

Interrogations for Equality Seminar
Session 4. Basic Income
September 24, 2009

Ben Kilbarger

Is there good reason, contra Bergmann, to put SG or UBI on the short-to-medium term agenda?

UBI and SGs both sound really, really cool. I've spent no small amount of time this weekend staring off into space wondering what the US would be like if either of them were implemented. I'm not sure which to prefer. I look forward to hearing which people find best, all things considered.

I worry, however, that we're premature in considering *either*. Bergmann's challenge troubles me: we have a fixed amount of resources, which will go toward funding a welfare state or a system of wealth distribution like a UBI or SG. We cannot, at present, have both.

Equality is important. But Bergmann seems to point at something even more fundamental: what's *really* important is ending the worst suffering of the worst off, and ending it immediately. We care about this regardless of whether we care about equality. Once we sufficiently help the worst-off, we can redirect our resources toward achieving equality in the broader sense, including income, wealth, jobs, etc. That's not to say that meeting the pressing, immediate needs of the worst-off is not contained within or fully compatible with achieving overall equality. It's that the focus on wealth-redistribution seems too diffused a notion of equality in a world with way too much hunger, disease, violence, and way too few resources like healthcare, quality housing and education.

If we only have X% of the GDP to work with (allowing for healthy growth), should we not focus all of our resources on ending the most tangible, immediate, ameliorable forms of human suffering? Once that's achieved, we can move on to consider further equalizing measures.

In short, is there a good response to Bergmann? Is there good reason to put a UBI or SG plan on the short-to-medium term political agenda? *Especially* in a country like the US, which has relatively poor social services?

(This points back to the non/ideal issue: the UBI/SG question is fascinating, but is it the right one to ask in a world like ours? Or does it idealize too far away from the actual?)

Gina Schouten

As Philippe Van Parijs recognizes, his case for a guaranteed basic income as a "first-best" means of achieving social justice depends upon the acceptance of a "real freedom" metric of justice, where real freedom is understood as "the real freedom to pursue the realization of one's conception of the good life, whatever it is" (Van Parijs 16). I am not persuaded that "real

freedom” is what egalitarians should seek to equalize, so I am not persuaded by Van Parijs’s arguments in defense of a basic income. I hope we are able to spend some time in seminar talking about how plausible the “real freedom” metric of justice is, and whether a first-best case for basic income can still be offered if we reject that metric.

My reason for being doubtful that real freedom is the appropriate distributandum of social justice stems from my belief that people can have conceptions of the good life which are incorrect and/or objectionably harmful to other people. When people have conceptions of the good life which are incorrect or harmful (or *at least* when those conceptions are *both* incorrect *and* harmful), there is no duty of justice to ensure that those people are as free to pursue those conceptions as others are to pursue correct or benign conceptions of the good. (It might (I hope!) seem less pompous to entertain the possibility of incorrect and harmful conceptions of the good life if we imagine a conception which we are strongly inclined to consider harmful—let’s say to the agent herself—and then consider whether it is plausible to say that it is also incorrect in virtue of the harm it causes.)

In suggesting that some conceptions of the good life can be wrong, and that our duties of justice do not require us to promote those on a par with other conceptions of the good life, I mean to be suggesting that the state need not be entirely neutral with respect to conceptions of the good. This is, I think, what makes Barbara Bergmann’s proposal of universal provision of “merit goods” (Bergmann 130) so much more appealing to me than the provision of a basic income.

Catherine Willis

Sufficiency

I was quite surprised by the interpretation of sufficiency offered by Casal; she seems to interpret Frankfurt’s concept to mean the bare minimum required to survive, while Frankfurt specifically rejects this (38). I found absent from both discussions the idea that sufficient might change depending on the general distribution of income in society in two ways. First, in a society with some very rich people, it would seem that what is sufficient would need to be higher than if there were no very rich people. So for sufficiency to be satisfied as a criteria, might a reduction of inequality starting from the top not also be required? Second, absent from the discussion is an explicit look at how establishing sufficiency would require not just looking at the job market and cost of living, which is also the focus in Ackerman et al., but looking at the money needed to even out political inequality. Right now for example, I would argue that my income is sufficient with regards to my living needs, but absolutely inadequate with regards to influencing politics like many business leaders can. For my income to be considered sufficient in this context it would be necessary to increase my income or reduce the ability of the richest members of society to use their money to influence politics.

Children and basic income

Bergmann (in Ackerman et al. 140) raises the problem of “loss of power over children by their parents” as a consequence of Basic Income. For me, bringing children into the debate raises a whole other slew of questions about basic income, and I am not sure of the answers:

- why give basic income to children: to help their parents raise them or for their parents to

- save for them for when they get older?
- who controls this money? Do we assume that a parent with a basic income does not have enough money to raise a child?
 - does giving children a basic income contribute more to equality than having a well supported welfare system (quality schools, medical care, subsidized leisure activities, daycare, quality school lunch programs etc.)

Basic Income

There is one set of arguments in the readings around which I would like some clarification. I am confused about the decoupling of means and needs test and the significance of this (Ackerman et al. Pp14-5).

Kevin Cunningham

I want to list some advantages and criticisms of a basic income scheme. I will focus on Philippe Van Parijis' article, since his was my favorite and grapples most with the nitty-gritty of the implementation of such a plan. I set aside the issue of basic income as opposed to stakeholder grants.

Van Parijis' scheme has a number of insights. Before reading these articles, I was skeptical that a BI plan could possibly create a workable system of incentives. However, I am now convinced by Van Parijis' argument that a BI scheme, provided that it is both work- and income- unconditional, could provide (to a degree) the incentives for individuals to work hard, while ensuring bare material sufficiency for all. Unlike many current welfare programs, becoming wealthy will not jeopardize my BI assistance. I find this another benefit of Van Parijis' scheme: economic inequality can exist. Individuals who are innovative and productive can attain great levels of wealthy above the BI threshold, while the less productive or unlucky are not left out in the cold. However, for Van Parijis' system to work, it is probable that existing social programs (welfare, unemployment/disability assistance, possibly Medicaid) would have to be dismantled. These programs would incentivize individuals to stay under the BI threshold, rather than earn extra income, lose social benefits, and be subjected to taxes. This is another benefit of Van Parijis' scheme: it would allow for us to end the cumbersome, patchwork social programs that exist today. This proposal (contra Bergmann) would greatly increase efficiency and reduce taxes.

Let me also offer two criticisms. First, a BI scheme would reduce overall wealth. In a laissez-faire market, individuals would be strongly incentivized to be productive and work hard (otherwise, they would starve barring private charity!) In Van Parijis' scheme, the incentives are greatly weakened: work hard if you want to buy unnecessary goods like Jet Skis and take vacations. This lowering incentives will--across the market--cause people to work less hard, innovate less, and produce less goods, consequences that will result in a reduction net wealth. Under BI, we would be collectively poorer. There is good evidence to justify this admittedly simplistic economic model (for example see

http://www.irp.wisc.edu/research/nit/NIT_index.htm) It is an empirical question how much a BI system would impoverish an economy, but is there a threshold in which we would choose unequal wealth over equality? Second and similarly, BI would disincentivize individuals to perform the low-paying (often service and manufacturing) jobs that are vital to the economy. Why would one take a low-paying job, say, at Wal-mart that (to her tastes) was extremely undesirable, when one could subsist on a BI income? My off-the-cuff guess is that a “shadow” market would arise where such jobs would be held by those outside the BI system (e.g. illegal immigrants, citizens working “under the table” outside taxation) or such jobs would go to economies without BI. This is not a good outcome.

Paul Gibbons

Casal challenges Frankfurt’s formulation of the positive sufficiency thesis on page 298.

- 1) Is there a robust analytical formulation of sufficiency – that does not fall into the logical traps she identifies? (The traps are both to do with using the number of people in the formulation, but those arguments are trivially strengthened by ‘above the line per 100’ rather than absolute measures.) Does Casal’s challenge to the conceptualisation fall apart?

Frankfurt is keen to avoid using an egalitarian argument to refute discrimination.

- 2) Does discrimination rely (analytically) on egalitarian sentiments? (If one discriminates, then surely it is against a standard of equality?)
 - a. I think Frankfurt wrong, they are the obverse of each other.
- 3) Does respect provide sufficient justification to refute discrimination as a practice?
 - a. Is it also necessary? Non-discrimination (say coercively) without respect sounds undesirable.
- 4) In two extreme cases, universal abundance, or universal privation, does egalitarianism lose relevance? (In the case of privation, some value related to generating surplus; in the case of abundance, some value related to optimal usage?) If, at these limits, egalitarianism is without moral foundation – does this lead toward any conclusions in more balanced states?
- 5) Casal says equality is easy to see and measure [sic] – therefore is better than [sic] sufficiency.
 - a. As ‘life’ (brute luck, differential preferences for work/ leisure, etc) quickly imbalances equality w.r.t. X– even a strict egalitarian must allow for a margin of error. (Or, is the commitment to continue to address such imbalances when they happen?) Thus Casal’s argument that sufficiency is ‘impractical’ (one can’t know what sufficient is), applies equally to egalitarianism – it is too hard to judge ‘is this equal enough’.
 - b. I agree with Frankfurt’s view that considerations such as specifying sufficiency are less important than our broad commitment as society to sufficiency or equality.
 - c. Is sufficiency constrained, luck egalitarianism a formulation that responds to this problem?

General questions on egalitarianism

- 6) In abstract, to say that A and B are unequal with regard to an attribute X, is a descriptive claim. A commitment to act requires a second normative premise. Egalitarians make at least one of two

such claims: A and B ought to be equal w.r.t. X; or, A and B ought to be *equalized* w.r.t. X. (One commits to outcomes, one to means.)

- a. In the second formulation, it matters a great deal whether A and B *themselves pursue this; or whether equalising places demands on C; or whether a group/ society undertakes to equalise A and B – in one instance C's autonomy is under threat because C is – in a sensed – forced to take an interest in A and B. In the latter instance, what sort of coercion (or commitment to non-coercion) must be balanced with the egalitarian impulse?*
- 7) E is sometimes defended contingently (access to political power, freedom to enjoy other primary goods, self-respect, etc). Empirically such correlations exist. Why must they? Are these necessary entailments, or empirical inconveniences? Could not political influence be separated from (say) income, or (say) status?

Justin Lonsbury

I enjoyed reading the basic income proposal, and appreciate both the motivations behind it and the effort that went in to trying to make it workable. However, even though I thoroughly enjoy the thought of living life without the burden of working, I have enough concerns to make me shy away from this specific proposal. First, considering last week's readings, I wonder if the proposal does enough to level status and power. If poverty is at all perceived relatively, it seems like there will still be much work to do both in the economic sphere and with regard to subjective feelings of worth and people's perceived ability to engage in political activity. People may have some money in their pockets and more time to act collectively, but will they think that they matter enough to create change? Also, in light of the sufficiency paper and the Bergmann piece, I'm concerned that once a basic income is in place, people will see both their actual standard of living and their ability to act politically diminish. Bergmann points to the incompatibility of a substantial basic income and the provision of merit goods like education and health care. If people are going to have to purchase their own services, will there be enough left over to make them better off than they are in the status quo? If they make poor decisions with their money, especially with regard to merit goods, will others see them as having deserved their fates? Could an argument be made that the basic income should be enough for people, and that, as a result, individuals who want to engage in democratic dialogue about increasing or modifying the public provision of merit goods are whiners? It seems that governments can absolve themselves of any blame when it comes to the conditions of the least advantaged and place the responsibility of taking care of its citizenry back on the individuals who need help the most. This all, I think, would attenuate democracy and let governments blame others for poor provision of public services.

Justin Lonsbury

I enjoyed reading the basic income proposal, and appreciate both the motivations behind it and the effort that went in to trying to make it workable. However, even though I thoroughly enjoy the thought of living life without the burden of working, I have enough concerns to make me shy away from this specific proposal. First, considering last week's readings, I wonder if the proposal does enough to level status and power. If poverty is at all perceived relatively, it seems like there will still be much work to do both in the economic sphere and with regard to subjective feelings of worth and people's perceived ability to engage in political activity. People may have some money in their pockets and more time to act collectively, but will they think that they matter enough to create change? Also, in light of the sufficiency paper and the Bergmann piece, I'm concerned that once a basic income is in place, people will see both their actual standard of living and their ability to act politically diminish. Bergmann points to the incompatibility of a substantial basic income and the provision of merit goods like education and health care. If people are going to have to purchase their own services, will there be enough left over to make them better off than they are in the status quo? If they make poor decisions with their money, especially with regard to merit goods, will others see them as having deserved their fates? Could an argument be made that the basic income should be enough for people, and that, as a result, individuals who want to engage in democratic dialogue about increasing or modifying the public provision of merit goods are whiners? It seems that governments can absolve themselves of any blame when it comes to the conditions of the least advantaged and place the responsibility of taking care of its citizenry back on the individuals who need help the most. This all, I think, would attenuate democracy and let governments blame others for poor provision of public services.

Jeffrey Grigg

It turns out that I have been concerned about questions of sufficiency for quite some time and didn't know it; rather, I had known it as "proficiency" in the context of education. Casal's clarification of the "positive" and "negative" views of sufficiency were quite welcome, and I was gratified to learn that the positive view has essentially been accepted at least in some form (299). That being said, the type of one's positive view has implications for those below the threshold, not to mention the numerous issues Casal raises in regard to defining the threshold and treating those above it.

The example of scarce medicine for sick patients (introduced on page 307 and revisited in page 316) prompted me to think about "triage," both in the medical and educational (Booher-Jennings 2005) senses. My biggest problem with sufficientarian thinking—at least in education—is that it can minimize the value of moving people from low levels to less low levels that remain below the threshold (this makes me sympathetic to the prioritarian view). In education, this concern is raised by the inherent value of raising a student's level of performance even though it remains less than "proficient." To use the medical scenario introduced on page 307 (there are ten doses of medicine and ten people, and evidently one dose will allow a person to die without suffering, two will allow a person to live, and [introduced later in the paper] more than two will allow a person to thrive), is there really no value to distributing the medicine such that people die painlessly? (For my purposes, I will assume that this scenario does not represent a world in which every is sick and the survival of the species is at risk; rather this is a question of

individuals. I do this to rehabilitate the strictly egalitarian option of allocating the ten doses so that all die painlessly. I am—egad—willing to consider a scenario in which all ten people die, albeit without pain).

This death business makes me uneasy; the four options presented in this example might correspond to other scenarios. For example, the educational equivalents might be: die with suffering = illiterate; die without suffering = literate; live = proficient; thrive = advanced performance. Alternatively, the levels of income could be deprivation/subsistence/comforts/rich. I admit that some might think I've diminished the "death" part of "die without suffering," but my point is rather to highlight the potential value of distributing the good (medicine, education, or income) to avoid pain, ignorance, or deprivation.

One might object that the zero-sum game is false, that some people don't have to suffer in order that others might live, or that some don't need to be illiterate that others might be more than just literate. But if you believe that the rich can only be rich at the expense of the poor, then you believe that there is not enough to go around.

Two final notes: First, I was somewhat disappointed in Casal's final option of sufficiency-constrained luck egalitarianism (SCLE), primarily because it appeared to me that she presented it as a solution less by addressing all of the concerns she had brought up during the course of her paper and more by invoking Rawls and claiming SCLE is congruent with Rawls' views, as if that were sufficiently convincing (WWRD?). Second, and perhaps this betrays the fact that I am not a philosopher, but Casal's invocation of alternate worlds to critique philosophical positions (e.g. the critiques of Frankfurt's views on page 298 or Crisp's on page 314) threw me off a bit. I have enough trouble imagining the implications of philosophical statements for the world we have, and it seems unfair to criticize someone for presenting an argument that leads to a "slippery slope" consequence in an alternate reality. I look forward to knowing the reasons for including such radical thought experiments in the philosophical toolbox.

Alex Hyun

An issue I'd like to discuss in class is how economic equality may be *derivatively* good, and how its derivative goodness impacts Casal's arguments against sufficientarianism. In the Frankfurt reading, consideration of the derivative goodness of equality is not given much space, but he does suggest that striving for economic equality may be helpful in achieving sufficiency, encouraging fraternity, and decreasing undesirable discrepancies in social status and political influence (Frankfurt, 22, 24). So plausibly, economic equality is derivatively a great good, and sufficientarians are free to think so. Sufficientarians must deny only that equality is a non-derivative, intrinsic good (Casal, 296, 299). I feel like this fact may undermine some of Casal's argumentation against sufficientarianism. For instance, Casal asserts that, even on its most plausible reading, Frankfurt's "positive thesis" "remains implausible as it requires raising one individual from slightly beneath to slightly above the threshold, even when doing so involves placing an unlimited number of individuals who were previously also just beneath the threshold far below it" (Casal, 298). But if sufficientarians can consistently hold that such a vast increase in economic inequality is (derivatively) very bad, I don't see why sufficientarians must give the verdict that Casal says they do. Couldn't they just say that in this case, the *prima facie* duty to

raise people above the threshold of sufficiency is outweighed by the duty to avoid derivatively bad inequality?

Another thing: we don't have to discuss this in class, but I wanted to raise the suggestion that implementing a Basic Income in the United States may be a solution to the poor job market for philosophy teachers. Imagine that every citizen is guaranteed a Basic Income large enough to support a no-frill, Top-Ramen-every-night lifestyle. I find it highly plausible that a good number of philosophers who currently have/seek professorships would choose to be unemployed. This way, they could devote themselves wholly to their philosophizing, unhindered by teaching duties. This would open up professorships for philosophers who would still want a teaching position at a University. So perhaps philosophers have especially good reason to support a generous Basic Income.

Kelly Robbins

Van Parijs claims that current inmates and other wards of the state (or community) should not be eligible for BI (p8) during their "stay." This seems intuitively right to me, but I am concerned about the argument he offers. The basic claim is that the community spends more than the yearly BI on each year of internment/wardship. Though likely, it is neither intrinsic to BI that it is set at a certain (low) level (as Van Parijs himself claims later in his defense of the affordability of BI; p16), nor is the cost of internment/wardship necessarily set at some (higher) level.

Furthermore, if it turns out to be the case that internment/wardship is more expensive for the community than BI *and* BI does not replace all community-provided benefits and safety nets as Van Parijs claims, then a problematic practical dilemma results. First, there are policy difficulties about what counts toward the community picking up "the full cost of their stay" (do prescription drugs count? do food stamps? stays in women's shelters?). Putting these aside, there is an additional difficulty that an egalitarian should be particularly concerned about. Imagine the BI is set at \$15,000/year. Should a ward of the state that costs the community exactly \$15,001/year be ineligible for BI, while a ward whose stay costs \$14,999 still receive a yearly BI? Not only does Van Parijs' reasoning suggest that there should be a difference, but he rejects the solution of making up the difference to the wards by paying them a fraction of the yearly BI (in this case, \$1), when he rejects *ex post* assessments of income (here, other benefits paid by the community; p9, 14).

To rescue Van Parijs' point about inmates and wards, it seems we must say that certain people are ineligible for BI because they have forfeited the right to it. This is morally plausible for inmates, but not so for (most) wards of the state. What should we do about them? If we take Bergmann to be correct, it is also not a dependable solution to hope/require that people spend their BI on the services the community would otherwise provide to wards (that is, it is not a feasible solution to get rid of wards of the state altogether by increasing the BI; p135). It is very plausible that she is correct, especially where her merit goods are needed just when or because the potential ward cannot afford them, e.g. catastrophic/mental health care, financial counseling (p134, 135).

Given all of this, I am concerned that any services given to a non-criminal ward that are not subsumed/replaced by BI, must be provided in addition to BI, even in the cases where those services outstrip the cost of the ward's yearly BI.

Tatiana Alfonso

Frankfurt argues that equality itself lacks moral importance and asserts that the important to think about redistribution, is that everybody have enough. While reading Frankfurt's article, I was wondering how I could insist in the idea of inequality as a value itself for a fair redistribution in a society with scarce economic resources. Nevertheless, throughout the reading, I surprised myself persuaded to believe on the doctrines of sufficiency because if it is possible to guarantee *enough* resources for everyone, it is not problematic if someone has more than enough. However, I would like to discuss one issue/question regarding this thesis of the doctrines of sufficiency.

The question is related to the nature of the markets in which distribution of economic resources occurs. In a free market, the accumulation of resources in one side is interconnected to the scarcity of those resources on the other side. It means that if someone has more than enough (that someone is accumulating a lot of economic resources), there is someone who has less than enough (this person is at the bottom of the distribution of resources), and those two facts are not independent. The inequalities gaps and measures seem to refer to that interdependent connection. That would be one reason to believe in the moral and economic importance of inequality of income between individuals as a criterion for redistribution. The doctrines of sufficiency seem to ignore or neglect this relational character of the accumulation of economic resources. The question then, is how the doctrines of sufficiency deal with those empirical situations of concentration of resources in a society with limited resources? How would a doctrine of sufficiency design a redistribution strategy to guarantee that everyone have enough?

Noel Howlett

I was rather taken by Casal's representation of sufficiency. I think this stems in large part from an interest in rejecting equality as the moral criterion in distributive justice. For me, the requirement is not equal distribution, but rather distribution that is equitable/fair; or rather not based on lines of racial, gender, cultural, etc. difference. I am fine with the idea that some will have more and some will have less, but I am bothered by the idea that we can predict who will have more and who will have less based on socially constructed categorical memberships. For want of an argument for this principle, I found some appeal in the sufficiency argument.

To this end, I was really quite pleased with Casal's take on the positive and negative theses. To Casal, the positive thesis of sufficiency centers on the importance of sufficiency as a measure or criterion itself. The negative thesis is, on the other hand, is more of an argument against

egalitarianism concerns of equality and priority. I am unsure of the extent to which Casal, and I, believe that one need endorse both in order to form a coherent theory of sufficiency. Casal makes some effort to redeem each from the criticisms lobbied against them, but meets with only moderate success as I read the article.

A major obstacle I encounter when considering endorsing a sufficiency argument is the notion of what is “enough”? Casal raises concerns around this point as well. Casal notes, in my opinion correctly, that endorsing absolute thresholds of sufficiency is unreasonable. For me, this is a significant weakness to the argument, as prioritarian and egalitarian arguments both seem able to endorse absolutes to a degree that sufficiency can not. What’s more, under some circumstances the notion of “enough” is left up to people to determine in somewhat relativistic terms. This is also undesirable. Finally, those who do not have enough, and are largely the concern of sufficiency in my view, would likely be left out of the conversation, assuming there was one, around determining “enough” and thus would likely be ill-represented. Without a coherent account of what is enough, I don’t believe I can endorse sufficiency. Ultimately Casal ends up representing sufficiency concerns as a sort of set of qualifiers to egalitarian and prioritarian concerns.

I found the cases of Ana, Bea, and Celia somewhat problematic in Casal’s paper. Casal imagines three people, Ana, Bea and Celia who are currently suffering deprivation. Ana, has always been deprived and intervention will not be sufficient to alter the state of her living in deprivation. Bea, has had a generally sufficient existence, although just barely, and the intervention could end her deprivation. Celia has lived a life of excess and intervention would restore that existence. Casal rightly addresses the concern that based on sufficiency only, there is no motivating difference between Bea and Celia. In this sense, Casal invokes a sort of Rawlsian maximin argument claiming that Bea should receive the intervention over Celia. I find this unconvincing, or not well executing since Ana in fact should be the focus of the maximin argument and not Bea. Casal quickly dismisses Ana since she will not meet sufficiency even with the intervention. This ability of the theory of sufficiency to be correctly applied and ignore the worst off seems a significant weakness to me.

Justin Horn

One feature of the Basic Income proposal that is advertised by its proponents is the promotion of what Pateman calls “the freedom not to be employed.” This feature of the proposal is attractive for several reasons. Not only does this freedom have the potential to enhance human flourishing directly, it also has the potential to shift the balance of power between employers and employees in a more egalitarian direction.

Yet this feature of the proposal is also the source of a cluster of “free rider” objections. Although Wright notes this line of objection in the introduction, I was a little surprised that the authors did not discuss this line of objection more thoroughly in the readings. There seem to be roughly two types of concerns surrounding the possibility that implementing Basic Income would, in Elizabeth Anderson’s words, “inspire a segment of the able population to abjure work

for a life of idle fun.” Some might object to such an outcome on moral grounds, claiming it is *unfair* to transfer wealth from those who are gainfully employed to those who are able to work, but choose not to. Alternatively, one might raise a “free-rider” objection on grounds of efficiency. Bergmann puts this objection starkly, claiming that such a policy could spark a “a vicious circle: Fewer working for pay, causing lower tax revenues, requiring an increase in tax rates, causing fewer to work for pay, and so on.” (139)

I think the moral objections could be convincingly answered by appeal to a liberal egalitarian theory of justice. Just for starters, egalitarians could point out that as it is now, many of the well-off (who would be paying the brunt of the cost of Basic Income) already have the privilege of being able to comfortably go considerable periods of time without employment, and that most have done nothing to *deserve* this, but merely have this privilege in virtue of being born into a wealthy family. This observation doesn't settle the matter, of course, but it's a start, and I think considerations along these lines are sufficient to overcome the moral objections to “free-riding”.

The efficiency objections are harder to assess. Van Parijs points out that although a guaranteed Basic Income provides a disincentive to work, the lack of means-testing allows the policy to avoid the “unemployment traps” present in other assistance policies, potentially balancing out this effect.

What I find frustrating about his discussion, as well as Pateman's and Bergmann's comments, is (and it hurts me to say this as a philosopher) how strikingly *a priori* they are. None of them tries to marshal any considerable empirical evidence for their predictions about incentive effects, but instead tend to invoke somewhat crude generalizations about human motivations in order to predict the impact of the policy. Sometimes these generalizations seem rather suspect. For instance, Van Parijs suggests that those who choose to live off their Basic Income without seeking employment would generally be “unemployable and unmotivated,” and for this reason, their departure from the labor market would not substantially harm efficiency. But I see no reason to make this assumption; it might be that a number of otherwise responsible people would simply decide that they preferred to enjoy their “modest but decent standard of life” without employment than to supplement the income through labor. If this were to happen, efficiency really would suffer, though it is very difficult to estimate how much.

All of this leaves me wondering: what sort of evidence do we have about the potentially harmful incentive effects of the Basic Income proposal? How can we go about predicting the extent to which the proposal would affect efficiency, and how reliable should we expect our predictions to be? How should this uncertainty affect our normative assessment of the proposal?

David Calnitsky

Reading Van Parijs' Basic Income proposal, the potential problems that immediately come to mind—especially if the policy was enacted only in one country rather than globally—are that of capital exiting to countries with, say, lower tax rates on profits, or capital striking until the

political community abandons the project. Whether or not that would actually come about would perhaps depend on the size of the tax burden and on the level of organization of capital, respectively. If a significant amount of capital did leave for non-BI countries not only would taxes on profits be lost, but the reduced economic activity would also diminish the amount of revenue taxable from worker incomes. It might be necessary to make capital flight more costly. (All of this is not to say that BI is unrealistic or unfeasible—that criteria would strangle most proposals for a more equal society in infancy—rather I'm pointing to a *potential* basic incompatibility with functioning capitalism.)

Also, it seems that regarding the capital strike, with BI workers would be less reliant on the usually minimal strike fund and hence could both better survive capital strikes and better sustain themselves throughout their own strikes. Further, the problem of scab labor undermining strikes is less likely to come about. Similarly, the usual role of the reserve army in lowering wages might be weakened.

At the same time, it seems plausible that union membership (and hence union bargaining power, and hence wages) might decline as members now have a decent exit option. Additionally, wage deflation might be possible if capitalists see the BI as an opportunity to pay out less in wages given the previous levels of worker income; this would leave the remuneration of workers unchanged with an effective subsidy to capital.

Miriam Thangaraj

Frankfurt's "sufficientarian" argument suggests that equality for its own sake is morally irrelevant insofar as it does not contribute to the quality of the conditions of a person's life such that his needs are met. An equal distribution of resources does not necessarily imply that everyone's needs are met; or, as long as everyone's 'needs' are met, equality is not of concern. Fundamental to this formulation is the assumption that conceptions of quality of life have no comparative consideration; that definitions of 'enough' are intrinsically driven.

Is it possible to determine in isolation what is good for oneself when one inevitably participates in a larger system that distributes goods? However, I like this formulation because it renders market-based/consumption-based markers of sufficiency (and equality) redundant. But it also seems to imply that resources may be better spent trying to teach everyone contentment rather than meeting their 'needs', equally or otherwise, which is problematic because it could also suggest that the poor not only have less, but are also discontent.

Frankfurt questions the point of egalitarianism when utility thresholds and available resources are such that there are an equal distribution leaves everyone below the threshold. I found it hard to argue against this point (and Casal's response to it on p. 298 did not satisfy) though the question of how the threshold is defined remains. It seems right to define 'enough' as survival, under conditions of scarcity. Under plentiful conditions however, what is 'enough' (or what is 'trivial') is harder to see, and "satisfactory amounts of satisfaction" is vague at best. (Could the group presenting clarify Crisp's formulation of sufficiency?)

Casal argues for egalitarianism with greater success, I think, as a better framework to deal with discrimination. Frankfurt's sufficiency principle favors those closer to the threshold than those more deprived; if there are structural characteristics that determine the distribution of those

below the threshold, then sufficiency cannot give us a reason for a less-discriminatory restructuring.

Discrimination, as far as Frankfurt and Casal go, is restricted to its economic causes; Frankfurt's focus on the intrinsic over the comparative means that status and power (from Glaser's 'exhaustive list' of distribution strata) which are relevant to discrimination, do not figure in his analysis. But Frankfurt's sufficiency principle, as does Glaser's egalitarianism, argues against n-BEE, since both focus on the individual – his flourishing and the satisfaction of all his non-trivial needs, respectively; the latter finding groups morally irrelevant, the former, comparative indices of flourishing.

Paul Hanselman

Aside from the question of how a Universal Income (UI) policy would affect gender differences in the household (which strikes me as an empirical question and a topic we will revisit later in the semester), the most interesting tension for me about the debate for and against UI is that between a substantial package of individual and societal benefits and the relative value of other goals given a finite existing set of resources (economic, political, cultural). The fact that Pateman focuses on the former while Bergmann on the latter is partly a function of the abstract nature of van Parijs' proposal (at least in this selection). There are at least three ways in which UI must be specified, and they are certainly inter-related. First, specific distributional priorities need to be set (corresponding the values in van Parijs' figures; ie, the minimum acceptable level of gross income, as well as the tax schedule). Second, specific budgetary tradeoffs need to establish economic viability. Third, political support must be raised for a specific policy package. The prospects for UI therefore seem to differ widely in different actually existing societies.

The Alaska Permanent Dividend Fund

Relatedly, I was fascinated by the specific enactment of a UI-like program in Alaska, and the fact that it is as old as I am. Here is the result of some cursory research [read: Wikipedia and the official website] on Alaska's Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) program. The PFD came about as a result of a constitutional mandate to invest funds from oil profits (the Trans-Alaska pipeline began pumping oil in 1977), partly as a result of a lack of long-term invest in earlier lease-based oil revenue. The dividend was first paid in 1983 and provides a performance-adjusted share to all Alaska residents. In 2007 the amount was \$1654, in 2008 it was \$2069, though in 2005 it was \$845. Eligibility requirements include only Alaska residency (absences of up to 180 days are acceptable), although certain convicted persons are exempted. The U.S. Supreme court struck down an initial requirement that the dividend pay \$50 for each year of Alaska residency up to 20 years [Zobel v. Williams]. An understanding of the program can certainly not be complete without a visit to the kids site (head to <http://www.pfd.state.ak.us/kids/index.aspx> for your daily word search fix).

There are at least three obvious unique characteristics of the Alaska case. First, the program was made possible by a drastic windfall in state revenue. In fact, some hoped that the PFD would be a temporary payout, but the program has almost unanimous support and subsequent attempts to divert the money to other state budget items have soundly defeated (84% of voters in 1999).

Second, the value seems very low, especially given the high cost of living in Alaska and extreme poverty and unemployment experienced in villages. Third, the checks are distributed in October, and in some ways the program functions as winter support, owing to the highly seasonal nature of the Alaskan economy. Therefore, it's not clear how much the PDF stands a model for UI on any of the authors we read this week.

Sarah Bruch

Reading Pateman's chapter linking citizenship to basic income and then the chapter by Bergmann on the welfare state brought up a number of related issues for me. Pateman brings up T.H. Marshall in reference to his typology of social, political, and civic rights and ties the idea of a basic income to other rights that citizens have. She did not explicitly bring up what I think of when T.H. Marshall is brought up, namely that you can have formal rights that you cannot use/enjoy substantively.

Status distinctions – citizenship and other – are created not only by your market relationship – relation to means of production or subsistence – but also by law and custom. Who is included and what the conditions are for membership are fundamentally about both rights and duties. One duty which many argue is necessary is work, pointing to the historical development of citizenship and the early poor or pauper relief pre-welfare state policies, both of which excluded non-workers and/or non-property owners and in this way reinforced or inscribed the notion that work is required or is a duty of citizenship both in the formal and informal senses of being part of the community. Some sociologists might also argue that much of one's status in society is obtained through one's work – specifically through one's occupation. I'm thinking here of the whole line of scholarship on status attainment and the importance that is given to the attainment of status as defined by occupation. How would the implementation of a basic income change the status that is associated with not only one's relation to the market in terms of the means of production and subsistence, but also in relation to other status considerations?
