

Democratizing Citizenship: Some Advantages of a Basic Income

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If the focus of interest is democratization, including women's freedom, a basic income is preferable to stakeholding. Prevailing theoretical approaches and conceptions of individual freedom, free-riding seen as a problem of men's employment, and neglect of feminist insights obscure the democratic potential of a basic income. An argument in terms of individual freedom as self-government, a basic income as a democratic right, and the importance of the opportunity not to be employed shows how a basic income can help break both the link between income and employment and the mutual reinforcement of the institutions of marriage, employment, and citizenship.

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The essays by Philippe Van Parijs on basic income and Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott on a stake (or capital grant) contain very valuable insights into both these ideas. They also provide arguments about feasibility and the best way to present stakeholding or a basic income to gain public support. I am going to focus on the reasons for advocating a basic income, and how a theoretical argument for it should be framed. By a "basic income" I am referring to the payment of a regular sum by a government to each individual (citizen) over an adult lifetime, with no conditions attached. "A stake" means a one-time unconditional capital grant from a government to all individuals (citizens) at, say, age twenty-one.¹

My view is that in the current political climate in the United States and Britain a stake is likely to prove more acceptable to public opinion than a basic income. The Blair government in Britain has already committed itself to a variant of stakeholding, the Baby Bond. Under this proposal the government will open a

capital account for each child at birth, to be available with the accrued interest when the child is eighteen. A basic income stands more chance of being introduced in Europe where, as Van Parijs illustrates in his essay, income support policies have already moved in a direction where a basic income, albeit probably of a partial character, could be seen as a logical “next step.”

Stakeholding, I agree, would be an advance over current arrangements in the United States and in Britain. But which is to be preferred: a capital grant or a basic income?

The answer to that question depends upon the reasons each of these ideas is being advocated. All ideas and policies are invariably put forward for a variety of different reasons and involve different hopes about what might be achieved. The reasons that eventually become most prominent in public debate then help shape practical outcomes. All human activities have unintended and unforeseen consequences, so we cannot be certain of the results of introducing either a basic income or stakeholding, not least since a great deal hinges on the level of the income or capital grant. But because the direction of change depends, among other things, on the reasons the change is advocated and what it is expected to achieve, the manner in which the theoretical case is made for a basic income or a stake is crucial.

I became interested in the idea of a basic income some years ago for two main reasons. First, because of the part that basic income could play in furthering democratization, that is, the creation of a more democratic society in which individual freedom and citizenship are of equal worth for everyone. The second, and closely related, reason is because of its potential in advancing women’s freedom. My argument is that in light of these reasons a basic income is preferable to a stake. A basic income is a crucial part of any strategy for democratic social change because, unlike a capital grant, it could help break the long-standing link between income and employment and end the mutual reinforcement of the institutions of marriage, employment, and citizenship. In the early twentieth century, Bertram Pickard declared that a state bonus (a forerunner of a basic income) “must be deemed the monetary equivalent of the right to land, of the right to life and liberty.”²² My conception of the democratic significance of a basic income is in the spirit of Pickard’s statement.

I will begin with some general arguments about why, if democratization is the goal, a basic income should be preferred to stakeholding, and then discuss the institution of employment and some questions about free-riding and the household.

A BASIC INCOME AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

My argument for a basic income shares the view of Van Parijs and Ackerman and Alstott that both a basic income and a stake expand individual freedom. However, our reasons for holding this view and our conceptions of individual freedom are very different. Basic income in Van Parijs’s *Real Freedom for All* and

stakeholding in Ackerman and Alstott's *The Stakeholder Society* are justified in terms of freedom as individual opportunity. Despite the many other differences between the form and content of their arguments, they agree about the conception of freedom to be promoted. I am concerned with another conception of freedom, individual freedom as self-government or autonomy, which I see as a political form and as central to democracy. In *Real Freedom for All* Van Parijs explicitly rejects any necessary connection between individual freedom and democracy; if there is a connection it is merely contingent.³

Individual freedom as autonomy or self-government has been neglected in the academic debates about stakeholding, but it is central to democracy. Modern (universal) democracy rests on the premise that individuals are born, or are naturally, free and are equal to each other. That is to say, they are self-governing or autonomous. If their self-government is to be maintained they must become citizens with rights, and interact within institutions that further autonomy. In this conception, freedom includes not only individual economic (private) opportunities, and the opportunity to participate in collective self-government, but also individual autonomy. The latter tends to be overlooked, in part because "democracy" has become identified with collective (national) self-government, especially through "free and fair elections." Other forms of government that deny or limit individuals' freedom fall out of the picture, such as government in marriage or the workplace. Insofar as self-government in these areas has received attention in political theory it has been directed to the workplace rather than to marriage, despite three centuries of feminist analysis that has highlighted the denial or limitation of wives' self-government and the political significance of the institution of marriage.

Individual self-government depends not only on the opportunities available but also on the form of authority structure within which individuals interact with one another in their daily lives. Self-government requires that individuals both go about their lives within democratic authority structures that enhance their autonomy and that they have the standing, and are able (have the opportunities and means), to enjoy and safeguard their freedom. A basic income—set at the appropriate level—is preferable to a stake because it helps create the circumstances for democracy and individual self-government.

Little attention has been paid in recent academic debates to the democratic significance of a stake or a basic income. Participants have tended to focus on such questions as social justice, relief of poverty, equality of opportunity, or promotion of flexible labor markets, rather than democracy. I do not want to downplay the importance of these questions, or suggest that they are irrelevant to democracy, but they involve different concerns and arguments than explicit attention to democratization. Academic discussion today is too often conducted in a series of separate compartments, each with its own frame of reference. In political theory, for instance, discussion of social justice has usually been undertaken by one set of theorists and democratic theory by others, with the two discussions seldom inter-

secting. The terms of the debate about stakeholding have tended to be confined within the framework provided by republicanism, libertarianism, utilitarianism, and liberalism. And, rather oddly in ostensibly “political” theory (though in keeping with the times), political argument is being displaced by neo-classical economic concepts and theories.

The narrowness of the debate is exacerbated by the striking absence of the arguments and insights provided by feminist scholars. Some feminists are opposed to a basic income but their arguments are absent too. Many years of scholarship about marriage, employment, and citizenship are virtually ignored in debates about basic income and stakeholding, and women’s freedom (self-government) and its implications for a democratic social transformation have hardly been mentioned.

Now that the nostrums of neo-classical economics enshrined in national and international policy making have begun to look a little tattered, the way is being opened for some new ideas. The idea of a basic income is not, strictly speaking, new; advocates usually trace it back to Tom Paine, and I have mentioned one of its earlier incarnations as a state bonus. But it is now being more widely discussed, and current circumstances (as I shall discuss below) offer a much more favorable environment than in years past. A basic income offers not just an alternative to highly bureaucratized public provision, and to the less eligibility doctrines that have been resurrected in recent years, but an opportunity to move out of the very well-worn ruts of current discussions of welfare policy. As Brian Barry has stated, “Basic income is not just another idea for rejigging the existing system.” Rather, it has the potential to lead to “a different way of relating individual and society.”⁴ Or, at least, it has that potential if it is argued for in terms of democratization and women’s freedom.

A DEMOCRATIC RIGHT

One reason for the democratic potential of a basic income is that it would provide an important opportunity, namely, *the freedom not to be employed*. Participants in the debates about a basic income tend to skirt round this distinctive implication, but, as I shall argue, it is central to its democratizing possibilities—providing that the income is set at an appropriate level. Neither the idea of a basic income nor a capital grant says anything about the level at which they should be set. The level proposed will depend on the reasons for supporting such proposals. My assumption is that, for a basic income to be relevant for democratization, it should be adequate to provide what I call a modest but decent standard of life. This is a level sufficient to allow individuals to have some control over the course of their lives, and to participate to the extent that they wish in the cultural, economic, social, and political life of their polity.

It might be objected that the level of basic income has more to do with practical feasibility than why the proposal should be supported. The objection always

raised when basic income or stakeholding is mentioned is that both schemes would cost far too much, but political imagination is required here.⁵ Besides, before turning to problems of implementation and cost we need to know *why* a basic income or stakeholding should be introduced at all, and what level of income or grant is entailed, given those reasons.

If interest in a basic income is, say, as a means to relieve poverty—a goal that I certainly share—then the level of income will differ from the level required when a basic income is advocated as part of a wider strategy for democratization. Van Parijs remarks that the fight for a basic income “is no game for purists.” But if we are going to be “tinkerers and opportunists”⁶ in attempts to get a basic income squarely on the political agenda, we need to understand what we are being opportunistic about, including wider goals and the level of the income. What is it that we shall be sacrificing if, as no doubt will be the case, compromises are necessary in practice? Perhaps my notion of a level of basic income sufficient for a modest but decent standard of life makes me a “purist,” but this is necessary to appreciate the differences between arguing for basic income as an element in a democratic social transformation or advocating it as a means of improving existing systems of income support. The latter is no doubt more politically feasible, but a great deal of democratic value in the idea of a basic income is lost if immediate political feasibility dominates the academic discussion.

The idea of a basic income has much less political and theoretical interest if the payment is assumed to be below subsistence level and seen merely as a way to alleviate poverty. Thus I would take issue with Van Parijs when he states that “the central case” for a basic income is as a “specific way of handling the joint challenge of poverty and unemployment.”⁷ To be sure, a basic income is a way of handling this challenge, but this is not, I would argue, the central reason to be interested in the idea. On the face of it, Ackerman and Alstott’s case for stakeholding seems much closer to my own argument. They focus not on poverty or unemployment but on citizenship: “Stakeholding is not a poverty program. It is a citizenship program.”⁸ A capital grant, they write, creates a “proud culture of free citizenship.”⁹ But the citizenship in question is economic citizenship; a stake is an “economic birthright.”¹⁰ In *The Stakeholder Society* they state that “just as one person—one vote expresses political citizenship, an equal stake expresses economic citizenship.”¹¹ The comparison between a basic income and universal suffrage is instructive, but I part company with Ackerman and Alstott in their bifurcation of citizenship.

When I first began to think about basic income I was alerted to the comparison between suffrage and a basic income by a little-noticed passage in T. H. Marshall’s famous *Citizenship and Social Class*: “To have to bargain for a living wage in a society which accepts the living wage as a social right is as absurd as to have to haggle for a vote in a society which accepts the vote as a political right.”¹² There are, however, two problems with Marshall’s argument that are pertinent here.

First, as is well known, he separated citizenship into three different components, civil, political, and social rights. But whether the division is into three parts, or Ackerman and Alstott's two-part economic and political citizenship, the result is the same: attention gets diverted into endless wrangles about which category is primary and which category can properly be seen as "rights" (do social rights count?). Second, Marshall linked standard of life to employment, by which he meant male employment, a matter I shall discuss shortly.

Van Parijs also refers to universal suffrage. In making his comment about purism and tinkering, he compares the fight for a basic income to the fight for universal suffrage, and neither, he states, is an "all-or-nothing affair." This is a curious comment. Countries with restricted suffrage—even restricted to the male half of the population—are often called "democracies," but that reveals less about the suffrage than about a more general wariness of the full implications of democratization. The suffrage is either universal, that is, encompassing all adults, or it is not. Partial enfranchisement means that there are qualifying conditions that only some of the adult population can meet (typically, owning property, being male, having a white skin, or belonging to a certain ethnic group). Where such eligibility conditions exist a vote is a privilege, not a right. Universal suffrage is democratic precisely because the vote ceases to be the privilege of a part of the population and becomes a right of all adults. To be universal, qualifying criteria for the suffrage have to be reduced to the bare minimum that everyone can meet with time, such as an age requirement and length of residence for naturalization, or that all can meet barring accidents of nature, such as being of sound mind.

My argument is that a basic income should be seen, like the suffrage, as a democratic right, or a political birthright. By a "democratic" right I have in mind a fundamental right in Henry Shue's sense of a "basic right." Basic rights "specify the line beneath which no one is to be allowed to sink." Rights are basic "if enjoyment of them is essential to the enjoyment of all other rights."¹³ Subsistence is one of Shue's basic rights, which he defines as "what is needed for a decent chance at a reasonably healthy and active life of more or less normal length, barring tragic interventions."¹⁴ Building on this line of argument, a basic income, at a level sufficient for a modest but decent standard of life, can be seen as a fundamental or democratic right. Such an income is necessary to enable all citizens to participate as fully as they wish in all aspects of the life of their society.

A basic income as a fundamental right can more reasonably be compared to the suffrage than can a stake. Citizenship and the suffrage are for life, and a basic income is a right that also exists over a citizen's lifetime, whereas a capital grant is a one-off payment at the beginning of adulthood. A stake provides young people with a valuable start, but what of the rest of their life as citizens? A basic income provides the lifelong security that helps safeguard other rights. Universal suffrage is the emblem of equal citizenship and underpins an orderly change of government through free and fair elections, so enhancing citizens' security. A basic

income is the emblem of full citizenship and provides the security required to maintain that political standing. Another way of making this point is that a basic income as a democratic right is necessary for individual freedom as self-government, a political freedom.

One of the major disagreements between Ackerman and Alstott and Van Parijs in their essays is over the latter's prohibition on the capitalization of (future) basic income into a single payment. Van Parijs minimizes the difference between basic income and a capital grant and remarks that the difference between the two "would be essentially annulled if the . . . recipients could freely borrow against their future basic income stream."¹⁵ I shall leave aside the issue of whether the future income stream can be used as collateral for a mortgage on a house, for example, and concentrate on prohibition against conversion of a basic income into a single lump-sum. The question is whether this constitutes a significant limitation on individual freedom.

Ackerman and Alstott argue that it does; a basic income stands in the way of individual freedom. Young people are hindered in achieving their goals if they cannot choose to capitalize their basic income as a capital grant. Ackerman and Alstott, therefore, see a basic income as "a fancy name for a restraint on alienation."¹⁶ The restriction on conversion, they argue, makes basic income into the equivalent of a "spendthrift trust," the beneficiary of which has to apply to a trustee, who administers the trust according to a set of conditions, in order to be able to use the money. They see basic income as a "universal spendthrift trust." To treat adults as potential spendthrifts "demeans their standing as autonomous citizens." In contrast a stake would "promote the real freedom of young adults on the threshold of life."

It might, but the most obvious problem is that a lump-sum capital grant could very easily and quickly be squandered or lost. Many responsible individuals could lose their capital even if they avoided Las Vegas or drugs. Small businesses have a high failure rate despite the best efforts of their owners, and stock markets crash. Of course, Ackerman and Alstott are aware of the problem of stakeblowing, and they supplement the individual stake with an old-age pension that is provided, unconditionally, as right of citizenship. But stakeholding plus a retirement pension are insufficient for democratic citizenship. Too long a period of citizens' lives is open to the vagaries of chance and the market.

For individuals to be able to decide in which form to receive their income means that entrepreneurial activities would no doubt be encouraged as well as trips to Las Vegas. Ackerman and Alstott see the risk of individuals losing their lump-sum as part of individual freedom. As they write in *The Stakeholder Society*, they are "interested in opportunities, not outcomes," and they present a basic income as a cushion for failure, whereas a stake "is launching pad for success."¹⁷ But the launch might well end in a crash. Equality of opportunity is a democratic principle, but the freedom involved in young people being able to convert a basic

income to a capital stake hardly looms large from the perspective of democratization and individual freedom as self-government.

Ackerman and Alstott also criticize a basic income on the grounds that it “encourages a short-term consumerist perspective.”¹⁸ The only sense in which, as far as I can see, a basic income might do this is if it were introduced at a level below that required for a modest but decent standard of life. A payment below subsistence level might be seen, at least by those well above the poverty level, as merely an extra bit of discretionary income available for immediate spending. But even this would be mitigated if the tax system came into play for those at higher income levels. There seems no good reason why a basic income implemented at the level I am suggesting would encourage consumerism. Indeed, one could make the opposite case; by breaking the link between income and the labor market it would allow individuals, if they so wished, to abstain from the race to accumulate ever more material goods and help combat the identification of freedom with consumerism.

EMPLOYMENT

A basic income would have two important consequences for democratization. First, it would allow individuals more easily to refuse to enter or to leave relationships that violate individual self-government or that involve unsafe, unhealthy, or demeaning conditions. It would, as Van Parijs states, endow “the weakest with bargaining power,”¹⁹ but the bargaining power is a by-product of the full standing as citizens that a basic income helps create. Basic income is not (as Marshall saw) about bargaining but self-government, rights, and democratic citizenship. A basic income would also support citizens’ participation in collective self-government by opening up opportunities for citizens to develop their political capacities and skills. A guaranteed standard of life would mean that participation in social and political life would not require heroic efforts on the part of any citizens.

The second consequence, and a crucial difference between basic income and stakeholding, is that a basic income would give citizens the freedom not to be employed. Both a basic income, if set at the appropriate level, and a capital grant would provide enlarged opportunities for individuals, but the opportunities provided by a basic income would be far wider than those offered by a stake, since the new opportunities would not be confined to the competitive market. A basic income, like a stake, would make it possible for anyone (at any point in their life, not merely while they are young) to go back to school, to retrain for a new occupation, or to open a business. But a basic income providing a modest but decent standard of living would do much more.

In *The Constitution of Liberty*, Friedrich von Hayek—like G. D. H. Cole from a very different point on the political spectrum—argued that employment fostered an outlook among employees that was an impediment to freedom. The employed, he wrote, are “in many respects . . . alien and often inimical to much that consti-

tutes the driving force of a free society.”²⁰ His solution was that there should be as many gentlemen of private means as possible to counteract the deleterious effect of employment. In effect, such gentlemen have large basic incomes, albeit not provided by a government. At a very much lower level of resources a basic income democratizes the freedom open to a gentlemen of private means to spend time in scholarly pursuits, good works, writing poetry, cultivating friendships, hunting, or being a drone or a wastrel. A basic income would allow individuals at any time to do voluntary or political work, for example, to learn to surf, to write or paint, to devote themselves to family life, or to have a quiet period of self-reassessment or contemplation.

By opening up this range of opportunities and uncoupling income and standard of life from employment, a basic income has the potential both to encourage critical reassessment of the mutually reinforcing structures of marriage, employment, and citizenship and to open the possibility that these institutions could be remade in a new, more democratic form. A capital grant given to young people with the aim of assisting individual economic success lacks the same potential. In *The Stakeholder Society*, Ackerman and Alstott argue that a stake encourages individuals, in a way that a basic income cannot, to reflect upon what they want to do with their lives, and appraise their situation. “Civic reflection” and attention to “the fate of the nation” become possible when economic anxieties are lifted.²¹ A “purer form of patriotism” will arise out of the “simple gratitude to the nation” that citizens will feel as they think about their capital grant and the debt that they owe to their country for the economic citizenship that comes with stakeholding.²²

Patriotism and gratitude, however, have only a tenuous connection to individual freedom. Provision of a one-time capital grant will no doubt encourage individuals to consider what courses of action are open to them, and might even foster reflection on the debt they owe to their country. But it seems implausible that it would help promote reflection on the political implications of the structural connections between marriage, employment, and citizenship. Both the wide variety of opportunities made possible when employment becomes truly voluntary and the fact that women’s freedom would be greatly enhanced mean that, unlike a stake, a basic income has the potential to open the door to institutional change—providing that democratization is at the forefront of discussion and that feminist arguments are taken seriously.

The freedom not to be employed runs counter to the direction of much recent public policy and political rhetoric (especially in Anglo-American countries, though the policies are international), and this makes stakeholding more palatable than basic income in the current political climate. The effect of such policies and rhetoric is to draw even tighter the long-standing link between employment and citizenship, at the very time when a reassessment has been made possible by changing circumstances. The institution of employment is a barrier to democratic freedom and citizenship in two ways. First, economic enterprises have an undem-

ocratic structure, a point that I shall not pursue here.²³ Second, as feminist scholars have demonstrated, the relationship between the institutions of marriage, employment, and citizenship has meant that the standing of wives as citizens has always been, and remains, problematic.

The Anglo-American social insurance system was constructed on the assumption that wives not only were their husbands' economic dependents but lesser citizens whose entitlement to benefits depended on their private status, not on their citizenship. Male "breadwinners," who made a contribution from their earnings to "insure" that they received benefits in the event of unemployment or sickness, and in their old age, were the primary citizens. Their employment was treated as *the* contribution that a citizen could make to the well-being of the community. Ackerman and Alstott acknowledge this in their criticism of "workplace justice,"²⁴ and their recognition that unconditional retirement pensions would be particularly important for the many older women whose benefits still largely derive from their husbands' employment record.²⁵ That is to say, only paid employment has been seen as "work," as involving the tasks that are the mark of a productive citizen and contributor to the polity. Other contributions, notably all the work required to reproduce and maintain a healthy population and care for infants, the elderly, the sick, and infirm—the caring tasks, most of which are not paid for and are undertaken by women—have been seen as irrelevant to citizenship.

FREE-RIDING AND THE HOUSEHOLD

The debates about basic income also center on the figure of a man in—or avoiding—paid employment. This is very clear in one of the major criticisms of, and apprehensions about, the idea of a basic income; that is, that it would encourage free-riding and idleness. Free-riders breach the principle of reciprocity by obtaining the fruits of the efforts of others and contributing nothing themselves in return; a basic income, it is charged, would "inspire a segment of the able population . . . to abjure work for a life of idle fun."²⁶ But who is being seen as so prone to idleness and fun? The assumption guiding the discussion of basic income is that the problem is about men and employment.²⁷ A much greater problem about male free-riding to which a basic income is directly relevant, but a problem about the household, not employment, is therefore ignored.

Van Parijs appears to be an exception to the prevailing view of free-riding. Unlike most other participants in discussions of basic income he has noticed that free-riding exists "on a massive scale" in household interactions.²⁸ But who are the free-riders in the household? Barry notes that full-time housewives can be seen as free-riders.²⁹ But they can only be seen in that way if "work" is taken to mean paid employment.³⁰ As feminist scholars have emphasized for a very long time, housewives are working (unpaid) by undertaking the necessary caring work. Given the major contribution they already make for no monetary return at

all, wives (women) are hardly likely to be the target of the objection that a basic income would lead to idleness and fun.

The majority of wives are now in some form of paid employment, but their labor force participation is usually different from that of men. This reflects the legacy of a wage-system that enshrined the belief that husbands (men) not wives (women) are “breadwinners.”³¹ Many more women than men work part-time, and women earn less than men. The private and public sexual division of labor, that is to say, continues to be structured so that men monopolize full-time, higher paying, and more prestigious paid employment, and wives do a disproportionate share of unpaid work in the home. Given the structure of institutions and social beliefs, this appears as a “rational” arrangement. The mutual reinforcement of marriage and employment explains why husbands can take advantage of the unpaid work of wives and avoid doing their fair share of the caring work. That is why there is massive free-riding in the household—by husbands.

Neither free-riding by husbands nor its scale is usually acknowledged in discussions of basic income and stakeholding. This is because marriage and the household rarely enter the argument. The narrow parameters of discussion and the influence of the assumptions of neo-classical economics preclude attention to institutional structures and their interrelationships. Van Parijs is an exception in recognizing that a problem of free-riding exists in households, but his neo-classical theoretical apparatus leaves him unable to acknowledge that the problem is one of men (husbands) and the work of caring for household members. His argument is that free-riding arises merely because of differences in individual tastes or preferences. Free-riding, Van Parijs states, occurs when benefits enjoyed by both partners in a household are produced by only one of them, the partner who happens to care most about the particular benefit. His example is that the partner who most strongly prefers tidiness will make sure that the home is tidy.

“Tidiness” is part of the more general work of housekeeping, and there is abundant empirical evidence that shows that the female partner is most likely to do the housework, including tidying up. The empirical data do not show this pattern just by chance—female partners do not by some quirk happen to prefer tidiness more strongly than their male partners. The institution of marriage and social beliefs about what it means to be a “wife” or “husband” have vanished in Van Parijs’s analysis, and there are merely two individuals, indistinguishable except for their different tastes for tidy surroundings. His theoretical approach in *Real Freedom for All* precludes analysis of the structure of relations between the sexes, and a crucial area of debate is, therefore, removed from discussion of basic income.

Indeed, some advocates of a basic income argue that it would make it easier for women to do “their” work in the home. Van Parijs remarks that some women would probably use their basic income to “lighten the ‘double shift’ at certain periods of their lives.”³² But, he continues, “who can sincerely believe that working subject to the dictates of a boss for forty hours a week is a path to liberation?”

One can have grave doubts on the latter score—but also ask, first, whether working for a husband at home is the right path either and, second, ask why *men* might not use their basic income to take on their fair share of the caring work?

Now is the time to ask the second question. The conditions under which the institution of employment and the Anglo-American social insurance system were constructed have now crumbled. “Old economy” male breadwinner jobs are being swept away in global economic restructuring and “downsizing.” New jobs have been created but many are low paid, lacking benefits, and temporary, and economic insecurity is widespread. Views about femininity, masculinity, and marriage are changing too, but since we are still in the midst of all these changes it is hard to know what the eventual outcome will be. Still, times of rapid change provide opportunities to investigate new ideas and look critically at old arrangements—including the moral hazard of institutions that give incentives to men to avoid their fair share of the unpaid work of caring for others. It has now become possible to rethink the connections between income and paid employment; between marriage, employment, and citizenship; between the private and public division of labor; and between caring work and other work—and to reconsider the meaning of “work.” But such rethinking requires a different approach from that taken by many participants in the debate about stakeholding and basic income. This is crucial if proper account is to be taken of women’s freedom, which has received rather short shrift in discussions of a basic income.

As early as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft argued in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that rights, citizenship, and full standing for women required economic independence, whether a woman was married or single.³³ As Ackerman and Alstott emphasize, a capital grant would be a step in this direction, but a basic income would for the first time provide all women with lifelong economic independence. Thus feminists might be expected strongly to support the introduction of a basic income.³⁴

Yet this is not the case. Some feminists are critical of the idea because they fear a basic income would reinforce the existing sexual division of labor and women’s lesser citizenship. They argue that the provision of an income without having to engage in paid employment would, in light of women’s position in the labor market combined with lingering beliefs about the proper place and tasks of women and men, give women an even greater incentive to undertake more unpaid caring work in the household, and, conversely, men would have another incentive to free-ride. A basic income, that is, would reinforce existing limitations on women’s freedom.³⁵

This objection illustrates the importance of the reasons advanced for supporting a basic income. The probability of feminist fears being borne out is higher, for example, when the argument is made that to avoid weakening the “incentive to work” a basic income should be below subsistence level. This “incentive” is promoted with men and paid employment in mind. A basic income at this level pro-

vides no incentive for wives to “work” (i.e., enter paid employment); rather, it would encourage them to do more unpaid caring work. Again, to support basic income on the grounds that it would improve the living standards of the poorest sectors of the population does not promote consideration of the structural connections between marriage, employment, and citizenship, and the private and public sexual division of labor. Without the debates about basic income being informed by feminist arguments, and a concern for democratization (and genuine democratization necessarily includes women’s freedom and standing as citizens), the discussion will revolve around ways of tinkering with the existing system rather than encouraging thinking about how it might be made more democratic.

Putting democratization at the center requires attention to institutional structures, especially the institutions of marriage and employment. For instance, Ackerman and Alstott remark in *The Stakeholder Society* that the “case for stakeholding does not ultimately rest on its effects on employment, marriage, or crime. It rests on each American’s claim to respect as a free and equal citizen.”³⁶ However (leaving crime aside), the respect accorded to women and men as free and equal citizens has a great deal to do with the institutions of marriage and employment. It is not possible to understand women’s lesser citizenship, as Ackerman and Alstott show in their discussion of social security, without understanding the relationship between their position as wives and men’s position as workers.

Similarly, Van Parijs argues that while “a defensible long-term vision” of an unconditional basic income at the highest sustainable level is vital, nevertheless more limited and politically feasible proposals are also essential. He states that a household-based guaranteed minimum income “would definitely be a major change in the right direction”³⁷—but the right direction according to which reasons? Household-based schemes disregard not only all the problems about the sexual division of labor, and the fact that women earn less than men, but also income distribution *within* households. Can it be confidently assumed that income would be distributed equally between husband and wife? A basic income is important for feminism and democratization precisely because it is paid not to households but *individuals as citizens*.

A focus on individuals does not imply resort to the atomistic individualism of neo-classical economics. The problem of women’s self-government and full standing as citizens is visible only when individuals are conceptualized within the context of social relations and institutions. A household-based basic income allows the problem of marriage, employment, and citizenship to be avoided since wives (women) disappear into the category of “the family” or “household.” To treat a basic income as a payment to households rather than individuals ignores the question of who performs the work of caring for household members. That is, it is tacitly assumed that reciprocity exists and that free-riding is only a problem about men avoiding employment.

This assumption is nicely illustrated by the picture of a male surfer on the cover of *Real Freedom for All*. In academic discussions the surfer is used to represent non-contributors. But in the popular political imagination and the media other symbols of free-riding are present, such as the African American “welfare queen” or, more recently, the “illegal immigrant” or the “asylum seeker.”³⁸ The figure of the surfer not only obscures the problem for democratization of popular attitudes embodied in these other symbols but also obliterates the systematic avoidance of one form of contribution, the vital caring work, by men who are *in employment*.

Nor do the numerous suggestions for conditions to be placed on payment of a basic income as a solution to free-riding—Atkinson’s “participation income” is a well-known example³⁹—get to grips with free-riding by men in the household. While the notion of a “contribution” may be broadened to include, for example, the work of caring for others, as in Atkinson’s proposal, this is insufficient to focus attention on the structural problem of the connections between marriage, employment, and free-riding by husbands. While payment of a basic income to a husband for his “contribution” through employment and to his wife for her “contribution” in the home is to recognize that she does indeed make a socially valuable contribution, this does little to calm the fears of some feminists that a basic income will merely reinforce women’s lesser standing and the idleness of husbands in the household.

An adequate discussion of free-riding and reciprocity in debates about basic income is hampered by, on the one hand, the prevalence of an economic or contractual sense of “reciprocity.” In this interpretation of the term the recipient must make a contribution directly in return for every benefit received, a view that magnifies the problem of free-riding. On the other hand, by ignoring the household, participants in the debate tacitly presuppose that “reciprocity” in another sense, that is, mutual aid, characterizes domestic interactions.⁴⁰ To refocus the debate about basic income around its significance for democratization would mean replacing the preoccupation with one kind of free-riding with an examination of how to reinforce reciprocity in the sense of mutual aid across the social order. And that, in turn, would require widening the terms of debate, engaging with the large body of feminist analysis, moving away from the assumptions of neo-classical economics, and developing a political argument.

In conclusion I want to make two further points. First, schemes for a conditional basic income raise another problem. In effect, these proposals declare irrelevant the comparison of basic income with universal suffrage as a democratic right. The criteria for eligibility for a conditional income may be very generously interpreted, but there are always likely to be individuals who fail, or refuse, to meet the conditions. What, then, is their status? Are they, like individuals who lack the franchise, to become second-class citizens? All the time that a basic income is conditional, a privilege not a right, the problem of second-class and lesser citizenship cannot be avoided. The use that citizens make of their freedom

is open to no guarantees. Democratic self-government entails that they decide for themselves how and when they will contribute, or whether they will contribute at all. If the cost of improving democratic freedom for all citizens is the existence of some drones, then, I submit, it is a cost worth paying.

Second, let me emphasize that a basic income is not a panacea. In itself, a basic income would not, for instance, provide an adequate stock of affordable housing, sufficient good quality education, adequate health care, an end to racism, or violence-free neighborhoods. Yet if a genuinely democratic society in which the freedom of women is as important as that of men remains an aspiration, it is hard to see that there is a substitute for an unconditional basic income.

NOTES

1. I am focusing on adults and citizens here; a more complete account would also discuss non-citizen residents and children.

2. Bertram Pickard, *A Reasonable Revolution: Being a Discussion of the State Bonus Scheme—A Proposal for a National Minimum Income* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1919), 21.

3. Philippe Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All: What (if Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8-9, 15-17. Van Parijs's argument is libertarian or, more exactly, a real libertarian argument that departs in some significant respects from typical libertarianism. I comment further on Van Parijs in Carole Pateman, *Freedom and Democratization: Why Basic Income Is to Be Preferred to Basic Capital*, in *The Ethics of Stakeholding*, edited by Keith Dowding, Jurgen De Wispelaere, and Stuart White (Palgrave, forthcoming).

4. Brian Barry, *The Attractions of Basic Income*, in *Equality*, edited by Jane Franklin (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 1997), 161.

5. Others are much more qualified than I to discuss this aspect, but how public monies are allocated—guns or butter—is as much a political as an economic question. Bruce Ackerman and Anne L. Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), provide a detailed discussion of how a capital grant could be financed through a wealth tax. However, neither wealth taxes nor income taxes are popular at present, so I would suggest consideration of an alternative, hypothecated form of taxation, such as a Tobin tax on speculative financial trading, or a tax on polluting and other environmentally destructive activities. Or, even better, I would advocate far fewer guns and much more butter.

6. Van Parijs, *Basic Income: A Simple and Powerful Idea for the Twenty-first Century*, *Politics & Society* 32, no. 1 (2004): 7-40.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Ackerman and Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society*, 197.

9. Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott, *Why Stakeholding?* *Politics & Society* 32, no. 1 (2004): 41-60.

10. Claus Offe, *The German Welfare State: Principles, Performance and Prospectives after Unification*, *Thesis Eleven* 63 (2000): 11-37, also argues in terms of universal economic citizenship in his proposal for sabbatical accounts, which he presents as a gradualist and experimental approach to basic income.

11. Ackerman and Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society*, 33.

12. T. H. Marshall, Citizenship and Social Class, in *Sociology at the Crossroads and Other Essays* (London: Heineman, 1963), 116.
13. Henry Shue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 18, 19.
14. *Ibid.*, 23.
15. Van Parijs, Basic Income, 9.
16. Ackerman and Alstott, Why Stakeholding?
17. Ackerman and Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society*, 24, 215.
18. Ackerman and Alstott, Why Stakeholding?
19. Van Parijs, Basic Income.
20. Friedrich von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 119.
21. Ackerman and Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society*, 185.
22. *Ibid.*, 186, see also 43-44.
23. See Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970); *Id.*, Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2002): 20-53.
24. Ackerman and Alstott, Why Stakeholding?
25. Ackerman and Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society*, 145-46.
26. Elizabeth Anderson, Optional Freedoms, in Symposium: 'Delivering a Basic Income,' *Boston Review* October-November (2000): 16.
27. The consequence for employment rates of a basic income is hard to determine in the abstract. On the one hand, it would act as a disincentive for individuals to be employed, since, ex hypothesis, they could live on the income. On the other hand, precisely because the income is paid whether or not individuals are employed, they could enjoy a better standard of life by taking a low-paid job than living on a basic income alone. It would thus act as an incentive to employment and improve the flexibility of the labor market.
28. Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All*, 143.
29. Brian Barry, Real Freedom and Basic Income, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 4 (1996): 242-76, 245.
30. McKay and VanEvery remark that critics of the free-rider objection argue in masculinist terms which ignore the implicit relegation of family careers to this category: Ailsa McKay and Jo VanEvery, Gender, Family, and Income Maintenance: A Feminist Case for Citizens Basic Income, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State, and Society* 7, no. 2 (2000): 281.
31. For a discussion of support for the legacy in the Netherlands, see Janneke Plantenga, J. Schippers, and J. Siegers, Towards an Equal Division of Paid and Unpaid Work: The Case of the Netherlands, *Journal of European Social Policy* 9, no. 2 (1999): 99-110.
32. Philippe Van Parijs, A Basic Income for All, in Symposium: 'Delivering a Basic Income,' *Boston Review*, October/November (2000): 4-8, 7.
33. Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, in *Political Writings*, edited by Janet Todd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, [1792] 1993).
34. For some examples of discussion of the importance of a basic income for women, see Tony Walter, *Basic Income: Freedom from Poverty, Freedom to Work* (London: Marion Boyers, 1989); Hermione Parker, *Citizen's Income and Women*, BIRG discussion paper 2 (London: Citizens Income, 1993); McKay and VanEvery, Gender, Family, and Income Maintenance, 266-84; Ailsa McKay, Arguing for a Citizen's Basic Income: A Feminist Perspective, paper presented at the 2002 annual meeting of the American Political Science

Association, Boston; and on stakeholding, Anne L. Alstott, Good for Women in Symposium: 'Delivering a Basic Income,' *Boston Review*, 2000 October-November.

35. Like Ingrid Robeyns, Will a Basic Income Do Justice to Women? *Analyse and Kritik: Zeitschrift für Sozialtheorie* 23, no. 1 (2001): 88-105, I have frequently encountered this objection when I have talked about a basic income. It is less often seen in academic discussions.

36. Ackerman and Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society*, 209.

37. Van Parijs, Basic Income, 25.

38. My thanks to Harvey Goldman for his comments about the surfer at a talk I gave at the University of California San Diego in 2001.

39. Anthony Atkinson, The Case for a Participation Income, *Political Quarterly* 67 (1996): 67-70. For a conditional stake see Robert Goodin, Sneaking Up on Stakeholding, in *The Ethics of Stakeholding*, edited by Keith Dowding, Jurgen De Wispelaere, and Stuart White.

40. To apply reciprocity in the first sense to the household would have dire consequences, not least for infants. Political theorists in an earlier era saw reciprocity in my second sense as the primary law of nature. That is, they recognized that a social order is a system of generalized mutual aid and mutual forbearance, or a system of reciprocity. If reciprocity in this sense of the term breaks down, social order begins to disintegrate.

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