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The Political Theory of Universal Basic Income

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Abstract

Universal basic income (UBI) is a radical policy proposal of a monthly cash grant given to all members of a community without means test, regardless of personal desert, with no strings attached, and, under most proposals, at a sufficiently high level to enable a life free from economic insecurity. Once a utopian proposal, the policy is now widely discussed and piloted throughout the world. Among the various objections to the proposal, one concerns its moral adequacy: Isn't it fundamentally unjust to give cash to all indiscriminately rather than to those who need it and deserve it? This article reviews the variety of strategies deployed by political theorists to posit that the proposal is in fact justified, or even required, by social justice. The review focuses mainly on the contemporary normative debate on UBI—roughly dating back to Philippe Van Parijs's influential work in the 1990s—and is centered on the ideals of freedom and equality.

INTRODUCTION

Universal basic income (UBI) is a radical policy proposal of a monthly cash grant given to all members of a community without means test, regardless of personal desert, with no strings attached and, under most proposals, at a sufficiently high level to enable a life free from economic insecurity. In recent years, UBI went from a utopian proposal to a policy with growing currency. UBI experiments have been conducted in countries as different as Kenya, Finland, Namibia, India, and Canada. In the United States, variants of the UBI proposal were very much alive in the early second half of the twentieth century—including through figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Milton Friedman—but the conversation did not pick up much in subsequent decades.

This changed around 2016, when several American personalities wrote on the policy, including former Service Employees International Union president Andrew Stern, former Secretary of Labor Robert B. Reich, and futurist Martin Ford. Notably, the technology incubator Y Combinator started testing UBI in Oakland, California, in 2016; the Economic Security Project was launched in 2016, devoting millions to research and advocacy on UBI; and the mayor of Stockton, California, announced the launch of a pilot program starting in 2019. The growth of income and wealth inequalities, the precariousness of labor, and the persistence of abject poverty have all been important drivers of renewed interest in UBI in the United States. But it is without a doubt the fear that automation may displace workers from the labor market at unprecedented rates that primarily explains the revival of the policy, including by many in or around Silicon Valley (Ford 2015).

UBI has a long history and has been defended from a variety of often overlapping, but occasionally conflicting, ideological perspectives. Like most proposals to expand the safety net, UBI has roots in social democratic, anarchist, and socialist thinking. Ancestors of UBI were discussed by the likes of Thomas Paine (1797) in the form of a lump sum granted to all citizens at adulthood, the Belgian socialist Joseph Charlier (1848) in the form of a "territorial dividend" generating a regular income, and James Meade [1988 (1935), 1993 (1964)] in the form of a "social dividend" in the 1930s and later. Those proposals share with recent versions of UBI a commitment to the view that a share of the wealth produced by all in common, or by previous generations, should be redistributed to all in the form of a direct payment to individuals.

In a context of systemic discrimination against African-Americans and the resulting widespread unemployment and poverty, Martin Luther King, Jr. [2010 (1967)], the Black Panther Party, and James Boggs (1968) also considered guaranteed income as a strategy. Meanwhile, feminists, including the Wages for Housework movement in the 1970s, also discussed an income separate from labor as a way to weaken the prominence of the male breadwinner model (Costa & James 1973, Cox & Federici 1976). UBI also has a footing in neoliberal thinking. The economist Milton Friedman famously defended a cousin of UBI, the Negative Income Tax (NIT). He held that the NIT would raise the floor without negatively affecting the price system and market mechanisms, and that it would reduce the paternalistic and intrusive state bureaucracy required to decide who, among the poor, merits assistance (Friedman 1962, 1968).

Despite this rich history, this review focuses on the contemporary debate on UBI, with few exceptions. Even more specifically, it is concerned with the relatively recent conversation on UBI among political theorists—roughly dating back to Philippe Van Parijs's 1991 paper "Why Surfers Should Be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income" and his book *Real Freedom for All* in 1995. Those influential pieces have sparked a vast philosophical literature on UBI, essentially normative in style. That is, its participants have argued that UBI is required or justified by explicit appeal to a conception of justice, rooted in the importance of liberty and

equality, and they pursue the added objective of revising existing conceptions of justice at the same time.

If contemporary moral and political philosophers have taken considerable interest in UBI, it is in large part because the proposal challenges some of our most enshrined intuitions about what justice requires. UBI is for everyone: rich and poor, able and disabled, young and old, working and not working. No distinction is made between those typically considered truly deserving of public assistance (for instance, the needy, those involuntarily unemployed, or the disabled) and those typically considered undeserving of such support (the rich, the "lazy," those who choose not to work, the young adult watching Netflix all day, etc.). The very idea that we ought to provide for anyone and everyone, without asking anything in return, stands in sharp tension with assumptions about the importance of productivity and the Protestant work ethic that pervade most conceptions of justice. If justice is somewhat a cooperative enterprise centered on benefits and responsibilities, then the idea that we ought to enable the lifestyles of those who choose to remain idle or unproductive seems highly suspicious.

UBI research is multidisciplinary. Economists have pointed to empirical evidence from randomized controlled trials casting doubt on the notion that the poor are wasteful and lazy (Evans & Popova 2014, Bastagli et al. 2016), while sociologists have challenged myths around poverty to mitigate fears of parasitism (Dean & Taylor-Gooby 1992). Political theorists have built on such economic, historical, and sociological arguments, but their unique contribution has been to respond to the moral objections to UBI. By turning our conceptions of justice on their heads, or by showing that our principles lead us to UBI rather than conditional benefits, they have deployed a variety of strategies that are presented in this review. Understanding the ideals that motivate the design of UBI is important for anyone wishing to take a moral position on the policy, build a theory of change around it, and evaluate its success and failure modes.

The review is structured as follows. First, I highlight and briefly motivate some of the core definitional features of UBI (for instance, its universal and unconditional eligibility structure). I then introduce what I take to be the most central normative debates surrounding UBI, organized around the ideals of freedom and equality, and the social issues of race and gender inequalities. The sections feature high-level normative contributions to the field and also particularly substantial pragmatic or fact-based arguments that have been mobilized in the same intellectual space. The final section highlights literature gaps and further directions for the political theory of UBI.

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME?

UBI proposals vary across political ideologies and disciplines. Nonetheless, there are five definitional features that generally remain constant from one proposal to the next. The allowance is distributed in cash, regularly, individually, unconditionally, and universally. In this section, I introduce each of these definitional features and briefly explain what motivates them.

A Cash (Versus In-Kind) Benefit

Like unemployment benefits, the earned income tax credit, or income support in general, and unlike in-kind benefits such as food stamps, boxes of canned goods, or housing benefits paid directly to a landlord, UBI is a direct cash transfer. Cash has the particularity that it can be converted as the recipient sees fit; while some beneficiaries will buy food or pay rent, others will purchase fuel or driving lessons, or save for future security. UBI allows recipients to convert their benefits into whatever they might like—including cigarettes or a trip to Las Vegas. Because the possibilities for recipients are endless compared to in-kind benefits, restricted vouchers or specific investments

in public institutions, UBI is often put forward as an instrument of freedom from state paternalism (Van Parijs 1995, ch. 2; Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017, ch. 5). Cash benefits have also been defended as a superior economic tool (Friedman 1962, Tobin 2013). Cash turns the poor into consumers without distorting markets. Various cash transfer programs are already in place throughout the world in the form of minimum income schemes, job-seeker allowance, and other public assistance programs.[1] Existing programs, however, are often household-based rather than individual, conditioned on particular behaviors, and targeted toward those with lack of means. UBI departs from these for reasons highlighted below.

An Individual (Versus Household-Based) Benefit

Most means-tested income support schemes establish eligibility based on household income. This means that dependents within households that have a higher income than the eligibility ceiling typically do not receive a welfare payment of their own. A wageless spouse depending on a rich enough partner, for instance, lacks eligibility for welfare support. Political theorists who have written on UBI take individuals to be the unit of concern for distributive purposes, and therefore the relevant beneficiaries of public assistance. Although families are often spaces of solidarity and support, they can also be spaces of contention and potentially domination. Nothing ensures that the distribution of resources from breadwinner to caregiver or unemployed spouse allows the dependent to lead a dignified life. UBI proponents contend that we should therefore make sure that individuals have exit options by getting an income of their own even if they dwell in a rich enough household. The move from household-based to individual benefits has thus been defended as an instrument of empowerment for women. Young adults are also invisible dependents who are often hardly eligible for income support, as is the case in France (Bidadanure 2012). Under most proposals, children are also covered by the UBI scheme—but they get a lower amount and the cash is allocated to their parents.[2] The individual feature of UBI seeks to protect vulnerable individuals within family units and increase their freedom. The additional allowance for children ensures the family unit has enough to live free of economic insecurity.

An Unconditional (Versus Conditional) Benefit

Perhaps more controversial than all its other definitional features is UBI's unconditionality. In most welfare schemes, benefits are disbursed on the condition that recipients show that they are genuinely unfit for work or that they are doing their best to find employment. This is often referred to as welfare-to-work. In the United Kingdom, for instance, benefit claimants can lose their benefits if they have not applied to enough jobs each week; if they miss an appointment or arrive late; if they refuse a job offer; and if they are also declared "fit for work." Conditionality is justified mainly by the evaluation that work is good for individuals and necessary for their community. Benefits schemes are further centered on the suspicion that a significant number of recipients will attempt to cheat the system; they are therefore designed to deter and screen out free riders. By contrast, UBI involves no work requirement or sanctions; it is accessible to those in work and out

[1] Cash transfers are becoming more widespread in the Global South, including in South Africa and Brazil, as well as in foreign aid and philanthropy. The nongovernmental organization Give Directly, currently running a UBI pilot program in Kenya, is a leading example.

[2] Instead of (or in addition to) the children's UBI, some have also defended a baby bond: an investment account opened at birth for each child and endowed by the state. At 18 years old, an individual would be able to withdraw the cash and use it as desired (White 2011, 2015; Bidadanure 2014, p. 171).

of work, voluntarily or not. UBI proponents share in common that they want to divorce the right to an income from the obligation to work. They believe that no one should be allowed to fall too low, even if they choose to remain inactive, and especially when there is no full employment (Jordan 2013, Nooteboom 2013). The visions underpinning the commitment to this unconditional feature of UBI are centered on the notions of freedom, choice, dignity, and equality.

A Universal (Versus Means-Tested) Benefit

Also controversially, UBI is not means tested; that is, it is not targeted at those poorest, or those who need it most. In contrast, most schemes of public assistance are aimed at those at the bottom of the income distribution. It may seem wasteful to give cash support to everyone, including the rich. In most UBI proposals, even though the rich would get UBI, an important part of it (or for some income brackets all of it or more) would be taxed back. Allegedly, though, wouldn't it be more just and efficient to give cash support only to those in need? UBI proponents often respond that universality, somewhat counterintuitively, benefits the least well off themselves. This is because being a recipient of benefits is highly stigmatizing (Stuber & Schlesinger 2006). This partly explains why benefits take-up rates tend to be low: Many eligible individuals do not apply for existing cash payments because they would rather be poor than demonized as benefit scroungers and welfare queens (Moffitt 1983). UBI destigmatizes public assistance by making everyone a recipient. Other reasons for low take-up rates are that eligibility criteria are exclusive (a physical address is required, for instance) and administrative procedures to claim benefits are often complex. A radical way to solve the take-up problem is to make benefits a universal default every person automatically receives. Some evidence further suggests that universal entitlements could be more popular than targeted entitlements and that universal schemes would be more stable than the alternative (Gelbach & Pritchett 2002).

A Regular (Versus One-Off) Payment

UBI is a recurrent cash payment. Under most proposals, it is a monthly allowance, while under a minority of proposals it is a weekly or yearly grant. Instead of delivering a continuous income on a regular basis, however, we could give it all in one go. Basic Capital is an alternative proposal of a significant lump sum that all citizens receive in early adulthood (Wright 2006, p. xii). Ackerman & Alstott (2000) introduced the policy and developed a specific proposal (Ackerman & Alstott 2006, p. 45): "At age 21, as each liberal citizen steps forward to begin her adult life, she should receive a stake of $80,000 from the government…. The money is hers to spend or invest. She may go to college, or not. She may save for a house or a rainy day—or blow her money in Las Vegas." UBI proponents are usually in favor of periodic payments because they take it that benefits must prevent recipients from falling too low at any point in their life. Basic Capital is a one-off chance that can be blown. UBI is a safety net that ensures economic security throughout one's life with important benefits in terms of freedom and equality (Birnbaum 2012, Bidadanure 2014).

Unsteady Features

A number of features importantly vary from one UBI proposal to the next, in particular the funding source, the level of the payment, and the policy package that comes with it.

Most UBI proposals are funded by appeal to a variety of taxes—an income tax, a wealth tax, a consumption tax, financial transaction taxes, carbon taxes, or a combination of those (Widerquist et al. 2005, Widerquist 2017). The Alaskan Dividend fund epitomizes the alternative of a sovereign

wealth fund. Under such a model, every resident becomes a shareholder who receives a yearly grant in cash. Like UBI, the dividend is individual, unconditional, universal, and regular, but it differs from most proposals in that it is funded through a non-redistributive mechanism.

The level of the payment also varies from one scheme to another. The "basic" in UBI simply refers to the fact that income from work comes to supplement basic income. One does not stop receiving UBI payments when receiving other forms of income; UBI is a base and other sources of income top it off. Most proponents argue that UBI should be set high enough for recipients to be free from desperate poverty even if they do not have any other sources of income. A $1,000 grant per individual is often taken as the exemplar in the United States. Other proponents of UBI consider that any amount, even low, would make an important difference to those worst off, and that the grant could then be expanded over time once citizens get accustomed to the proposal (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). A UBI set at $500 per month or less is then proposed. UBI could also be set at the level that seems most economically sustainable—for instance, a quarter of GDP (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). Unless otherwise stated, for simplicity's sake, this review uses a UBI grant of about $1,000 per month as a benchmark.

Another point of contention concerns the programs UBI would replace. This is highly contextual, since packages of provision of cash and in-kind goods vary vastly from one country to the next. But in general, UBI replaces programs that would become redundant under it: Someone who had been receiving $400 in food vouchers and cash benefits would now be receiving a $1,000 unconditional monthly payment instead. Other cash programs that are contributory, like some unemployment benefits, would remain untouched. On the conservative end of the political spectrum, UBI is sometimes proposed as a replacement for the delivery of other welfare goods, including health insurance programs like Medicare (Murray 2016). The vast majority of political theorists are found in the camp of those who see UBI as a further expansion and enhancement of the safety net—a complement to the necessary provision of welfare goods by the state. They concomitantly advocate for universal healthcare, a well-funded public education system, and affordable housing (White 2015). The broad view is that among the package of benefits provided by the state, it is imperative that a significant portion be in the form of unconditional cash to enable recipients to have the effective means to exercise their freedom.

IS UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME PART OF THE MAKE-UP OF A JUST SOCIETY?

Universal Basic Income and Real Freedom for All

Van Parijs's 1991 paper "Why Surfers Should Be Fed" and his 1995 book *Real Freedom for All* have shaped the normative debate on UBI. Against libertarians who claim that taxation infringes on self-ownership, Van Parijs (1995) reasons that one cannot truly own oneself without access to the resources needed to survive. Van Parijs thinks of his typical opponent as someone like Nozick (1974), who, in the name of freedom, opposes redistribution as forced labor, arguing that you cannot be said to own yourself if you do not own the product of your labor. Van Parijs's main thesis is that, if we truly care about freedom, not just for the few but for all, we should seek to "maximin" real freedom—that is, we should design societies that maximize freedom for those worse off when compared to any alternative societal arrangement. Real freedom is defined as "the freedom to do what one might want to do." It is not only the formal right to do as one wants but also the actual capacity to do so. In his own words (Van Parijs 2000):

> What matters to a real libertarian…is not only the protection of individual rights, but assurances of the real value of those rights: we need to be concerned not only with liberty, but, in John Rawls's phrase,

with the "worth of liberty." At first approximation, the worth or real value of a person's liberty depends on the resources the person has at her command to make use of her liberty. So it is therefore necessary that the distribution of opportunity—understood as access to the means that people need for doing what they might want to do—be designed to offer the greatest possible real opportunity to those with least opportunities, subject to everyone's formal freedom being respected.

This conceptual innovation in the space of theories of justice connects strongly with the UBI proposal. With an income independent of labor, individuals will not be forced into positions that may not reflect their own conception of the good life. Those most vulnerable end up disproportionately forced to take up roles that most would never want to occupy. If one really values freedom for all, they therefore should oppose conditions that force individuals to choose between survival and a life they do not want for themselves. One should thus have a strong presumption in favor of the UBI proposal: "A cash grant to all, no questions asked, no strings attached, at the highest sustainable level, can hardly fail to advance that ideal. Or if it does not, the burden of argument lies squarely on the side of the challengers" (Van Parijs 2000). Promoting real freedom for all through a tax-funded UBI does not have to come at the expense of self-ownership. This is because the UBI would be generated by a share of undeserved gifts and bequests. Large transfers in wealth and assets between family members come to mind here, but more originally, Van Parijs (1995) would also subject employment rents of privileged jobs to yield-maximizing taxation. More simply put, if privileged jobs are in part undeserved gifts held by the advantaged, they should be part of the wealth that gets redistributed to secure a UBI for all. This is done through the taxation of employment rents.

The uniqueness of this bold position partly explains why it has generated countless responses. Few share Van Parijs's view that we ought to ensure for everyone the ability to pursue whatever conception of the good life they might have, and, accordingly, many reject the policy proposal that follows from it. The rest of this section introduces principled objections to real freedom and UBI, as well as alternative justifications for the policy.

Universal Basic Income Versus Perfectionism and Paternalism

One important line of opposition to real freedom and UBI comes from "perfectionism"—the view that we should promote flourishing lives (Quong 2010). Instead of supporting the freedom to do whatever one may want to do, we should enable the exercise of freedoms known to be central to a good life. Another way to phrase the critique is that we should not promote general freedoms at the expense of the particular freedoms assumed to be central to human flourishing (Anderson 2000). Perfectionists therefore are unlikely to be in favor of UBI. As Van Parijs (1992, p. 20) puts it, it appears to be "an extremely gross tool for anyone concerned to foster a particular conception of the good."

In the context of UBI, perfectionism often comes in the form of a pro-labor position. The exercise of one's agency through employment is important to lead a good life, one of dignity even. If we tend to value jobs, it is partly because we think that it is better for the workers themselves to be employed; jobs offer the opportunity to access "the goods of work" (Gheaus & Herzog 2016). Apart from delivering an income, employment enables workers to make a contribution to their community and gain recognition from others, to attain a specific kind of excellence associated with a trade, and to develop relationships with others (Gheaus & Herzog 2016). Unemployment is often damaging to individuals precisely because jobs remain privileged positions to access those goods.

State paternalism is a particularly widespread explanation for poverty alleviation programs' emphasis on work. Experts contend that work is good for people and that, to promote happiness, any job is better than no job and a life on the dole (Layard 2004). This alleged fact is seen to justify policies that promote paid labor in order to deter those who may be tempted by idleness. If working is so central to wellbeing and a life well lived, then perhaps we should nudge or compel benefits recipients to get back to work. A significant competitor to UBI in the literature is the jobs guarantee proposal (Harvey 2012, Tcherneva 2012). Contrary to benefits conditioned on willingness to work, job guarantee programs place the burden on the state, rather than the individual, to help the unemployed back into work.

UBI proponents have provided a number of responses to the charge that we should incentivize work because it is a preferable option for those out of work. One is simply to vindicate the liberal commitment to individual choice (Ackerman & Alstott 2000). What matters is that people be free to do what they most want, not that they be free to do what others think best for their flourishing. Cash is an instrument of freedom in that way, and we should celebrate its emancipatory potential. A perfectionist position can be rejected as illiberally paternalistic when it seeks to further a particular conception of the good through policy interventions (Quong 2010).

Apart from its potential conflict with the values of freedom, autonomy, and choice, the problem with the pro-work paternalist position is that it is actually dubious that employment is always preferable. If we take into account what existing job opportunities are truly like, we may not want to fetishize work too much. In reality, many jobs, especially those available to benefits recipients, do not deliver the goods of work mentioned above. They can be demeaning, degrading, hazardous to one's physical and mental health, oppressive, disempowering, isolating, etc. The labor market increasingly offers precarious opportunities without job or income security (Standing 2011).

If the goal is to promote flourishing lives, it is important to recognize that UBI could improve work opportunities inside and outside the labor market. UBI, it has been argued, can contribute to improving working conditions both by helping precarious workers cope financially and by increasing their bargaining power (Standing 2013). It can also enable forms of work outside the labor market that might be both more beneficial to individuals and their communities and more virtuous than many formal job opportunities—for instance, activism, volunteering, and caring for others. In a sense, UBI can be seen as a form of compensation, and perhaps even encouragement, for all those who work without an income (Offe 1992). As Barry (2000) eloquently puts it, this is a knockdown argument for UBI at subsistence level, for "there is surely something crazy about the stipulation that those drawing unemployment benefit must be 'available for work' at any moment, which rules out their using the time to improve their qualifications, engage in community work, or help a neighbor while earning a bit extra." UBI thus does not need to be seen as anti-work; it could potentially help workers secure more fulfilling and productive occupations, or demand better work conditions.

In conclusion, it is interesting to remark that UBI is only an anti-perfectionist or anti-paternalist instrument to an extent. In its early days, UBI was put forward as aligning with the goals of Marxist perfectionism—UBI would enable individuals to practice inherently rewarding work since they would be freed from the need to work to make ends meet (Van der Veen & Van Parijs 1986, Birnbaum 2016). As for paternalism, some degree of it is in fact built into the UBI scheme: UBI is nonmortgageable in most proposals. The state would not allow recipients to alienate their future basic income to get a loan against it (Bidadanure 2014, White 2015). This importantly restricts what individuals can do with their UBI; they cannot buy a home or invest in a business as they would with a large lump-sum payment. It seems that UBI cannot be seen as a perfect embodiment of freedom from paternalism in the absence of a commitment to allowing mortgageability and given proponents' objection to lump-sum schemes. UBI proponents care

about individuals' permanent ability to make ends meet and live a dignified life—so much so that they are happy to prevent any front-loading, thus restricting the scope of what individuals can actually do with the cash. This is mainly an issue for those who want to posit UBI as the instrument of freedom from paternalism, and not so much for those who justify it on egalitarian grounds (Fabre 2003, Bidadanure 2014). But in any case, this suggests UBI proponents are indeed committed to making lives better, in addition to increasing freedom.

Rejecting UBI on perfectionist or paternalistic grounds alone may not be a very promising strategy. UBI may not be paternalistic enough for some or too paternalistic for others. But if we care about individuals' wellbeing and flourishing, then giving them access to the means to their survival seems to have important justifications, even if we think that work is particularly central to a life well lived.

Universal Basic Income Versus Responsibility and Reciprocity

If political communities tend to avoid delivering benefits without conditioning them on work, it is not only for perfectionist and paternalistic reasons but also because they believe that working is the recipients' responsibility. Letting the idle benefit from the hard working would be exploitative, and a system encouraging or enabling such free riding would be deeply unfair. Rawls famously claimed that we should not design institutions to subsidize those who decide to surf all day; if surfers want an income, they will have to use their productive capacity (Rawls 2001, p. 179). Similarly, Dworkin rejected the idea of a right to an income for "scroungers" and those who do unproductive activities such as beach combing (Dworkin 2000, p. 336; 2006, p. 104). Those who genuinely choose idleness or unproductive activities cannot expect those who have committed to doing productive work to subsidize their livelihood. Responsibility is central to fairness, and it conflicts with the idea of UBI as a policy. This concern has sometimes been described as the exploitation objection (White 2003, 2006).

Van Parijs's (1991, 1995) account is a direct response to this liberal egalitarian concern. He believes that Rawls, Dworkin, and others are failing their own commitment to liberal neutrality, noting a "productivist" bias in their conceptions of justice. For Van Parijs, there are no good reasons to favor the "Crazies" (who want to work hard) over the "Lazies" (who would rather work less). Under UBI, the Crazies will anyway likely be better off since they will be able to cumulate income from work and their guaranteed income. They further benefit from not having the Lazies competing for the same jobs in the labor market (assuming the Crazies and Lazies have the same productive potential). Moreover, there is no unfairness or exploitation, since basic income would be funded by a tax on undeserved gifts. If those goods are not deserved by any particular individual, it cannot be exploitative to use them for the good of all. This argument gets more controversial when we further highlight that, as discussed previously, the bundle of undeserved goods includes employment rents, in addition to inherited wealth for instance. The rationale for including employment rents is that discrimination, luck, favoritism, and privileges of various kinds play an important role in the allocation of good jobs. Once the pro-work bias is corrected within liberal egalitarianism, we can argue for a modest UBI, at least, on liberal egalitarian grounds.

Even if one remains unconvinced that UBI is compatible with fairness under ideal conditions, there are pragmatic reasons to support UBI in an unjust society like ours. As mentioned above, the actual conditions of employment are precarious and exploitative. In the abstract, we may find UBI unappealing on the ground that justice requires a contribution from those able to participate—the value of reciprocity (Galston 2000, White 2003, Segall 2005). But then, we may scrutinize the actual state of the world of jobs and reconsider our judgment. Jobs are characterized by much inequality. When we are forcing the worse off to work in exchange for an income, we might be

forcing them into jobs that are precarious, degrading, dangerous, alienating, or pointless—what Graeber (2018) terms bullshit jobs. As Shelby (2012) points out, the duty to work needs to be taken with a pinch of salt under unjust background conditions. Under such circumstances, those refusing to work may do so for good reason and may not be wronging their fellow citizens by opting out. Moreover, it seems difficult to claim that any formal job is a more adequate form of reciprocation than activities outside the labor market that are sometimes more useful or productive. In the words of White (2003), one of the background conditions that need to be in place for the value of reciprocity to apply is that different forms of participation must be recognized, including care work and volunteering.

An important competitor to UBI, which follows quite straightforwardly from this discussion on reciprocity, is Atkinson's (2015) alternative of a participation income, which rewards contributions, including less formal ones, through a basic income. Many UBI proponents have however worried about the extensive bureaucracy that would be needed to ensure recipients indeed perform enough work to meet the eligibility criteria. Such control and intrusion into the lives of citizens can be illiberal and wasteful in practice.

One may also wonder whether reciprocity matters so much that it should be the deciding factor in the design of our safety nets. I am skeptical that reciprocity ranks so highly that it could trump the values of freedom, choice, unconditional sufficiency, and opportunity; and these later values likely point toward UBI rather than participation income. While reciprocity is an important value, we may conclude, it is only one important value among many others. All things considered, justice may still require UBI, even if it is exploitative in one respect (White 2006).

Real Freedom or Equality

UBI has mainly been discussed and embraced as an instrument of freedom, and so there is a sense among critiques on the left that UBI is suspiciously libertarian (Rogers 2017). Further, when we think of an egalitarian proposal, we tend to think of a policy that reduces the gap between rich and poor. UBI is given to all, so it cannot be seen as reducing inequalities in this direct manner. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that UBI has attracted libertarian thinkers and has been opposed by labor unions (Vanderborght 2006). UBI skeptics on the left tend to think that UBI proponents too readily give up on the backbones of socialism: jobs and the interests of the laboring class. They also tend to worry that UBI may even be detrimental to egalitarian justice, if it is sold as a pill that will solve all ills, making market regulations seem unnecessary and full-speed automation look less objectionable (Rogers 2017). One important additional critique of UBI is that it makes no distinction between those who need many resources to achieve a decent level of functioning and those who need less to achieve the same goals (Anderson 2000). UBI then strikes us as perhaps inadequate for egalitarian purposes.

But in fact, as I show in this section and the next, UBI can also be seen as an instrument of equality (Baker 1992). Insofar as equality and freedom are conceptually connected, that is not surprising. Even Van Parijs's (1995) real libertarian defense is egalitarian at core—the currency of egalitarian justice that must be maximized is simply "real freedom" rather than welfare, resources, or opportunities. As we highlighted above, Van Parijs has further demonstrated that even liberal egalitarian theories of justice, à la Rawls or Dworkin, are compatible with an endorsement of unconditional benefits. This is not, however, what most have in mind when they think of an egalitarian proposal, so here I want to underscore more explicitly the egalitarian case for universal and unconditional benefits. I do so generally first by drawing on social egalitarianism and then more specifically by focusing on two types of inequalities in the section that follows.

Let's start by introducing yet another freedom-based framework that has been mobilized to offer powerful defenses of UBI: republicanism. Rejecting both the liberal conception of freedom as noninterference and Van Parijs's (1995) indiscriminating conception of freedom as the right "to do whatever one might want to do," republicans have put forward an alternative defense of UBI on grounds of non-domination. The republican conception of justice is more relational than the libertarian; it focuses on the presence or absence of dominating control by some over others, as well as by the state. Following Rousseau [1998 (1762), p. 52], republicans want to build a society where no one is too poor to be bought and no one is rich enough to enslave others. Insofar as UBI can realistically protect people from the dominating control of others by ensuring an income floor, it seems like a promising policy proposal on republican grounds (Pettit 2007, Casassas & De Wispelaere 2016). Widerquist's (2013) independentarianism—a close cousin of republicanism—also led him to defend UBI as providing individuals with the "freedom to say no" to abuses and domination by spouses or bosses. Those accounts are freedom based, but they are certainly egalitarian too.

In fact, the accounts just described are strongly connected to a view called social egalitarianism. Social egalitarianism is a conception of justice that has been revived in recent years by such contemporary philosophers as Elizabeth Anderson, Iris Marion Young, Samuel Scheffler, Debra Satz, Tim Scanlon, Martin O'Neill, Jonathan Wolff, and others. Like republicanism, social egalitarians believe that a just society is one in which people are free from domination and oppression. Central to this conceptualization of equality are the notions of equal social standing, equal status, equal respect, and equal political power. Social egalitarians do not give as much importance to individual responsibility as luck egalitarians like Dworkin (who hold the view that inequalities that are the result of individual choices—as opposed to brute luck—are acceptable) (Axelsen & Bidadanure 2018). Most social egalitarians would be unwilling, for instance, to let anyone fall below a critical threshold because of the choices they make. Sanctions and discontinuations of benefits make people vulnerable to oppression in a variety of ways. By preventing extreme economic insecurity, UBI reduces those risks.

Although social egalitarians have not necessarily been vocal in support of UBI, I would argue that the establishment of an unconditional income floor is quite well connected to the social egalitarian ideal. UBI can help reduce work hierarchies and segregation. The exclusive concentration on activation of many benefits systems devalues activities that are not commoditized. By enabling activities like caregiving, UBI has the potential to unsettle hierarchies created by commodification. UBI could also help reduce the micro-domination and infantilizing that go on in the delivery of behaviorally conditional benefits. The latter are delivered with the assistance of a large bureaucratic apparatus. Welfare advisors and controllers are given discretionary power to monitor the claimants, intrude in their lives, and punish them for failures to comply. A radical way to protect claimants is to make the welfare payment an unconditional right and to change the role of the welfare officers from controllers to advisors.

Last, conditional benefits systems often condone an endemic demonization of the poor. The obsession with screening out the undeserving underclass, the welfare queens and benefits scroungers, has generated a toxic and divisive rhetoric that undercuts the equal standing of those most vulnerable and puts at risk the social cohesion so dear to social egalitarians. Such demonization creates dangerous binaries between deserving and undeserving, and fuels a growing disrespect for the least advantaged. Universal benefits can help move us away from this undemocratic rhetoric and protect the social basis of self-respect (McKinnon 2003, Pateman 2004, Birnbaum 2012). For this reason and the other reasons highlighted above and below, UBI is an egalitarian instrument, in addition to an instrument of freedom.

ZOOMING IN ON GENDER AND RACIAL INEQUALITIES

The previous section ended with a demonstration that UBI can be grounded on egalitarian justice. I pointed out that the features of UBI and its likely effects align well with the goals of egalitarianism, at least in its social egalitarian form. I now advance the case that UBI is an instrument of equality by zooming in on the examples of gender and race inequalities.

Gender Inequality

One way in which UBI can serve as a potential tool to correct gender inequalities is through its individual feature: It provides dependent spouses with exit options. In most systems of assistance, eligibility for welfare support is calculated per household. This makes it particularly difficult for those abused by spouses they economically depend on to free themselves. Conner (2014, p. 340) sums it up this way: "While a batterer is empowered by his partner's financial dependence, the autonomy of a woman who is victimized is diminished by her abuser's ability to control her through financial means. Moreover, financial instability is one of the greatest reasons why, after gaining freedom, a woman who experiences battering has limited choices and may ultimately acquiesce to her partner's attempts to reconcile." This line of support for UBI is fairly uncontroversial and accepted by most in the literature. Note, however, that it does not necessarily constitute an argument for UBI as such; an individually means-tested and lightly conditional benefit would suffice to undermine the financial dependence of spouses. What makes a truly universal and unconditional basic income proposal more centrally connected to the goals of gender justice, I will now propose, is its capacity to contribute to the proper remuneration of care work.

Feminist political theorists who have engaged in the UBI debate tend to disagree on what a gender-just society would look like, but they all take the proper valuation of care work to be central to the goals of gender justice. For Gheaus (2008, p. 1), for instance, a just society is one where "the costs of engaging in a lifestyle characterized by gender-symmetry are, for both men and women, smaller or equal to the costs of engaging in a gender-asymmetrical lifestyle." For Zelleke (2008), promoting equality between men and women requires the destabilization of the gendered division of labor. Drawing on Fraser (1997), Zelleke highlights different models to achieve this goal. One is to promote women's employment (the universal breadwinner model); another is to support unpaid care workers by helping them gain rights and remunerations on par with formal employment (the caregiver parity model); and the last model consists in re-centering our social institutions around care and to posit traditionally female work as the norm (the universal caregiver model).

Rejecting the two first models as androcentric, Zelleke (2008) endorses a model that recognizes a conception of citizenship where care work is reassessed, recognized, revalued, and redistributed among all. This perspective proposes to change the way men lead their lives rather than encouraging women to mold their lifestyles to men's. Relatedly, Weeks (2011) seeks to liberate communities from the productivist mindset; she contends that the demands of feminists should be centered not only on more or better work, but also on less work. She argues that a just society is one where neither paid work nor family work is privileged and where the distribution of income challenges the exhaustiveness of those two categories. Note the resemblance between this objection to the productivist bias and Van Parijs's own rejection of it. But, while Van Parijs was objecting to the illiberal favoring of the lifestyle of the allegoric Crazies over Lazies, Weeks objects to a more politically and sociologically salient form of hierarchy—that between those who hold a formal and waged form of employment and those who work more informally.

The unconditional nature of UBI makes it an a priori interesting tool to promote and support care work, and many feminists, including the three cited above, have considered the policy. The basic motivation for UBI here is that it could enable us all—employed or not—to dedicate more

time to the important care work that we want to do. We could envisage a more multidimensional existence in which one takes a year off work to spend time with an ageing parent, for instance, and then reduces work hours to spend more time with a child or care for the children of one's community by volunteering in an after-school program. If we do not design our benefits system around activation (trying to bring the unemployed or inactive back into the labor market) and if we give recipients an income with no strings attached, some feminists hope, we may set ourselves on the path of a society where more care work is performed, where it is more evenly distributed across society, and where caregivers can perform their activity with greater economic security.

One may, however, complain that UBI does not constitute a true compensation for care work performed: A compensation that is universal is no compensation at all. Surely caregivers would receive an income under UBI, but so would the careless Malibu surfer. The alternative of the caregiver grant looks like a more adequate and promising solution from that perspective. The problem with this competitor to UBI is that the lower-paid spouse within a family would be more likely to drop their job to provide care than the higher-paid spouse. If we care about gender equality, this is an important drawback of the caregiver grant (Zelleke 2008). And yet, Gheaus argues, UBI would likely have the same problematic implication as caregiver grants; absent a strong paradigm shift in the way we think of care, she argues, UBI would risk further entrenching gender norms if women end up opting out of the labor market at higher rates than men due to both gendered social norms and a lack of equal opportunity between men and women (Gheaus 2008). UBI "would, all things considered, lower the costs for individuals to pursue their preferences." However, "It is precisely this feature which makes it attractive to liberals…and should worry feminists" (Gheaus 2008, p. 5).

UBI is surely not an all-encompassing solution to labor-related gender injustices, but it at least enables individuals to build more opportunities for care into their lives while also enabling other options—including using the UBI to cover childcare costs. A related feminist concern about UBI, though, is expressed by Bergmann (2004, 2008), who argues that because UBI is so expensive, it could come at the expense of other spending central for women's empowerment, including childcare, education, housing, social work, etc. If this concern is reasonable, then it is inadequate to respond to the worries about UBI expressed above by saying that UBI is insufficient but nonetheless helpful. On Bergmann's view, UBI could even be counterproductive.

There is no clear way to settle those discussions, but I offer three comments to conclude this conversation on gender and UBI. First, it seems that the outcome of this debate now largely depends more on empirics than on values (Robeyns 2008). The feminists discussed in this section roughly agree that gendered social norms must be challenged and that care work must be revalued, but they disagree in their hypotheses about what would happen under UBI. This disagreement sets a research agenda for those experimenting with UBI throughout the world. They must find out, for instance, what the precise combined gender and labor effects of UBI would be in different institutional contexts. Since many jobs are alienating and precarious, it is not clear that finding a drop in employment rate among women would necessarily be regrettable, all things considered. We would need to find out more than just how many women are likely to drop out of the labor market. As Weeks (2011, p. 124) points out, "slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink." We would need to know precisely which women are likely to give up which jobs, and to do what. To help move this conversation forward, empiricists must also look at the concern that UBI would contribute to the defunding of public goods and find out how reasonable it really is. This would require also studying the framing of various UBI proposals and their reception (to find out whether progressive proposals are more popular than regressive ones, for instance).

A second comment has to do with heterogeneity among women. It is important for this debate to start from an assessment of the situation of the most vulnerable women and whether UBI would

benefit them, rather than focusing the debate on whether UBI can further the more abstract goal of gender justice. For many women, lack of formal employment is actually not the main problem. The problem is rather the inability to perform the care work they want to perform without being stigmatized or condemned to a life of poverty or dependence. For some women, the problem is overwork—that they are combining several low-paying jobs to support their children and end up left with too little time to spend with them. Too often socially invisible, many domestic workers are bound to abusive employers by a lack of exit options. Lacking the economic security needed to have exit options also makes sex workers more vulnerable to abuse. The Sex Workers Open University (2017) in fact demands UBI on the basis that "[i]f every person in the UK was entitled to a universal basic income, no one would be pushed by absolute poverty into selling sex." The conversation on whether UBI should be endorsed on grounds of gender justice should be dependent, at least to some extent, on what UBI would do to empower the women who are currently most economically insecure and most vulnerable to domination.

One last comment concerns the need for all-things-considered judgments in political theory. One is rarely only committed to gender equality, since the egalitarian principles that underpin feminism also underpin racial equality, the fights against ableism, class hierarchies, etc. So it seems important to arrive at an all-things-considered judgment on whether UBI is desirable on egalitarian grounds. UBI may be second or third best as a tool of gender equality, for instance, but it may also be the only safety net that consistently appears at the top of the list of adequate tools to achieve a variety of other egalitarian goals. This should be a central consideration for political theorists who are committed to ending oppression in its various forms.

Racial Injustice

In *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* [2010 (1967)], the last book of Martin Luther King, Jr., the guaranteed income proposal is introduced as the simplest and most effective solution to poverty. MLK welcomes what he sees as a "cultural change" from old times, when we would see poverty as a result of individual inability or immorality, to new times, when we understand it as stemming from market failures and discriminatory practices that force people into unemployment. Because of this shift, he hopes that we may come to accept radical proposals like guaranteed income as a response to the poverty endemic to our economic systems. In October 1966, the guaranteed income proposal also appeared in the Black Panther Party ten-point manifesto under the second commitment of the program. It was envisaged as a compensation for involuntary unemployment among African-Americans stemming in part from discriminatory practices by white businessmen. The proposal was radical: If it cannot ensure a decent income to its citizens, the federal government ought to return the means of production to the community to guarantee a good living standard to its members. Decades later, the Movement for Black Lives also endorses a form of UBI as part of the economic justice platform of their manifesto.

If the UBI proposal was relevant for racial equality at the time of MLK and the Black Panther Party and remains relevant today, it is primarily because unemployment, underemployment, precarious employment, and bad jobs disproportionally affect the lives of people of color. This is true because of discriminatory practices, still, and also because of broader inequalities in access to education, training, and opportunities (Shelby 2012). Interestingly, both MLK and the Black Panther Party were arguing for guaranteed income *or* guaranteed employment. They saw the proposals as interchangeable to some extent. After all, both policies are indeed designed to restore dignity by alleviating poverty. Guaranteed income can also help keep job guarantee proposals in check. This is because, with a high enough UBI, recipients would only be willing to take on "decent" jobs that provide them with more than just an income. If caring for a relative, volunteering in their

community, or starting a business seemed like better options, then they will not be compelled to accept the jobs under the guarantee plan. This comment mirrors Standing's (2013) response to guaranteed-jobs proponents who oppose UBI: The right to an income is a prerequisite of a meaningful right to work.

The contemporary proposal for UBI on grounds of racial justice comes from Dorian Warren (2016) in the Movement for Black Lives' manifesto. Under most UBI proposals [excluding those that would overall reduce the benefits available to the worse off, like Charles Murray's (2016)] those most disadvantaged stand to benefit most. Since black families in the United States are disproportionately found at the bottom of the wealth and income distribution, and since unemployment is twice as high among black workers as among white workers, black families stand to gain most from the policy. Warren (2016) also argues that the proposal's commitment to universality would make it harder for governments to exclude felons and ex-felons from the safety net. Under a system designed to target the deserving and screen out the undeserving, those tied up in the criminal justice system would be more easily excluded. This is important for racial justice given the overrepresentation of people of color in prisons, and given the discrimination experienced by ex-convicts in the labor market.

Last, but not least, UBI could help disrupt the racial tropes and racial resentment pervasive around the existing welfare system. Negative racist stereotypes of lazy black youth and welfare mothers have important consequences. For a start, they force those in need to think twice before claiming benefits, the risk of stigmatization and demonization being high. This explains in part low take-up rates. Racial tropes also serve to shame recipients to keep them in check and incentivize them further to find employment. Furthermore, there is now ample evidence that racial resentment contributes to low support for welfare. Even when programs do not in fact benefit nonwhites more than whites, the myth of the lazy black recipient contributes to a welfare backlash. The pervasiveness of racial stereotypes is thus concerning both because demonized populations are less likely to enjoy the full benefits of assistance and because it contributes to a welfare backlash that is worrying from a progressive perspective. A universal income support system would be less likely to stigmatize the target population, since all members of the community would get a UBI. If benefits are destigmatized, those worse off are less likely to suffer self-respect harms and to drop out of programs they require to live well.

The recent conversation on UBI and race, as well as the conversation that took place in the 1960s among those resisting racial injustices, have not been sufficiently picked up in the political theory literature. Except for Shelby's (2012, 2017) contributions, little has been written on UBI from a racial justice perspective. And yet there are central issues at the intersection of racial justice and UBI that also happen to resonate with broader issues in the UBI field. One of them is the tension between equality, on the one hand, and universality, on the other. For inequalities to be corrected, we tend to think that reducing the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged is the way forward. Basic income is universal—it is aimed at all, including those well off. Targeting, therefore, seems to be more on the side of equality than universality. This basic issue has led a lot of progressives to disregard the policy as inefficient, at best, or wasteful, at worst.

There are reasons to believe universality is on the side of equality and should be preferred to targeting on egalitarian grounds. One is that it enables a delivery of benefits with less stigma for the least well off and therefore with a preserved dignity and social status for recipients. Another approach is to combine universal benefits and targeted reparations—the Universal Plus Basic Income (Warren 2016). Under the new scheme, everyone would receive a basic income, but an additional amount would be allocated to African-Americans. It is unclear whether the program would be politically feasible in a context largely reluctant to even recognize systemic racial injustices. But

this leads me to my last question: What should political theorists think about political feasibility in the discussion of targeting versus universality? It could be that in some contexts, universality is easier to advertise than targeting—especially when benefits recipients are vilified and demonized by the media as scroungers and welfare queens. But if indeed universality is more politically feasible, wouldn't we then come to support a policy for the wrong reasons? If we think the disadvantaged deserve assistance and we believe the rejection of public assistance is bigoted and misguided, then shouldn't we challenge that rejection, rather than circumvent it and accept the demonization as a given? As egalitarians, wouldn't we instead advocate the alternative of reparations? Much more needs to be written on universality, and the context of racial inequalities in the United States offers a particularly salient context for such debate.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR POLITICAL THEORY RESEARCH ON UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Political theorists have paid close attention to UBI, and they have done so from a plurality of rich perspectives—libertarian, republican, egalitarian, feminist, racial justice, post-productivist, and Marxist, to name only a few. It is therefore difficult to highlight gaps in the coverage of value-based arguments for and against the policy. Nonetheless, this review of the literature leaves me with four observations about what remains to be explored in the field, in addition to the gaps I have already highlighted.

Reflecting on the Singular Role of Political Theory in Universal Basic Income Scholarship

Metatheoretical work addressing head-on the question of the role of political theory in this UBI discussion would be helpful. What does it mean for a political theorist to research UBI? On which questions would political theorists be most helpful? At one end, ideal defenses focus on showing, in the words of Van Parijs, that "surfers should be fed"—that they deserve it, that it is their right, that we owe it to them, or that fairness demands it. UBI is defended primarily on value grounds rather than by relying on empirical facts and pragmatic thinking. At the other end, theorists argue that UBI is needed in non-ideal circumstances—that is, in societies like ours, which are unjust in a variety of ways. Theorists in this camp need not worry about whether UBI would be required in a perfectly just society. Here, the job of the political theorist is to mobilize normative ideals to identify pressing social injustices and then ask whether these can be alleviated in part through UBI. Between those two normative approaches, there is a very large space where values and facts, pragmatics and visions, work side by side. In short, we need work from both ideal and nonideal perspectives; we need work that explores how to referee policies that emerge from those rival paradigms; and we need work that takes this opportunity to ask what it means to do political theory about a public policy.

As illustrated by the discussion on gender and UBI, political theorists must also engage extensively with the social science of cash benefits. This is required to develop a realistic path forward, embodying and enhancing (or at least compatible with) central values. Normative theorists are also uniquely placed to set research agendas for empiricists to take up. Indeed, the political theory of UBI has uncovered a wealth of normatively significant hypotheses that are only waiting to be tested: for instance, the hypothesis that UBI would encourage individuals to take up care work, that it would increase workers' bargaining power, or that it would have a positive effect on mental health.

Engaging with the Changing Nature of Public Discourses and Acknowledging New Voices

The political theory of UBI has already been quite responsive to public discourses and debates, but times have changed, and we need political theories that respond to those new public conversations. One important new debate is about automation and the future of work (Walker 2016). While technological unemployment is without a doubt the prevalent angle through which UBI is approached in the United States lately, there is very little political theory scrutinizing the arguments provided. In popular debates, support for UBI ends up being reduced to a single story of automation and artificial intelligence massively displacing workers from the labor market, but the connection between UBI and the future of work remains to be clarified. The widespread idea is that we need UBI to protect displaced workers from economic insecurity, but there are quite a few potential bugs in this seemingly straightforward argument. First, if we take seriously the discussions on the value of work, UBI may seem inadequate as a replacement for the jobs lost. Many of those who stand to lose their jobs will lose not only an income but also a work community, a sense of purpose, and the dignity that comes with it. This suggests UBI is an insufficient solution to technological unemployment and to the continued rise of wealth inequalities. Second, we have noted the worry that UBI could be the pill that will make us all accept what we should not be accepting: a disappearance of jobs driven by profit rather than popular control. If UBI were to facilitate the transition, it could turn out to be the Trojan horse of an even more unbridled neoliberalism: a palliative to prevent the working and middle classes from rebelling against the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the few who own the means of automation. As a framing, an argumentative apparatus, and a motivation, automation may thus be detrimental to the UBI progressive agenda. But it seems that there is much unexplored conceptual space around whether UBI is insufficient, unnecessary, detrimental, or inadequate as a response to automation-related changes.

Similarly, new arguments and oppositions coming from grass-roots movements can add to the richness of the normative debate. I am thinking here of members of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Center for Community Change, Movement for Black Lives, National Guest Workers Alliance, Justice for Janitors, and Sex Workers Open University, among many others. Those who engage with UBI from a normative perspective would gain from engaging with those perspectives on UBI because—as I suggested in the section on race—they unsurprisingly correspond to gaps in the normative landscape. For instance, the topic of global justice and UBI—including the question of whether noncitizens should get UBI and the question of whether UBI should be implemented at the multinational level—is an area in need of more work. Many of the groups mentioned above are in fact committed to pushing for policies that integrate migrant workers and offer powerful arguments to make their case. For many, UBI's emancipatory and antipoverty potential would be seriously undermined if migrants were excluded and if transfers from the richest to the poorest at the global level were not also considered (Bidadanure 2017).

Establishing a Theory of Change Around Universal Basic Income

We would benefit from more clarity on the assumed theory of change when advocating for UBI (or arguing against it). In "A Capitalist Road to Communism," Van der Veen & Van Parijs (1986) attempted to indicate how we might progress to a just society through UBI. There are many potential routes from here to there, so this is an area where more work would be helpful. In an interesting recent contribution to this discussion, Gourevitch & Stanczyk (2018) worry that UBI proponents may be getting things backward—that the kind of UBI we would be able to get without organized labor would be too low. To think that the ruling and business class will simply acquiesce to an ambitious version of the proposal is naïve; it comes down to believing that they will consent

to their own expropriation. The left, the authors argue, should refocus its priorities on rebuilding the labor movement.

There is much room in which to provide responses and alternative perspectives on the path forward to a just society and whether it may include UBI or not. One interesting avenue is the potential of normative change—which I would define as the capacity to alter one's own conception of justice. There is evidence that UBI could help shift the way people think of what they owe each other. Two examples come to mind. The first is the Mincome experiment in Dauphin, Manitoba, in the 1970s, where an unconditional cash program with universal entitlement was piloted. Calnitsky (2016) finds that those involved in the experiment changed their perspective on public assistance—from viewing it moralistically to viewing it pragmatically. Similar results were found in recent research on the Alaskan dividend fund, a universal cash program financed through a sovereign wealth fund (Harstad Strategic Research 2017). Years into the program, Alaskans were far more likely to support the dividend than they were initially. A large majority of those surveyed expressed that they would subscribe to an income-tax-funded dividend to replace the existing program if the fund were to run dry. This is a very important finding in a state largely opposed to taxation. The examples of normative change introduced above potentially suggest that by experiencing universal entitlements and living in a society where everyone gets to rely on a regular stepping-stone, people could change their attitude toward assistance and redistribution in general. If normative change through UBI is a promising avenue, there are grounds for thinking UBI can be a truly transformative policy.

Scrutinizing the Specifics of Universal Basic Income

As always, the devil is in the details, and it is still necessary for political theorists to discuss the important value considerations underpinning seemingly small details of UBI implementation. The amount of the payment is a particularly important one. As Barry (2000) famously expressed, "Asking about the pros and cons of basic income as such [without setting a clear level] is rather like asking about the pros and cons of keeping a feline as a pet without distinguishing between a tiger and a tabby." Proponents and opponents alike also risk talking past each other if they discuss UBI without being clear on the policy contenders they are writing about and the precise package of policies UBI would complement to achieve the goals of a more just society. The comparison is never really UBI against everything else; sometimes it is UBI versus means-tested safety nets, at other times against Basic Capital, the job guarantee, the Negative Income Tax, or participation income. And in some discussions we hold everything else constant, while in others, we imagine other changes to the current policy context in combination. The task of the political theorist is then to show what specific role UBI can play as part of a broader package, and to ask what makes it instrumental or necessary for positive change. Attesting to the necessity of UBI does not have to come at the expense of supporting the programs without which our societies would be fundamentally unjust (Schemmel 2015). But since UBI would constitute a very large expense, defending the policy begs the question, "What will it replace?" Theorists writing about UBI must provide a clear answer. Clarity on what UBI would complement or replace is just as important as clarity on what is meant by UBI in the first place.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is the Faculty Director of the Stanford Basic Income Lab, a research center established in 2017 to provide an academic home for the study of UBI; to convene scholars, policy makers, business leaders, think tanks, nonprofits, and foundations around the politics and economics of

UBI; and to inform policy makers and practitioners about latest best practices. The lab has received funding by groups that seek to advance research in the United States on UBI. The author is also on the steering committee of the Economic Security Project, a network and philanthropic fund committed to advancing the debate on unconditional cash and basic income in the United States.

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