's research on basic income and time and income poverty; and section four (*Capability, real freedom and paternalism*) looks at Mozaffar Qizilbash's analysis of real freedom, paternalism and the 'capability approach'. In the final section I consider the objection that basic income is politically unfeasible.

Basic income versus basic capital

Basic income is one way of granting to individuals what has become known as a 'citizen's endowment', that is an endowment of resources to which all citizens are entitled without test of means or work requirement. A citizen's endowment can also be provided in a different way, namely in the form of basic capital. Whereas basic income is usually understood as a periodic and non-mortgageable cash payment, basic capital takes the form of a one-off lump sum payment made to individuals in early adulthood.

This section outlines Stuart White's discussion of the respective merits and demerits of providing a citizen's endowment in the form of a basic income and in the form of basic capital. The discussion begins by identifying an egalitarian, or equality-based, argument for a citizen's endowment and considering whether this argument lends greater support to basic income or basic capital. Analogous consideration is then given to a libertarian, or liberty-based, argument. The discussion concludes by advocating a hybrid form of citizen's endowment comprised of elements of both basic income and basic capital.

Let us start, then, with the egalitarian argument in favour of a citizen's endowment. White presents the argument as follows. It is possible to identify a set of resources which we may regard as inherited external assets (IEAs). These assets include natural resources and non-natural resources produced by previous generations. Each individual has a presumptive right to an equal share of the (full market value of these) IEAs. Demonstrating the long history of this argument White quotes the Enlightenment thinker Thomas Paine (1795) who claimed that

... the earth, in its natural uncultivated state was, and ever would have continued to be, the *common property of the human race* ... the system of landed property ... has absorbed the property of all those whom it dispossessed, without providing, as ought to have been done, an indemnification for that loss.

Satisfaction of the right to an equal share of IEAs is ensured by taxing those currently in possession of IEAs at the full market value of their holdings and distributing the proceeds equally among all citizens.¹

Before considering whether this egalitarian argument lends greater support to basic income or to basic capital, it is worth considering several general points which can be made about the argument. White notes that, significantly, the egalitarian argument sidesteps what has become known as the 'exploitation objection' to citizen's income. The exploitation objection says that citizen's income is unfair because, in distributing resources unconditionally among citizens, it allows the idle to live off the hard work of the industrious. But the egalitarian argument for citizen's income does not advocate the distribution of the product of people's labour, but rather the distribution of resources which exist *prior to* and *independent of* anyone's labour contribution.

There are, however, certain ambiguities in the argument. In particular, should IEAs be used to compensate those with handicaps or low levels of internal assets such as marketable talents? Do such people have a prior claim to the value of IEAs? If the answers to these questions are

affirmative there will clearly be less to distribute in the form of an unconditional citizen's income.

Let us move to the question of whether the egalitarian argument for a citizen's endowment lends greater support to basic income or basic capital. One reason for thinking that egalitarians should prefer basic capital is captured by what White calls the 'unequal longevity objection' to basic income. This objection points out that distributing IEAs in the form of a basic income will result in granting a higher citizen's income to those who live longer. This seems patently unfair to those who are arbitrarily burdened with a shorter life than others. If the citizen's income is distributed in the form of a one-off lump sum capital grant, on the other hand, then everyone receives the same amount irrespective of how long they live.

White acknowledges, however, that this objection can be countered. As mentioned above, it is open to question whether IEAs should be used to compensate those who suffer from various handicaps or fewer internal assets than others. If we think that they should be used to provide such compensation then they can be used to compensate those who are expected to live shorter lives than others.

A problem remains with regard to those who die young unexpectedly. If early death is not anticipated then it cannot be compensated for. But, as White notes, it is not clear that this consideration condemns basic income any more than it condemns basic capital. If an individual's life is cut short unexpectedly then they will not be able to make full use of their capital before dying. White concludes that if considerations of unequal longevity provide a victory to basic capital over basic income, the victory is marginal.

White then moves on to show that egalitarian considerations can be invoked to provide basic income with a substantial victory over basic capital. These egalitarian considerations concern inter-generational equity and prompt a number of objections to basic capital. Principal

among these objections is the 'variable fund objection'. This objection points out that, over time, the value of IEAs may increase. Under a basic income scheme, the level of the income could be raised to reflect this increase in value. Under a basic capital scheme, by contrast, those who have already received their one-off lump sum payment will not benefit from the increase in value while later generations will. Considerable inter-generational inequities may thus emerge under a basic capital scheme, but not under a basic income scheme.

The arguments considered so far all invoke an interpretation of equality known in the philosophical literature as 'luck-egalitarianism', namely a theory of justice which aims to eliminate the influence of bad brute luck (bad luck which individuals can do nothing to avoid) on the distribution of certain goods. But some egalitarians claim that equality is misrepresented when it is construed as a purely distributive concept. They argue that what really matters is not eliminating the influence of bad brute luck on distributive shares but rather ending oppression and establishing relationships based on equal status (Anderson, 1999).

According to White this conception of equality favours the adoption of basic income over basic capital. Why? Because basic income would do a better job of preventing the emergence of relationships of domination. This argument is elucidated in the discussion of 'the argument from non-domination' below.

Let us move now from the egalitarian argument for a citizen's endowment to the libertarian argument for a citizen's endowment. The libertarian argument runs as follows. Each person has a primary interest in freedom. In order to qualify as just, society must ensure that each person's interest in freedom is satisfied. If each person's interest in freedom is to be satisfied it is necessary to provide them with a sufficiently large unconditional resource grant. In order to qualify as just, society must provide all citizens with a sufficiently large unconditional grant.

White identifies three interpretations of this argument, each of which interprets freedom in a different way. According to ‘the argument from real freedom’ a person is free when they have the right and the means to do whatever they might want to do. ‘The argument from non-domination’, by contrast, identifies the free person as someone who is not subject to the arbitrary interference of another. And finally, ‘the argument from autonomy’ says that a person is free when they possess the capacity and opportunity to approach their life creatively, determining their life-shaping projects ambitiously on the basis of informed, independent reflection.

Let us consider each of these interpretations in turn and determine whether they favour basic income or basic capital. According to White, the argument from real freedom establishes a presumption in favour of basic capital. This is because basic capital can be converted into basic income and therefore provide all of the benefits of the latter whereas basic income is non-mortgageable and therefore cannot be converted into basic capital.

However, Van Parijs has managed to use the argument from real freedom to motivate support for basic income. He has done this by combining that argument with a paternalistic argument. This latter argument says that ‘a mildly paternalistic concern for people’s real freedom *throughout their lives*, not just “at the start”, makes it sensible to hand out the basic income in the form of a (non-mortgageable) regular stream’ (Van Parijs, 1997, pp. 47–48).

Hardline liberals may object that paternalism should be eschewed at all cost, but White dismisses such objections as dogmatic and erroneous. White points out that many of us happily accept laws which restrict our freedoms in certain ways in order to protect our welfare – laws which compel us to wear a seatbelt for example – and that, similarly, we would be justified in accepting laws which place restrictions on the ways in which we use our citizen’s endowment. However, White doubts

that we would necessarily accept the restrictions advocated by Van Parijs – namely, restrictions which would dole out our citizen’s endowment in the form of a periodic income. Rather, we may opt for a basic capital grant with certain restrictions on use, or perhaps some kind of hybrid of basic capital and basic income.

What about the argument from non-domination? Recall that this argument says that a person is free when they are not subject to arbitrary interference by another. According to White this argument favours the adoption of basic income over basic capital. Why? Because basic capital is more easily lost than a basic income, and if an individual loses their basic capital they may become vulnerable to domination. Thus, if we wish to endow individuals with, say, the opportunity to turn down low-paid and exploitative jobs, and the independence to leave abusive or oppressive households, it seems that we should opt for basic income.

White notes that advocates of basic capital may respond by pointing out that such concerns could be mitigated by the imposition of restrictions on use of basic capital which prevent individuals from investing it in imprudent ventures. But White points out that such restrictions could not entirely remove the risk of loss. Many businesses are thwarted, for example, not by imprudence, but rather by the arbitrariness of market forces.

Finally, let us move to the argument from autonomy. This argument, White suggests, works in favour of basic capital. This is because our overall capacity for autonomy is heavily influenced by the degree to which we can act creatively and ambitiously in early adulthood. White quotes Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott:

Our present [economic] arrangements impose an unnecessary moral dilemma: just at the moment we expect young adults to take

responsible life-shaping decisions, we do not afford them the resources that they need to take a responsible long-term perspective. Forced to put bread on the table ... almost all young adults are forced into short-term thinking ...

(Ackerman and Alstott, 1999)

The small periodic payments of basic income would not be sufficient to ameliorate such short-term thinking. What are required are sizeable endowments of capital to use constructively in early life-shaping investments.

We have seen that both egalitarian and libertarian concerns can lead us to basic income on certain grounds and to basic capital on others. So where does this leave us? White concludes by suggesting that the various arguments for a form of citizen's endowment can be distilled into two broad concerns. Firstly, we are concerned with eradicating exploitation and domination from the marketplace, the household and elsewhere; secondly, we are concerned with providing opportunities for young people. As basic income seems to better facilitate the first goal, while basic capital better facilitates the second, and seeing as it would surely be arbitrary to assign greater importance to one goal than the other, we should aim to combine basic income and basic capital.

Time and income poverty

This section outlines Tania Burchardt's discussion of:

- substantive freedom to achieve one's 'agency goals';
- the constraints placed on such freedom by time and income poverty;
- how current government policy fails to address such constraints; and
- how basic income may aid in the removal of such constraints.

The term 'agency goals' is used to denote our aims in life – the things which we have identified as valuable and wish to achieve, pursue or obtain. Agency goals are contrasted with well-being which, in the terminology of the philosopher and economist Amartya Sen, should be seen in terms of 'a set of interrelated "functionings", consisting of beings and doings'. These functionings can range from being in good health and being adequately nourished to achieving happiness and self-respect (Sen, 1992). Importantly, well-being or functioning is constituted by things that are good for us but which we may, as individuals, not actually desire, while agency goals are comprised of those things that we do actually desire and value.

Might basic income be able to provide individuals with the substantive freedom to achieve their agency goals? In order to answer that question Burchardt deems it important to consider the constraints that restrict access to, and create inequalities in, substantive freedom.

The degree to which substantive freedom is enjoyed by different people is influenced by a number of factors. It is influenced, for example,

by people's characteristics, the economic and political context, the financial and non-financial resources people can draw upon, and the various commitments people have. Burchardt focuses on two constraints in particular, namely, those imposed by time and income poverty. The majority of this section explains Burchardt's conceptual framework for examining time and income constraints.

In Burchardt's model we begin by considering the environment in which people are located – defined by the political infrastructure, the economy, public policy, and cultural and social norms – and which is jointly experienced by all. Within this environment people have different sets of resources and different sets of responsibilities. These sets, when combined, determine a range of possible time allocations in which to look after oneself, undertake paid work, and undertake unpaid work. Within the model it is possible to identify certain time allocations which do not allow individuals to meet their basic responsibilities. These allocations are regarded as unfeasible alternatives, and lie outside what Burchardt calls our 'time and income capability', that is, the range of feasible allocations and the disposable income and free time which these generate.

Let us examine the details of this model more closely. The set of resources available to any particular person includes time, various forms of capital – human, financial and social – and entitlements to social security and public services. The set of responsibilities borne by each person inevitably includes a certain amount of personal care (we must all eat, sleep and so on), and will often include caring for dependents (principally children, and elderly or disabled relatives).

Given this combination of resources and responsibilities, and given the broader context of the economy and political infrastructure, each individual can decide how to meet their responsibilities. These responsibilities may be met by direct unpaid labour – looking after one’s own children for example – or they may be met indirectly by earning income and using that income to pay someone else to meet one’s responsibilities – hiring a childminder, for example. Some responsibilities, though, are inherently inalienable, and may only be met directly. As Burchardt puts it, you cannot hire someone else to sleep for you.

The resources at any given person’s disposal determine the range of possible time allocations available to that person, given his or her responsibilities. Each allocation gives rise to a disposable income, that is, the net income left over after paying for the goods and services necessary to meet one’s responsibilities. One may or may not have a certain amount of free time left over once all responsibilities have been met. Burchardt refers to the range of possible combinations of disposable income and free time which are consistent with meeting one’s responsibilities as a ‘capability set’.

The particular allocation which any individual selects from their capability set will be influenced by a range of different things. It will be influenced, for example, by value judgements about work and leisure. But to the degree that we are concerned with the substantive freedom available to each individual, we are not particularly interested in which allocation they choose. What we are concerned with is the nature of their capability set – the size of the set, the options it includes, and whether it allows the individual to be free of what Burchardt calls time and income poverty, namely whether it gives them a disposable income above an income poverty threshold and an endowment of free time above a time poverty threshold. If none of the allocations available allow the individual to generate an income sufficient to remain above an income poverty threshold while retaining enough free time to remain above a time

poverty threshold, then we can say for sure that the individual is capability poor.

Burchardt has put her model into operation by drawing on information from the Office of National Statistics, establishing reasonable thresholds for time and income poverty, and estimating minimum time requirements for meeting various responsibilities. Without going into the details of Burchardt’s methodology it is worth noting some of the results of her research (Burchardt, 2008). In particular, it is worth noting that, according to Burchardt’s calculations, roughly half of all single parents living in the UK are time and income poor. That is to say, there is no allocation available which can secure them an income above an income poverty threshold, and time above a very low time poverty threshold (for example, zero hours a week).

This result both condemns the government’s attempt to shoehorn single parents into paid employment, and vindicates basic income. Since taking office in 1997 the Labour government has become increasingly eager to compel single parents to seek paid work and, as noted above, it is presently attempting to pass legislation which will deny benefits to those who do not do so. Such legislation is indicative of the government’s tendency to view paid employment as a panacea for all disadvantage. But, as Burchardt’s research shows, while pushing single parents into paid work may of course bolster their incomes, it can only exacerbate the time poverty which they face.

Burchardt’s work forces us to recognise that inadequate time, in addition to inadequate income, is inimical to the achievement of substantive freedom and can generate disadvantage. And while inadequate income can be addressed via paid labour, paid labour may deepen, or push people into, time poverty. Burchardt’s research vindicates basic income because basic income addresses the problem of income poverty without exacerbating, or creating, time poverty. It does this, of course, by providing an income which is not conditional on performing paid work.

Capability, real freedom and paternalism

This section focuses on Mozaffar Qizilbash's comparative evaluation of Van Parijs' real freedom approach and Sen's capability approach. It begins by considering to what extent each approach may be regarded as paternalistic, and then considers the respective merits of each approach with reference to disability policy.

Sen's capability approach, which was introduced in the previous section, focuses on two concepts: functionings (beings and doings) and capability. Functionings

... can vary from such elementary things as being adequately nourished, being in good health, avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality, etc., to more complex achievements such as being happy, having self-respect, taking part in the life of the community, and so on.

The 'capability to function ... represents the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve'. Capability determines a 'person's freedom to lead one type of life rather than another'. According to Sen it is capability which society should seek to equalise (Sen, 1992, pp. 39–40).

There are various interpretations of the capability approach. First we may distinguish between a 'thin' view and a 'thick' view. The thin view focuses on the advantages of concentrating on capability, as opposed to resources or welfare or some other metric of equality, whereas the thick view focuses on

specific methods of application. We may also distinguish between a narrow and broad interpretation. The former focuses exclusively on functionings, whereas the latter views capability as one concern among many and also grants consideration to other values such as 'process-freedom', that is, autonomy and non-interference.

While the capability approach is ostensibly committed to promoting people's 'freedom to lead one type of life rather than another' it has been criticised for potentially restricting liberty in a paternalistic manner. Recall that, as noted in the previous section, the functionings that individuals are deemed to have reason to value may differ from the things that they actually desire. It has thus been suggested that, in seeking to equalise the distribution of functionings, the capability approach sanctions overriding the actual desires that people have.

Qizilbash observes that on a narrow reading of the capability approach this criticism is surely on target. However, on a broad interpretation considerable importance can be granted to values such as autonomy and non-interference and the overriding of people's desires may thus be proscribed.

Van Parijs' notion of real freedom which, as we have seen, is used to build a case for basic income, seems, on the face of it, to eschew the kind of paternalism possibly motivating the narrow version of the capability approach. Recall that real freedom is possessing the right and the means to do whatever one might want to do. However, as was noted in the section *Basic income versus basic capital*, above, real freedom alone is not enough to justify basic income. As Stuart White observed, a concern

for real freedom actually establishes a presumption in favour of basic capital. In order to motivate support for basic income, Van Parijs combines the argument from real freedom with a 'mild' dose of paternalism.

In addition to motivating support for basic income as opposed to basic capital, paternalism is also invoked to justify mild violations of individual freedom (such as compulsory primary education or vaccination against infectious diseases) where a result of such restrictions is considerably expanded leximin opportunity (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 26).

While interpreting the capability approach in a broad sense may rescue that approach from charges of paternalism, Qizilbash does not identify an analogous rescue strategy for real-freedom.

Qizilbash then moves to consider the respective merits and demerits of the capability approach and real freedom in the context of disability. He begins by noting the way in which disability is used in Sen's work to highlight the shortcomings of resourcist and utilitarian forms of egalitarianism. Resourcist forms of egalitarianism are criticised by Sen on the grounds that 'the conversion of goods to capabilities varies substantively from person to person and the equality of the former may still be far from the equality of the latter' (Sen, 1980, p. 210). The fact that the disabled will often require more goods/resources than the able-bodied in order to achieve certain functionings is indicative of this.

Disability also highlights a number of problems with forms of egalitarianism that aim to equalise utility levels. Sen notes that a disabled person can enjoy levels of utility comparable to those experienced by able-bodied people despite his disability.

This could be because he has a jolly disposition. Or because he has a low aspiration level and his heart leaps up

whenever he sees a rainbow in the sky. Or because he is religious and feels that he will be rewarded in after-life, or cheerfully accepts what he takes to be just penalty for misdeeds in a past incarnation. (Sen, 1980, p. 217)

Thus, focusing exclusively on equalising utility levels seems to have the counter-intuitive implication that the disabled need not always be compensated for their disabilities.

Qizilbash observes that the capability approach has been applied in two ways that attempt to avoid these shortcomings. The first 'indirect' application attempts to 'correct' the inadequacies of the income metric so that it reflects actual capability. A 'direct' application, by contrast, does away with the income metric altogether and focuses instead directly on capability.

Qizilbash then moves on to the way in which disability is addressed by Van Parijs' real freedom approach, namely, via the concept of 'undominated diversity'. Undominated diversity says that:

The distribution of endowments is unjust in a society as long as there are two people such that everyone in the society concerned prefers the whole endowment (both internal and external) of one of them to that of the other. (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 59)

The internal endowment (talents, abilities and so on) of one individual is dominated by the internal endowment of another if and only if every member of society would prefer the latter over the former (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 73).

Compensation is owed to the disabled when, and because, they are dominated.

There are a number of objections to this approach and Qizilbash claims that, in addressing one of them, Van Parijs again invokes paternalism. The objection in question is that a disabled individual, in 'attempting to come to terms with her situation', may adjust her preferences in such a way that renders her undominated and thus ineligible for compensation. Van Parijs responds to this objection by maintaining that, if we are to give the disabled the equal respect they are entitled to, then we must respect such preferences. The charge of paternalism arises, however, because of a proviso Van Parijs adds which says that society must not take people's preferences at face value – rather, society must 'make sure that the preferences are genuine, that they do not rest on delusion, and are consistent with full information and understanding' (Van Parijs, 1997, pp. 77–78).

Qizilbash finishes by claiming that Van Parijs' approach to disability falls foul of Sen's argument that the conversion of resources into capabilities differs considerably from person to person. In particular, it struggles in the face of the importance of environmental factors – such as the presence or absence of lifts and ramps – in determining the rate of conversion. Whereas the capability approach forces us to consider such factors, the real freedom approach seems to focus exclusively on the provision of income. The capability approach therefore pushes disability policy in a more appropriately radical direction. It advocates not case-by-case compensation, but rather a transformation of social space.

Where now?

Are concerns about paternalism and disability enough to write off the idea of a citizen's endowment? It is not obvious that they are, for at least two reasons. Firstly, as was emphasised by Stuart White, paternalism should not be viewed as an absolute evil to be avoided at all costs. Neither should paternalism be viewed as necessarily illiberal. Drawing on work by Gerald Dworkin, White notes that reasonable people will often be willing to accept restrictions on their immediate freedom in order to insure themselves against misjudgments which might cause them profound loss (Dworkin, 1971). And, secondly, the alleged inadequacy of basic income (and, presumably, of basic capital) with regard to disability should not be seen as fatal. Proponents of real freedom view basic income as a necessary means with which to achieve such freedom – they do not view it as sufficient. They acknowledge that other measures must be taken in addition to the introduction of a basic income. Van Parijs, for example, acknowledges that real freedom is enhanced not just by income but, among other things, by access to means of production and access to health care, and he thus accepts that a considerable fraction of a basic income could be paid in kind, rather than in cash (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 31).

A persistent concern with citizen's endowment proposals, and one which was voiced several times at the 11 March symposium, is that they are politically unfeasible. Those who have this concern often point to the fact, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, that actual public policy often seems to be moving in the opposite direction. Universalism is increasingly being shunned while selection and targeting are being embraced. The political climate, it is concluded, is not conducive to proposals for basic income or basic capital, and it will not become conducive any time soon.

A basic income need not be funded by taxation (in Alaska, as was mentioned earlier, it is funded by the state's oil revenues), but, if it were, questions of political feasibility would become all the more pertinent. The introduction of a new 50 per cent tax band in the 2009 UK budget, which applies to just 1.5 per cent of the population, was enough to prompt fears of capital flight. The tax rises required to fund a basic income would surely motivate similar concerns but on a much larger scale.

In response to such concerns, Van Parijs rightly insists that we 'need not take either political feasibility or individual motivation as given'. Rather, we 'can and should inspire attempts to shape institutions in such a way that they... promote the emotional basis of equal concern' (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 231). Solidarity and fraternity should be fostered as much as possible. Margaret Thatcher claimed that 'there is no such thing as society, only individual men and women'. Any government committed to realising social justice must affirm a converse motto, something along the lines of 'no man is an island, entire of itself'. Van Parijs notes that:

One can hardly expect the required dispositions to flourish as a spontaneous expression of universal human nature. They will have to be nurtured, preserved, encouraged, engineered into existence by specific social conditions, specific ways of organizing social life... [T]he specific design of democratic political institutions is important, and so is the empathy-enabling role of the media. But...one most probably needs more, namely various institutions which systematically provide recurrent

opportunities for more-than-superficial personal contacts between people from all categories of the same society. (Van Parijs, 1997, p. 231)

It is also important to bear in mind that no one is demanding the immediate implementation of a basic income scheme. Smaller measures are necessary to take us from here to our destination, and the precise nature of these measures will differ from country to country. A step in the right direction will often be the modification or expansion of existing policies (such as tax credits in the UK), or the introduction of universal child benefit at a high level and non-contributory basic pensions in countries where these do not already exist. Indeed, the latter would amount to age-restricted basic incomes for the young and elderly respectively (Van Parijs, 2003, p. 9).

The Oxford economist Sir Tony Atkinson has suggested that 'in order to secure political support, it may be necessary for the proponents of basic income to compromise – not on the principle of no test of means...but on the unconditional payment'. Atkinson advocates the introduction of what he calls a 'participation income', that is, a basic income conditional on social contribution broadly conceived. In addition to those who perform paid work, a participation income would be granted to the involuntarily unemployed, pensioners, those who provide care for dependents, and those engaged in approved forms of education or training (Atkinson, 1988).

Finally, we should not overlook the uniqueness of the present political conjuncture and the equally unique opportunity it offers to progressives. The neo-liberal paradigm which has dominated political and economic thought for the past three decades is in the process of collapsing under the weight of its own catastrophic failures. As a result, the question of how to reform capitalism along more egalitarian lines is no longer addressed exclusively by leftist

intellectuals; rather, it pervades popular discourse.

Neo-liberalism was, in its day, itself a radical idea, albeit a fiercely rightwing one, and when Keynesian social democracy fell into disrepute in the 1970s it was there to fill the void. Now that its stifling grip on the political imagination is finally loosening, new ideas may flourish in the political landscape. There is little reason why basic income should not be among them.

About the symposium speakers

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Endnotes

1 Van Parijs' interpretation of this argument advocates not an *equal* distribution among citizens, but rather a *leximin* distribution. The leximin principle dictates that society should first maximise minimum holdings, or, in other words, maximise the holdings of the worst-off individual. Once it has succeeded in doing this, society should maximise the holdings of the second worst-off individual, to the degree that it can do so without diminishing the holdings of the worst-off individual. Once it has done this, society should maximise the holdings of the third worst-off individual, to the degree that it can do so without diminishing the holdings of the worst-off and second worst-off individual, and so forth.

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