

**BOSTON REVIEW**

**FORUM 2**

**Work**

**Inequality**

**Basic  
Income**

**Brishen Rogers, Philippe van  
Parijs, Dorian Warren, Tommie  
Shelby, Diane Coyle**



# Work

# Inequality

# Basic Income

**Editors-in-Chief** Deborah Chasman, Joshua Cohen

**Managing Editor** Adam McGee

**Senior Editor** Chloe Fox

**Associate Web and Production Editor** Avni Majithia-Sejpal

**Poetry Editors** Timothy Donnelly, BK Fischer, Stefania Heim

**Fiction Editor** Junot Díaz

**Editorial Assistants** Tynan Stewart, Holly Winkelhake

**Poetry Readers** Andy Nicole Bowers, William Brewer, Ally Covino, Julie Kantor, Charlotte Lieberman, Becca Liu, Nick Narbutas, Diana Khoi Nguyen, Eleanor Sarasohn, Sean Zhuraw

**Publisher** Louisa Daniels Kearney

**Marketing Associate** Anne Boylan

**Outreach** Kira Brunner Don

**Finance Manager** Anthony DeMuisis III

**Marketing Assistant** Jih-Chieh Yun

**Distributor** Disticor Magazine Distribution Services  
800-668-7724, info@disticor.com

**Printer** Quad Graphics

**Board of Advisors** Swati Mylavarapu & Derik Schrier (co-chairs), Archon Fung, Deborah Fung, Richard M. Locke, Timothy Lyster, Jeff Mayersohn, Jennifer Moses, Scott Nielsen, Martha C. Nussbaum, Robert Pollin, Rob Reich, Hiram Samel, Kim Malone Scott

**Graphic Design** Zak Jensen

**Typefaces** Druk and Adobe Pro Caslon

#### Permissions

Tommie Shelby's "A Blow to Ghettoization" is adapted from *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* by Tommie Shelby. Copyright © 2016 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Jen Fitzgerald's "Glossary of Terms" and "Bargaining" are reprinted from her book *The Art of Work* (2016) with permission of the author and Noemi Press.

Jill Magi's "SPEECH" includes text adapted from Elizabeth A.

Povinelli's *Economies of Abandonment* (Duke University Press, 2011).

To become a member or subscribe, visit:

[bostonreview.net/membership/](http://bostonreview.net/membership/)

For questions about subscriptions, call 877-406-2443 or email [custsvc\\_bostonrv@fulcoinc.com](mailto:custsvc_bostonrv@fulcoinc.com). For advertising questions, call 617-324-1325 or email [ads@bostonreview.net](mailto:ads@bostonreview.net).

*Boston Review*

PO Box 425786, Cambridge, MA 02142  
617-324-1360

ISSN: 0734-2306

Authors retain copyright of their own work.  
© 2017, Boston Critic, Inc.

**Editor's Note**

*Joshua Cohen*

5

FORUM

**Basic Income in a Just Society**

*Brisben Rogers*

11

**Will Basic Income Hurt the Cause?**

30

*Patrick Diamond*

**Expanding the Goal of Innovation**

35

*Annette Bernhardt*

**A Blow to Ghettoization**

41

*Tommie Shelby*

**The Overdue Next Step**

47

*Peter Barnes*

**Basic Income Convergence**

51

*Juliana Bidadanure*

**Reparations and Basic Income**

56

*Dorian Warren*

**An Answer to the Wrong Question**

61

*Diane Coyle*

**Real Freedom**

66

*Philippe van Parijs*

**Redistributing Wealth and Power**

72

*Connie Razza*

77	<b>The Silicon Valley Case</b> <i>Roy Bahat</i>	
81	<b>A New Social Contract</b> <i>David Rolf &amp; Corrie Watterson</i>	
87	<b>The Limits of Basic Income</b> <i>Brishen Rogers</i>	
	<b>ESSAYS</b>	
	<b>A Jobless Utopia</b> <i>David McDermott Hughes</i>	93
	<b>The Right to Strike</b> <i>James Gray Pope, Ed Bruno, &amp; Peter Kellman</i>	107
	<b>Why Coretta Scott King Fought for a Job Guarantee</b> <i>David Stein</i>	127
	<b>POETRY</b>	
	<b>From <i>Imperial Abhorrences (&amp; Other Abominations)</i></b> <i>Ammiel Alcalay</i>	9
	<b>Glossary of Terms</b> <i>Jen Fitzgerald</i>	125
	<b>From <i>SPEECH</i></b> <i>Jill Magi</i>	138
	<b>Bargaining</b> <i>Jen Fitzgerald</i>	141
	<b>Contributors</b>	142

---

## Editor's Note

*Joshua Cohen*

WHEN YOU ARE EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD in the United States, you get a right to vote. That right comes to you regardless of sex, race, religion, class, or gender identity. You can lose the right in some places if you commit a felony, and there are lots of efforts currently underway to make it harder to exercise. But for now you do not have to earn it. Similarly with the right to a jury trial. Or our rights of association, religious worship, or expression. So the idea of universal entitlements is familiar.

When we extend the idea to economic resources, however, skepticism sets in. For many people, the idea of a universal right to a basic level of income seems deeply misguided. Many people, but not all. A long and intellectually diverse tradition, including Thomas Paine, Friedrich Hayek, and Martin Luther King, Jr., has embraced some version of a basic income. In 2000 *Boston Review* published an article by Belgian political theorist Philippe van Parijs explaining and defending basic income, often called UBI (universal basic income), that generated a wide-ranging debate. But with a few notable exceptions, attention to basic income has come from the world of theory, not the world of politics and policy.

Now something very different is happening. From Switzerland to eastern Kenya, from Manitoba to Oakland, the idea of a basic income is on the table as a serious policy idea and a focus of organizing efforts.

Why this growing interest? Partly for the same reasons that theorists have been drawn to basic income: it ensures everyone a claim on the benefits of common assets, such as land or other natural resources; gives substance to civil and political liberties; protects against extreme vulnerability; or, by cushioning against economic calamity, frees people to explore risky innovations.

But the attention to basic income also reflects a range of current concerns about income and job loss due to technology, deepening economic inequality, the sheer costs of administering conditional and in-kind programs, and the perceived vulnerability of conditional (means-tested) programs.

Leading the discussion, Brishen Rogers delineates a case for basic income. Focused on the United States, Rogers embraces a model in which a basic income guarantee is one component of a more comprehensive program, including a “revamped public sector and new and stronger regulations around work.” For Rogers, basic income would provide an exit option from bad jobs, abusive relationships, and limited opportunities—in short, protections against political and economic subordination. A broader social-democratic setting is essential. Cut off from other essential policy initiatives, basic income could, Rogers argues, be a disaster.

The responses to Rogers’s article explore the benefits basic income promises in fostering freedom and alleviating poverty and inequality, the need for basic income to be embedded in a more comprehensive program, and, if such a program is possible, whether basic income is really needed. As the debate about basic income moves from theory to practice, we hope that this *Boston Review* forum will model the serious policy and political debate that democracy depends on.

In this forum, two additional issues emerge that have an important place in the debate about basic income—issues about work and power.

Some of the contemporary attention to basic income is animated by worries about a jobless future. In his fantastic book *Rise of the Robots* (2015), Martin Ford ties the case for basic income to job and income destruction driven by artificial intelligence. And not just destruction of repetitive work, but also the work of pathologists, radiologists, and legal researchers. Ford's argument is important but too speculative to be convincing. For the relevant future, we should assume a world in which people continue to work (often long hours) alongside machines.

Moreover, we should be wary of arguments for basic income as a substitute for income from work. Work is important to people, and not simply as a means to income. In his utopian novel *Looking Backward* (1887), Edward Bellamy imagines the world in the year 2000. He describes a system of rationally organized economic activity, with productivity unleashed through improved coordination and resources—including human capacities—fully employed for the common good. Aside from the implausibility of the scheme, the world of work in Bellamy's imagined future is depressingly dreary. As British designer and poet William Morris put it, “the true incentive to useful and happy labor is and must be pleasure in the work itself.”

I know what Morris means. As a researcher I have spent lots of time in mostly Chinese factories over the past four years, watching people do very productive and very tedious assembly line work, with little apparent pleasure in the work itself. The work is not made more pleasurable when robots join the production team.

David Hughes wrestles with these issues about the importance of work in his ethnographic meditation on La Zarzuela, an Andalusian farming community now subsidized by windmills. He resists an easy celebration of the traditional work of farming, but he also hesitates

to endorse the world of unemployed men and women, freed from toil, drinking beer and coffee in a community dominated by revenue-producing machines, unsure what to do with their time.

Alongside our conversations about basic income, then, we need a comparably serious discussion about how to create jobs that enable people—perhaps working alongside automated systems and robots—to find pleasure in the work itself. Of course having that conversation about decent work would be easier with a basic income in place. When people have greater income security, they are in a position to reject deadening work. And if they reject deadening work, then maybe some collective energy will go into figuring out how to enliven it.

The second issue is power. “Power,” Frederick Douglass said, “concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” A basic income might create more decent conditions of work and would benefit working people. But the power of workers is now profoundly limited, both by income disparities and by the desperate state of collective organization (especially unions). Rogers has some ideas about labor law reforms, and the issue of organization and power is the focus of the essay by James Gray Pope, Ed Bruno, and Peter Kellman. The key to power, they argue, is the right to strike.

Of course, faced with our current calamities, discussions about ambitious political projects are hard to have. With voting rights themselves under assault, the idea that we should be thinking about a more *expansive* set of unconditional rights may seem delusional.

Or maybe not. We are in a fight about the future, and it is important to be clear about the larger purpose of that fight. Suppose, then, we think that we are aiming at a freer society, in which greater economic security reduces vulnerability and subordination, and a society in which people not only work for income but take pleasure in the work they do. That is not a bad start in describing a world worth fighting for.