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Editorial

Jurgen De Wispelaere

Trinity College Dublin

Karl Widerquist

Tulane University

and

Loek Groot

Utrecht University

Following the successful launch of our inaugural issue in June 2006, the editors of *Basic Income Studies* (BIS) now settle into a method of operations as we introduce our second issue. This issue appears only a few weeks after the 2006 Congress of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) took place in Cape Town, South Africa, an event that marks the coming-of-age of the leading international network of basic income researchers and advocates.¹ The BIEN 2006 Congress offered BIS an opportunity to showcase the journal at a major international forum and award the first BIS Essay Prize to Michael Howard of University of Maine.

This issue contains a diverse range of basic income research. In addition to three original research articles, a historical note and a number of book reviews,

¹ The Basic Income European Network (BIEN), set up in 1986 by a group of basic income researchers of primarily European origin, has expanded globally and in 2004 renamed itself as the Basic Income *Earth* Network. The 2006 Cape Town Congress marks the first major event organized since BIEN's expansion.

this issue brings the first of a set of debates in which a number of expert commentators discuss a topical issue in basic income research. In this issue, guest-editor Loek Groot brings together five pieces debating the merits and drawbacks of conducting a basic income experiment.

1. Content of this Issue

In the first article, "Reconsidering the Exploitation Objection to Basic Income", Stuart White (University of Oxford) revisits his work of the past decade on the reciprocity principle and unconditional welfare. Based on his keynote lecture at the 2004 BIEN Congress in Barcelona, White considers how basic income advocates might respond to the objection that a basic income society fails to satisfy a deeply engrained social norm of reciprocity. White surveys three possible responses – the balance of fairness response, the balance of reciprocity response and the inherited asset response – which together might go a long way to counteracting any worries we might have about a basic income society failing to promote reciprocal behaviour. However, at the end of his article, White also cautions against those who believe that the arguments in favour of basic income outweigh *any* conditions attached to its receipt, since they fail to realize how welfare policy might promote principles of justice by influencing social behaviour more generally.

Next, in "Basic Income and the Problem of Cumulative Misfortune", Simon Wigley (Bilkent University) explores a non-paternalistic justification for basic income as a mechanism for counter-acting cumulative misfortune. Wigley engages with the philosophical strand of luck egalitarianism, which argues that we should as far as possible try to distinguish between outcomes from our actions, for which we are responsible, and outcomes grounded in circumstances beyond our responsibility. Wigley applies the distinction between choices and circumstances, originally proposed by Ronald Dworkin (2000), to the social and economic structure regulating employment and welfare in contemporary society. For Wigley, these structural features imply that our choices under those conditions reflect a series of gambles with misfortune accumulating over time. Basic income serves the important purpose of ensuring the odds are not cumulatively stacked against us with each new social or economic "gamble". Wigley claims the problem of cumulative misfortune offers an important justification for basic income even when we want to ensure people are held responsible for the choices they make; more importantly, however, cumulative misfortune also gives us a reason not to mortgage our basic income. Wigley's

argument thus offers a distinctively non-paternalistic argument to favour basic income over basic capital forms of a universal grant.

In the third article, “The Relative Cost of a Universal Basic Income and a Negative Income Tax”, Philip Harvey (Rutgers University) compares the cost of equivalent basic income and negative income tax schemes. Harvey takes issue with the common argument that unconditional basic income and negative income tax policies are equivalent schemes, because they can be constructed to have the same marginal and net effects on the distribution of income. However, basic income achieves this distribution by taxing everyone more and giving much of that money back in unconditional grants. He argues that this difference has important cost implications once we consider the concept of the gross cost of basic income. Moreover, Harvey calculates a basic income scheme would cost about twice as much as an equivalent negative income tax scheme. However, while the comparison between basic income and negative income tax schemes is insightful, Harvey’s real goal is to argue that there is a third, even better option (better in terms of cost-effectiveness), namely the proposal for direct job creation which the author has argued for elsewhere.

In addition to these three research articles, this issue of BIS publishes a short research note on “Basic Income in 1848”. Economic historians Guide Erreygers (University of Antwerp) and John Cunliffe (University of Warwick) offer the first English translation of a virtually unknown social constitution, originally drafted in Brussels in 1848, in which the idea of an unconditional basic income features prominently. This research note complements the growing body of evidence that basic income is an idea with a long pedigree in economic and political thought. Erreygers and Cunliffe present the full translation of the social constitution and discuss the historical and intellectual context in which the proposal originated.

This issue also features three book reviews: Almaz Zelleke (The New School) reviews Ailsa McKay’s *The Future of Social Security Policy*; Laura Bambrick (University of Oxford) discusses Clive Lord’s *A Citizens’ Income*; and José A. Noguera (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) offers the readers some critical reflections on Russell Muirhead’s *Just Work*.

2. Debate: Toward a Basic Income Experiment?

About a decade ago, Tony Atkinson wrote the following passage:

The NIT experiments are generally considered to have reduced the range of uncertainty surrounding the response of hours of work to taxation (...) there is no necessary reason to expect the results to apply

equally in a European context. Those interested in a [basic income] scheme in Europe might like to consider launching such an experimental research project, which would serve both to throw light on the economic effects of the reform and to demonstrate how it would work in reality. (Atkinson, 1995, p. 150)

A small group of social scientists have recently taken this consideration seriously, devoting two one-day workshops to the examination of the prospects for conducting a European Basic Income (BI) experiment. A first, ESF-funded workshop preceding the regular BIEN-conference in Barcelona 2004, was primarily geared at convincing the international BI community that launching an experiment is a good idea; the purpose of the second workshop, preceding the fifth Spanish BI network conference in Valencia 2005, was aimed at achieving the same goal with politicians from the Basque and Catalan regions. Neither workshops achieved their primary aim, but the ensuing debate has proved very instructive as an exercise to “think the unthinkable”, with the debate in this issue of BIS as an important offshoot.

Centred around the theme of “Toward a Basic Income Experiment?” this issue of BIS features a debate in which five contributions discuss different aspects of the experimental approach to basic income research. In his introductory comment, guest-editor Loek Groot (Utrecht University) offers a brief survey of the main reasons why a basic income experiment is a useful complement to existing research, focusing on the specific insights that only an experiment can bring. Next, Karl Widerquist (Tulane University) discusses the sort of questions a basic income experiment must address: for Widerquist getting the questions right is an often underestimated but crucial task when basic income researchers consider adopting an experimental approach.

In the next two contributions, the focus shifts from the general discussion of the benefits and constraints of basic income experiments to more specific considerations of research design, in particular alternatives to large-scale social or field experiments. Hans Peeters (Catholic University of Louvain) and Axel Marx (University College Antwerp) first discuss the findings of their “Win-for-Life” research, in which lottery winners receive a life-long grant (i.e., a basic income), and furthermore offer many arguments for using natural experiments to study basic income. In a similar vein, Jose Noguera (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and Jurgen De Wispelaere (Trinity College Dublin) argue in favour of using laboratory experiments in cases where social experiments are either not feasible, or perhaps even not desirable. While Peeters and Marx regard natural experiments such as Win-for-Life as essential complements to a social

experiment design, Noguera and De Wispelaere arguably take a more critical view about the use of large-scale field experiments to research basic income and believe laboratory research may well become the preferred design format.

In the final contribution, Ilkka Virjo (University of Tampere) then brings various strands of the previous comments together, arguing that many of the disputes amongst the authors are only skin-deep. Virjo warns us not to let disagreements about specifics crowd out the shared belief that experimental research represents a major gap in current basic income research that needs urgent filling. Virjo also offers a number of practical recommendations on how the discussion about the pros and cons of a basic income experiment should proceed next.

Written in an accessible manner, it is hoped that the different contributions in this debate will inspire further research as well as interest from practitioners and those on the political end of welfare reform. Although the original impetus was the exploration of a European basic income experiment, most contributions take a more general stance and discuss some important features of the experimental approach to the study of basic income. While some authors are clearly more optimistic about the prospects than others, all agree that basic income research should devote much more effort to the methods of experimental research when attempting to understand – perhaps even predict – how the institutionalisation of a basic income might impact on a variety of social and economic phenomena. What unites the contributors to this debate is the firm conviction that an experimental approach can offer invaluable insights that basic income researchers ignore at their own peril. The present debate therefore offers a plea to heed Atkinson's call for taking basic income experiments seriously, and invites scholars to further engage with the concerns briefly raised in the various comments.

3. Basic Income Studies 2006 Essay Prize, in association with BIEN

BIS awarded its first Essay Prize at the Eleventh Congress of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), which took place on 4th November 2006 in Cape Town, South Africa. The Essay Prize is instituted to encourage promising research on basic income and related policies and awarded to an essay that exemplifies a high standard of quality and original basic income research. The Essay Prize is organised in association with BIEN (www.basicincome.org) and USBIG (www.usbig.net), and the winners are chosen from essays presented on alternating years at the BIEN and USBIG Congresses. The 2006 Prize Essay was

selected by a panel of judges from the BIS Editorial Board and the BIEN Executive Committee, representing the fields of economics, politics, philosophy, and development studies.

The 2006 Essay Prize was awarded to Michael Howard's article entitled, "A NAFTA Dividend: A proposal for a guaranteed minimum income for North America." In his article, Michael Howard (University of Maine) applies Thomas Pogge's argument for a global resource dividend on a regional basis in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The paper is both novel and important, and it is well-developed both in terms of its comparison with the related proposal for a basic income for the European Union and in its examination of the specifics of the North American Free Trade Area. The winning essay will be published in an upcoming issue of *Basic Income Studies*.

Three other essays were awarded an Honourable Mention:

- "Good for women? Advantages and risks of basic income from a gender perspective" by Julieta Elgarte (Universidad Nacional de La Plata and Université Catholique de Louvain);
- "Why Switzerland? Basic Income and the Development Potential of Swiss Republicanism" by Eric Patry (University of St. Gallen); and
- "Australia's Disabling Income Support System" by Jennifer Mays (Queensland University of Technology).

These essays made important contributions to the examination of the argument over basic income from the perspective of feminism, republicanism, and the disability rights movement respectively. We wish the authors all the best in their future research.

References

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