

## **Basic Income as Participatory Parity**

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## 1 Introduction

One common assumption when talking about basic income is that an unconditional basic income would, or at least could, have an activating role with regards to people in society. This would be so because the basic income would, to a certain amount, “free” those who are worst off in society from concentrating all their energy on struggling for money, food, transportation and with bureaucracy etc. This is all done under the assumption that a secured income would encourage people to take part in society better than forcing them through penalties. This line of thought is usually bracketed within a framework of material economic justice. What usually is less clear is if an unconditional basic income could adjudicate other claims of justice such as identity-based claims or other political claims?

The aim of this paper is two-fold. First I intend to show how a basic income could adjudicate other justice based claims than claims for socio-economic justice. After it is established that basic income can adjudicate a wider variety of justice based claims, I’ll try to show how or why participatory parity can be conceived as the goal of an unconditional basic income.

I will base this paper on Nancy Fraser’s multi-layered framework of justice. Fraser claims that her framework of justice can encompass questions of material inequalities, identity based issues and questions of political representation. Questions of justice are adjudicated in Fraser’s framework by relating them to the normative core of participatory parity. In other words injustices are unjust because they hinder the possibility to interact with one another as peers in society. It is on this ground I propose that we should view participatory parity as the “goal” of an unconditional basic income. Thus basic income could have a larger emancipatory potential than merely “freeing” people from their daily economic struggles.

As this paper is argument is built around Nancy Fraser’s framework of justice I will start by making a quick introduction of her conception of justice. After this is done I will present how an unconditional basic income could adjudicate other justice based claims than socio-economic claims. When it is established that an unconditional basic income can remedy different forms of justice I will propose some arguments for claiming that participatory parity should be conceived as the goal of a basic income. In other words claims for an unconditional basic income shouldn’t be made on the grounds of socio-economic justice rather they should be framed in the name of radical democratic reform.

## 2 Point of Departure - Frasers Framework of Justice

Fraser divides her framework of justice in three parts which each corresponds to a different kind of remedy for a structural injustice. These remedies are redistribution, which corresponds to the injustices of socio-economic inequality, recognition<sup>1</sup> which corresponds with status inequalities of cultural identity, and representation which corresponds to the injustice of political misrepresentation or misframing. A view of justice that keeps recognition and redistribution as mutually exclusive is according to Fraser a false antithesis. Fraser's framework is an attempt to mediate between the problematic that arises from, her interpretation of a class-based egalitarian (socialist) imaginary and the shift to identity politics. (Fraser, 1997a, p. 11)

The core of Fraser multi-partite framework of justice is the radical democratic<sup>2</sup> norm of participatory parity. Within Fraser's framework, this means that injustices are unjust because they hinder the possibility and means for adult members of our society to interact with one another as peers. (Fraser, 2003, p. 36) Thus all claims for redistribution or recognition should seek their justification in whether the injustice in question functions as a barrier of participatory parity or not.

If we for example first consider the redistribution part and imagine a division that has its roots in the economic system of society. The injustice could then by definition be traced to the political economy of society. Any cultural injustices that derives from the current division would also have its core in the political economy, thus the divisions requires redistribution as opposed to recognition. One example of such a division could be for example class differentiation in orthodox economist Marxism. Here the working class is the group of workers who sell their labor power under arrangements that authorize the capitalist class to appropriate surplus production for their own benefit. Thus the core injustice here is exploitation of the working class. The working class certainly

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<sup>1</sup> Fraser's status model of recognition is about justice, not self-realization. The concept of recognition is commonly taken as a matter of self-realization as for example Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth does. For Taylor and Honneth recognition by another is a necessary condition for attaining full and undistorted personhood. Thus denying someone recognition in this sense is according to Fraser to "deprive her or him of a basic prerequisite for human flourishing (Fraser, 2003, p. 28)." In other words, Taylor and Honneth understand recognition in ethical terms as a matter a "good life". Fraser defends a view that sees recognition as a matter of justice. On the question of why misrecognition is unjust she answers:

"...that it is unjust that some individuals and groups are denied the status of full partners in social interaction simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value in whose construction they have not equally participated and which disparage their distinctive characteristics or the distinctive characteristics assigned to them." (Fraser, 2003, p. 29)

<sup>2</sup> The concept of "radical democracy" is a bit vague in Fraser's work. According to her radical democracy "...is the view that democracy today requires both economic redistribution and multicultural recognition" (Fraser, 1997c, p. 174) Thus a view that follows her own theoretical framework. Other relevant views include Iris Young's conception where the aim of radical democracy is to widen it so the spheres in society where democracy currently is lacking or absent altogether (Young, 2000, p. 183). Radical democracy can also be viewed from a perspective that posits conflict and dissension as the main constitutive features of democracy (Ingram, 2006, p. 37). This view is attributed by James Ingram to Claude Lefort

also suffer from cultural injustices, but they are not rooted in an autonomously unjust status order, but are derived from the economic structure. The remedy thus is redistribution. Class exploitation requires restructuring of the political economy to alter the benefits and burdens of class distribution to be overcome. In Marxism the task is to abolish the working class as such. What is important to notice here is that recognition of the distinctiveness of the working class is not needed when the point is to abolish class as such (Fraser, 2003, pp. 16,17)

At the other end of the imagined conceptual spectrum we would have a social division that has its roots in the status order of society, and all structural injustices attached to it would be traceable to the institutional patterns of cultural value. The core of this kind of injustice would be misrecognition and the remedy recognition. An example of this kind of injustice could be sexual differentiation. Here the social division between heterosexuals and homosexuals is not grounded in the political economy as homosexuals are distributed throughout the entire class structure and as such do not constitute an exploited class. The sexual division is rooted in the status order as institutional patterns of cultural value construct heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality as perverse and despised. The effect is to construct homosexuals as a despised sexuality subject to status subordination. Of course homosexuals suffer also from economic disadvantages, but these are not rooted in the economic structure. Rather they derive from the status order "...as the institutionalization of heterosexist norms produces a category of despised persons who incur economic disadvantages as a consequence of their subordination status" (Fraser, 2003, p. 18). Thus the remedy of this kind of injustice is recognition, not redistribution. (Fraser, 2003, pp. 17-19)

Injustices as mentioned above are quite straightforward when we face the extremes of the conceptual spectrum. Matters become a bit more complex when we face divisions that are located somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. These divisions are rooted at once in the economic structure and the status order, Fraser calls this kind of divisions "two-dimensional social divisions". "Two-dimensionally subordinated groups suffer both maldistribution and misrecognition *in forms where neither of these injustices is an indirect effect of the other, but where both are primary and co-original* (Fraser, 2003, p. 19)." Thus neither redistribution nor recognition will alone remedy two-dimensional injustices, they need both. Gender is according to Fraser one such two-dimensional division that requires both redistribution and recognition. The economic part of the division is quite clear in for example the division of paid "productive" labor and unpaid "unproductive" reproductive work where women are primarily responsible for the latter. Another example is the higher paid male dominated manufacturing branches and lower paid "female" domestic service occupations. These injustices clearly call for redistributive remedies. According to Fraser gender is also a status differentiation. She claims that gender codifies structural patterns of

value in a way that devalues everything coded as “feminine” and privileges masculinity. Thus viewed gender requires recognition to remedy the unjust status subordination. According to Fraser a gender-like division wreaks havoc on the idea that one has to choose between a paradigm of redistribution or recognition. In a two-dimensional division, both maldistribution and misrecognition is fundamental and thus a remedy requires both recognition and redistribution. (Fraser, 2003, pp. 19-22)

With the political dimension of justice, Fraser tries to establish social criteria for belonging. That is, she tries to conceptualize who should be included or excluded from those who are entitled to just redistribution and reciprocal recognition. By establishing decision rules the political dimension also sets the procedures for staging and resolving contests in the other two spheres. Thus the political dimension tells us who can make legitimate claims and how these claims can be adjudicated. (Fraser, 2008, s. 17) Because the political dimension is focused on procedure and belonging, the prime concern of this sphere is representation. Fraser identifies two different forms of political injustices against participatory parity. The injustices are misrepresentation and misframing.

With regards to an unconditional basic income it would seem plausible to claim that such a policy would remedy two-dimensional injustices. In Fraser’s framework participatory parity is promoted when we have justice in all the spheres of recognition, redistribution and representation.

### **3 Basic Income and Claims for Justice**

#### **3.1 BI and Redistribution**

As mentioned above, the sphere of redistribution in Fraser’s scheme is concerned with the class structure of society. This means that justice in this sphere is promoted when we achieve or take steps toward participatory parity with by restructuring the economic structure of society.

To conceive an unconditional basic income in terms of redistribution is probably the most common conceptual framework regardless if basic income is seen as a more effective way of organizing social security or as a security measure for insecure employment. One can also conceive the merits of an unconditional basic income as giving the workers a more favorable position of negotiation because of the possibility of declining job offers without fear of sanctions. Even though all these examples can remedy injustices in other spheres, they are primarily considered to belong in the sphere of redistribution as the main objective is to restructure the economic order. The question

of parity of participation arises when you ask the question of why one should strive to restructure the economic order.

If the examples given above are considered individually, the answer to the question of *why* is given differently than if one would conceive them under a general concept. For example the answer of why one would strive for an unconditional basic income could be to increase effectiveness, remedying the conditions of issues regarding modern employment or furthering the cause of the working class. With the exception of the last example, the conceptual framework of the answers can be seen as fairly thin. Thin in the sense that the conceptual framework doesn't serve to explain why an unconditional basic income would be worthwhile in society in general. For example effectivity as such is not something to strive for, it is only seen as positive if one can prove that it frees up resources for other undertakings that can be seen as worthwhile from the perspective of the populace in general. This is of course only the issue if we hold values as democracy and justice as cornerstones of our society. If one values oneself as a peg in a machine and nothing else, effectivity could indeed serve as a worthwhile value. With regards to the example with the working class one can draw upon the conceptual framework of economic Marxism where all societal injustices can be reduced to the economic order. One of the main features of Fraser's framework is the claim that the different spheres of justice should not be reduced to "simple" economism or ethical self-realization. Even though they interact, the injustices should be seen as co-original.

The reason for claiming that participatory parity should be seen as the driving force for unconditional basic income or as Fraser puts it, as the normative core of justice, is that it does provide with a framework that can encompass a wide variety of conceptions and still retain its emancipatory potential. The general prerequisite is to adhere to democracy and conceive of it as everyone's real possibility to participate on par with each other as peers.

On the question of how economic redistribution can be conceived of as promoting participatory parity the answer would lie in the fact that in our modern capitalist societies, money is transferable to influence. Thus redistribution serves as to equalize individual influence in society, thus also participatory parity.

### **3.2 BI and Recognition**

One way of conceptualizing identity-based claims of justice is by framing them as claims for recognition. Fraser's usage of the concept is clearly political and should not be confused with for example Axel Honneth's or Charles Taylor's usage that derives the concept from ethics and self-development. For Fraser to be recognized is to be able to take part in society on equal terms with

one's peers. Recognition thus requires us to rearrange our structures of cultural values so that they don't hinder anyone from taking part in society. Fraser is concerned with the status order of society, her model of recognition is also usually referred to as the status model of recognition (for example: Zurn, 2003).

With regards to an unconditional basic income it is possible to utilize the concept of recognition to highlight different problems with our current welfare systems. A means-tested social security system can easily stigmatize the recipients of the benefits. If income supports marks the disadvantaged as poor then it is possible to view and criticize our institutions related to social services in the framework of recognition. Marking the disadvantaged as poor would in Fraserian terms is to add the insult of disrespect to the insult of deprivation (Fraser, 2003, p. 77). An unconditional basic income could reduce inequality without stigmatizing the poor and thus allow them to be recognized as peers in society. An income transfer can be framed as a claim based on redistribution. However a justice-based claim of redistribution would be adjudicated with a traditional need based income support. Thus I claim that on this part claims for an unconditional basic income should be done in terms of recognition. Also with regards to in this sense justice is done on the basis of equality of respect to ensure that no one is degraded by our institutions. An unconditional basic income could also prevent exploitation of the worst of as the dependence of work, ones spouse etc. would lessen. To introduce new means tested policies would not help this problem as they would only shift the dependency from for example one's spouse to the whim of the case worker.

Fraser has also argued that a basic income model could change the gendered division of labor that give women the responsibility for a major part of the unpaid domestic work and marks some professions as feminine and thus of lesser value. A universal basic income would universalize the role of the caregiver and thus promote gender equality. (Fraser, 1997b) (Fraser, 1998)

A basic income scheme could also change the view on the recipients of welfare benefits and also persons at large in society. An unconditional basic income scheme presupposes an active view of a person in contrast of a passive agent that has to be guided by incentives and penalties. In this sense an unconditional basic income could function as adjudicating claims for recognition on a more universal level as our basic presuppositions of the political agent would be of one that wants to promote one's own well-being and participate.

One common problem when trying to remedy injustices of identity is the stand still that arises from the equality-difference problem. What this means is that usually when we strive for justice for a group we have to choose whether we want to promote every ones equality or highlight a groups special needs, thus promoting difference. The arguments for both strategies are sound,

promoting equality can be seen as forcing a certain set of norms on a group and promoting differences can be seen as confining disadvantaged groups into certain stereotypes and thus promoting them. This dichotomy is partially solved by insisting on promoting participatory parity instead of having to choose one of the before mentioned antithetical strategies. (for example: Fraser, 1994)

### **3.3 BI and Representation**

For Fraser the third dimension of justice is the political dimension that she calls representation. This dimension is two-fold. One of the aspects is the boundary setting aspect. The issue of this aspect is the boundary setting aspect of justice, which are questions of inclusion and exclusion. The other aspect is what Fraser calls the decision-rule aspect. This level is concerned with the decision-rules or procedures that structure public processes. Questions that arise are for example if the boundaries of the political community exclude someone unjustly or do the community's decision rules give equal voice in public deliberation. Thus this dimension concerns with obstacles in the way of participatory parity that cannot be reduced to the class structure of society or the status order. (Fraser, 2008, pp. 17-18)

With regards to an unconditional basic income this dimension would be tied to the contested nature of who we count as the objects of justice or in other words recipients of the basic income. It would raise the question of who should count as citizens and if the category of citizens can be counted as the valid community that should receive the unconditional basic income. For example the question could be raised if only citizens of a nation should be counted for as eligible for a basic income or should the basic income be given to the populace as a whole.

This dimension could function as a starting point to give voice to those working in untypical branches, such as self-employed, researchers and artists. Thus all those working outside the scope of traditional wage labor. This dimension would contest the concept of who the "all" is that should be counted for in our societies. Preferably this should be the same "all" that should have a voice in our democratic societies. Thus conceiving of an unconditional basic income in this sphere would open up the question of who we count as relevant in our societies.

### **4 Participatory Parity as the Goal of Basic Income**

What I'm trying to argue for is that when we make our claims for an unconditional basic income, they should not be made on the basis of economics but democratic politics. Naturally it is important to study and analyze how a basic income scheme could be financed etc. However when arguing for and against an unconditional basic income, we should not only see it as a substitute for welfare

distribution. If viewed only as a matter of economics, basic income becomes a matter of redistributive justice. Thus utilizing for example Fraser's framework where we have to show how a proposed scheme promotes participatory parity in the spheres of redistribution, recognition and representation would serve to base our claims for basic income on a sufficiently rich conceptual framework that takes into account the myriad of different claims of justice that we face in the modern world.

When framed in this way the question about basic income becomes one of justice and through Fraser's framework also about democracy. In Fraser's words it becomes a question of who the author and the subject of the requirements of justice. When framed this way it enables us also to open up the discussion of giving the silenced and the marginalized the possibility of participating on par in society. In other words, it gives the marginalized the voice they deserve. Thus an unconditional basic income should be seen as a program/policy that fosters participatory parity and on this ground also justice. Thus we should focus on utilizing the conceptual framework of justice and democracy to ground our claims for justice.

Framing the question of basic income within the framework of Nancy Fraser, could also change our conception of social systems on a larger scale and change politics to be about economic technicalities to be about values, identities and democracy.

In a sense what I'm claiming is that we should ground our claims for an unconditional basic income, and why not any other policy, in a framework that positions emancipatory democratic politics as its core. At the moment I would argue that Nancy Fraser's framework provides us with the greatest conceptual strength by positioning participatory parity as its core and allowing us to analyze different forms of injustices on their own grounds in the spheres of redistribution, recognition and representation. Thus one can claim that Nancy Fraser provides us with the framework to frame our claims for an unconditional basic income in the name of radical democratic reform.

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