

Towards Basic Income: On the Non-Working Ethos

Keng-Han Lin

Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica

E-mail: kenghan@yahoo.com.tw

Abstract

This article attempts to explore the kind of social ethos needed to make feasible the institution of a basic income. Philippe van Parijs, the main advocate of basic income, has noted that if some people opt out of work as a result of receiving a basic income, the social system will be rendered less stable. To resolve the incentive problem, he proposed promoting an ethos of work, meaning that while individuals might be permitted to not engage in paid work, they would nonetheless retain a willingness to engage in paid work thanks to a number of non-institutionalized norms. However, this article argues that van Parijs pays insufficient attention to differences between the stability and accessibility of an institution. The former explores how to sustain an institution after it is established; the latter how to promote an institution prior to its establishment. Moreover, the ethos of work is related to the stability of the basic income institution. If this argument is correct, in promoting the basic income system, it will also be necessary to establish an ethos which allows people to not engage in paid work, that is, the ethos of non-work, which can change the current work ethics to improve people's acceptance of basic income. Moreover, this paper claims that a country insisting on value neutrality can only adopt certain viewpoints as part of its rationale in promoting a non-working ethos, while allowing some viewpoints to propagate in society.

Key Words: basic income, work, the working ethos, non-working ethos, value neutrality