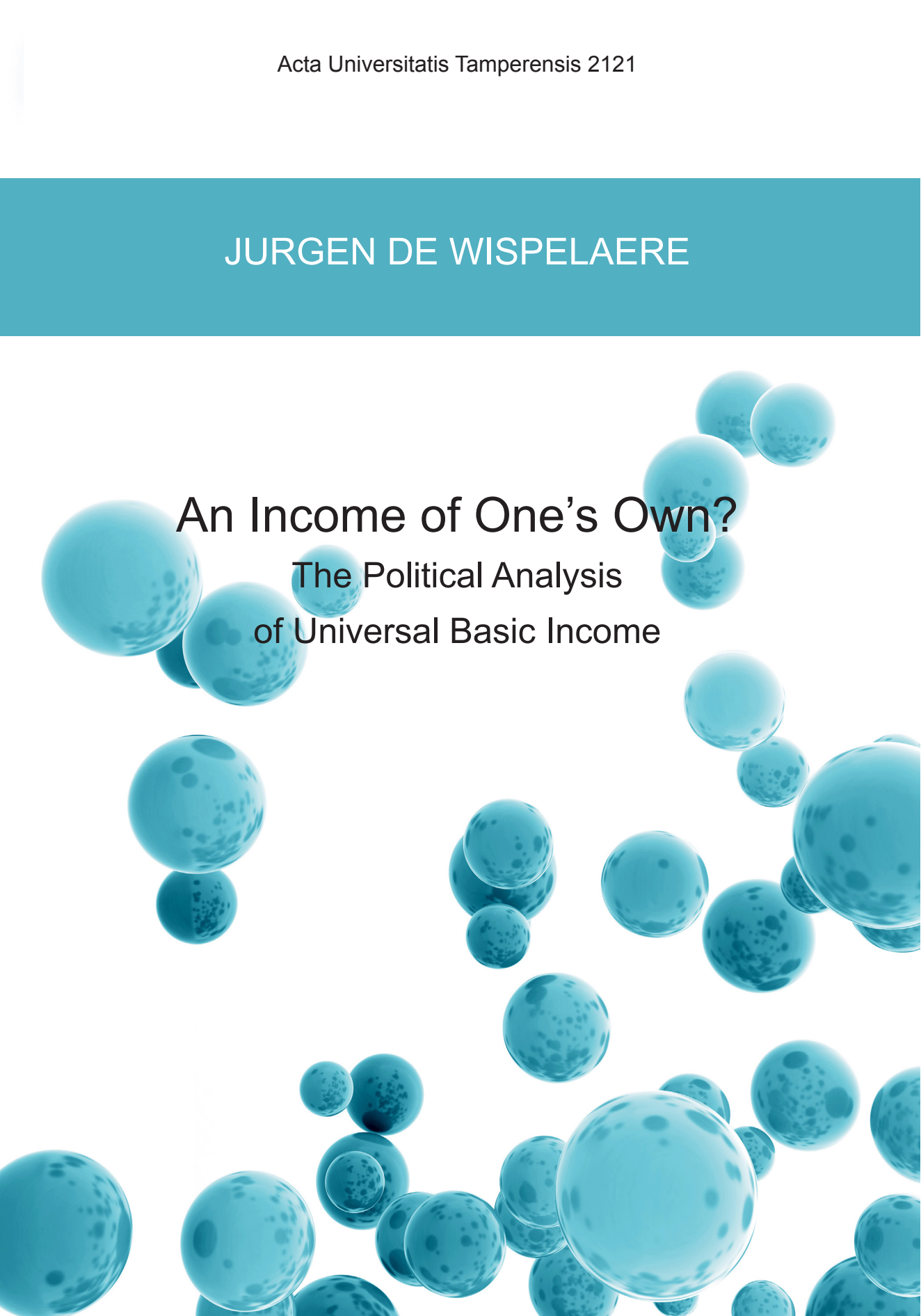


JURGEN DE WISPELAERE

An Income of One's Own?
The Political Analysis
of Universal Basic Income

The background of the cover is white, featuring a collection of numerous blue, semi-transparent spheres of varying sizes. These spheres are scattered across the page, with some appearing larger and more prominent than others, creating a sense of depth and movement. The spheres have a subtle texture and a slight shadow, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.



JURGEN DE WISPELAERE

An Income of One's Own?

The Political Analysis
of Universal Basic Income



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be presented, with the permission of
the Board of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities
of the University of Tampere,
for public discussion in the lecture hall Linna K 103,
Kalevantie 5, Tampere,
on 12 December 2015, at 12 o'clock.

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

JURGEN DE WISPELAERE

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For Leti, unconditionally

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the political feasibility of an individual, universal and unconditional basic income, a policy that radically departs from the mainstream means-tested and work-dependent perspective on income maintenance in the traditional welfare state. The basic income idea has gained considerable traction in both policy and scholarly communities, but its politics remains little understood. Scholarly attention in recent decades has focused largely on the ethics and economics of basic income, with marginal effort spent on political analysis. In addition, existing political studies are predominantly focused on descriptive case studies with only a few engaging in analytical examination of the role between design, implementation and politics.

This dissertation engages in a political analysis of the basic income proposal by reviewing both extant descriptive country studies and the rapidly growing scholarly literature on basic income. Since basic income in its fully developed version is nowhere implemented at this moment, robust empirical evidence is scant. Instead, this study proceeds by systematically applying established policy theories and evidence from analogous schemes (such as Alaska, Brazil or Iran) to the basic income proposal. The results of this study are presented in six articles, published in peer-reviewed political science and policy journals.

The main contribution of this dissertation is twofold. First, whereas the orthodox view suggests basic income advocates face an uphill battle against political actors and a general public that is broadly skeptical about giving “money for nothing”, I argue that there exists a second critical political frontline. A widespread tendency to think about basic income as a general idea rather than a set of specific policy proposals obscures the extent to which key design dimensions produce internal disagreement and division between basic income supporters. This internal division has a major impact on the political stability of a broad enacting basic income coalition.

Second, this dissertation argues that the internal tensions inherent in basic income design become salient once we consider basic income implementation. In contrast to the bulk of basic income research which eschews administrative analysis, this study adopts a public administration perspective and identifies a range of key implementation challenges that need to be carefully resolved for basic income to

become a practical policy proposal. Furthermore, I demonstrate that these administrative challenges are decidedly political in nature, reinforcing the potential for persistent internal disagreement amongst basic income advocates.

Tiivistelmä

Väitöskirja käsittelee henkilökohtaisen, universaalien ja vastikkeettoman perustulon poliittista toteutettavuutta. Perustulo poikkeaa politiikkana radikaalisti perinteisen hyvinvointivaltion valtavirtaisista tarveharkintaisista ja työsidonnaisista näkökulmista toimeentulon tukemiseen. Perustulon idea on herättänyt runsaasti kiinnostusta sekä poliittisissa että akateemisissa yhteisöissä, mutta siihen liittyvä politiikka on edelleen heikosti ymmärrettyä. Tieteellinen huomio on viime vuosikymmeninä keskittynyt pääasiassa perustuloon liittyviin eettisiin ja taloudellisiin kysymyksiin, ja poliittisten kysymysten analyysi on saanut vain marginaalisesti huomiota. Olemassa olevat politiikkaan keskittyvät tutkimukset ovat enimmäkseen kuvailevia tapaustutkimuksia. Vain harvat niistä ovat ryhtyneet suunnitelmien, toimeenpanon ja politiikan välisen roolin analyttiseen tarkasteluun.

Tämä väitöskirja kytkeytyy perustuloehdotuksen poliittiseen analyysiin luomalla katsauksen sekä kuvaileviin maakohtaisiin tutkimuksiin että nopeasti laajentuvaan perustuloa koskevaan tutkimuskirjallisuuteen. Koska perustuloa täysin kehittyneessä muodossaan ei ole toistaiseksi otettu käyttöön missään, vahvaa empiiristä näyttöä on vähän. Sen sijasta tutkimus etenee soveltamalla systemaattisesti vakiintuneita politiikan teorioita ja perustuloa vastaavia järjestelmiä koskevaa tietoa. Tutkimuksen tulokset on esitetty kuudessa artikkelissa, jotka on julkaistu vertaisarvioituissa politiikatutkimuksen lehdissä.

Väitöskirjan pääasiallinen kontribuutio on kaksiosainen. Ensinnäkin, siinä missä ortodoksinen näkökulma esittää, että perustulon kannattajat kohtaavat työhönsä taistelun poliittisia toimijoita ja ilmaista rahaa kohtaan laajalti skeptistä yleisöä vastaan, väitän että on olemassa myös toinen kriittinen poliittinen etulinja. Laajalle levinnyt taipumus mieltää perustulo mieluummin yleisenä ideana kuin sarjana erityisiä politiikkaehdotuksia hämärtää sitä laajuutta, missä toteutusmallien keskeiset ulottuvuudet tuottavat sisäisiä erimielisyyksiä ja jakoja perustulon kannattajien välille. Tällä sisäisellä jakautumisella on merkittävä vaikutus laajan perustuloa ajavan koalition poliittiseen tasapainoon.

Toiseksi, tässä tutkielmassa väitän, että perustulomallien muotoiluun luontaisesti liittyvät sisäiset jännitteet tulevat keskeisiksi siinä vaiheessa kun ryhdytään harkitsemaan perustulon toimeenpanoa. Toisin kuin valtaosa perustuloa koskevistä

tutkimuksista, jotka karttavat hallinnollista analyysiä, tämä tutkimus omaksuu julkisen hallinnon näkökulman ja tunnistaa sarjan keskeisiä toimeenpanoon liittyviä haasteita, jotka täytyy selvittää huolellisesti jotta perustulo voisi muotoutua käytännön politiikkaehdotukseksi. Lisäksi osoitan, että nämä hallinnolliset haasteet ovat selvästi poliittisia luonteeltaan, joten ne lisäävät mahdollisuutta pysyvään poliittiseen erimielisyyteen perustulon kannattajien välillä.

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Thomas Malthus famously argued in his *Essay on the Principles of Population* that economic catastrophe is inevitable when an unchecked population multiplies geometrically while the food supply only increases arithmetically. A similar (but decidedly less gloomy) equation holds with respect to doctoral dissertations: as the thesis drags on year after year, the number of individuals who went out of their way in supporting its completion grows exponentially. I am most grateful to anyone who over the many years it took to complete this project helped out, and apologize in advance for those I fail to list by name.

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discussing and writing with smart friends on a topic that intrigues us all has been a formative experience, but most importantly a continuous source of intellectual pleasure. I am grateful to Lindsay and Leti for granting me permission to use some of our joint research in this dissertation.

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Belfast, Northern Ireland — November 2015

Jurgen De Wispelaere

List of Original Articles

This dissertation consists of six published articles, which will be referred to throughout this general introduction with the Roman numbers I-VI.

- I. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton (2007), “The Public Administration Case Against Participation Income”, *Social Service Review* 81(3): 523–549.
- II. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton (2011), “The Administrative Efficiency of Basic Income”, *Policy and Politics* 39(1): 115–132.
- III. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton (2012), “A Disarmingly Simple Idea? Practical Bottlenecks in Implementing a Universal Basic Income”, *International Social Security Review* 65(2): 103–121.
- IV. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton (2013), “The Basic Income Guarantee: Bringing Bureaucracy Back In”, *Political Studies* 61(4): 915–932.
- V. Jurgen De Wispelaere (2015), “The Struggle for Strategy: On the Politics of the Basic Income Proposal”, *Politics*. DOI: 10.1111/1467-9256.12102.
- VI. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Leticia Morales (2015), “The Stability of Basic Income: A Constitutional Solution to a Political Problem?”, *Journal of Public Policy*. DOI: 10.1017/S0143814X15000264.

1. Introduction

“Give all citizens a modest, yet unconditional income, and let them top it up at will with income from other sources.”

Philippe Van Parijs, 2004: 7

This dissertation examines the politics of basic income, understood in its generic form as a guaranteed income provided by the state to all citizens or long-term residents.¹

Basic income constitutes a guaranteed income in two relevant senses. It is *non-withdrawable*, comprising a guaranteed income floor below which no eligible individual is expected to fall. Basic income is the level of income a person maintains even when all other sources of income provision, whether private or public, fail. Conversely, the basic income floor allows individuals to complement the basic income with other private or public sources of income, including earnings and state benefits.²

In addition, basic income is *non-contingent* or guaranteed by right: it is an income that every citizen receives irrespective of individual background circumstances — e.g., alternative sources of income, household or family composition, age or gender — that customarily condition eligibility for support programs. Most controversially, basic income understood as a citizen’s right (Plant, 2005; LoVuolo, 2012c) is decoupled from present work status, past work experience, and even a demonstrated willingness to work.³

These two senses of a basic income guarantee are closely related: basic income is able to perform its function as an income guarantee precisely because it is provided

¹ The distinction between citizens and residents is highly relevant but will not be further discussed here. See Van Parijs (2004), Howard (2006), and ARTICLE I, II and III.

² This sets apart basic income from other policies that aim to provide workers with a guaranteed income, such as wage subsidies (Phelps, 1997) or employer-of-last-resort programs (Harvey, 1989, 2002, 2013; Solow, 1998). The International Labour Organization (ILO) has spent the last few years developing a Social Protection Floor instrument that is more inclusive but nevertheless eschews basic income (Deacon, 2013).

³ Reference to the right to basic income refers to the so-called “legislative level of social rights” (King, 2012: 19), leaving open whether basic income constitutes a constitutional right (ARTICLE VI).

as a matter of right (Offe, 2008; De Wispelaere and Morales, 2015b). Because of these features, its advocates maintain, basic income radically departs from contemporary welfare models, offering a “Painean” alternative to the Bismarckian or Beveridgean welfare state model (Van Parijs, 1995b; Noguera, 2001). However, as outlined in the next sections, within the generic model we find important variations affecting detailed program design, expected outcomes on individuals or particular groups (e.g., women), the particular social values that underpin its moral foundation, and the competing political doctrines and ideologies that support getting basic income off the drawing board and into the real world of policy implementation. In this dissertation I argue that those advocating basic income must pay more attention to these “differences within”, for the variation amongst basic income models invariably affects both the ethical desirability and the political feasibility of basic income.

1.1 Why Basic Income?

Basic income is advocated⁴ from a broad range of perspectives, drawing support from both principled and pragmatic arguments (Van Parijs, 1992b; Fitzpatrick, 1999).⁵ A *principled* justification proposes that basic income constitutes an integral part of a just society. Two broad types of principled justifications can be distinguished in the literature. There is, first and foremost, the freedom-based argument for basic income, which regards basic income as a precondition for individuals having the freedom to live their lives in accordance with their own values and plans. The freedom-based argument comes in many forms, including a liberal-egalitarian (Maskivker, 2011; Birnbaum, 2012), republican (Casassas, 2007; Pettit, 2007; Casassas and De Wispelaere, 2015), and even a libertarian variant (Tomasi, 2012; Zwolinski, 2012). It is most importantly associated with the real-libertarian justification advocated by Philippe Van Parijs in *Real Freedom for All*

⁴ Throughout this dissertation I use the label “basic income advocate” to refer to a very heterogeneous group of activists, researchers and policy entrepreneurs who share a preference in favour of basic income. This heterogeneity reveals itself in competing ethical views and political ideologies as well as conflicting views regarding the goals, design features and expected policy effects of the basic income proposal. Leading advocates in the contemporary scholarly or policy debate are typically associated with the international basic income network BIEN or one of its affiliated national and regional networks (see www.basicincome.org).

⁵ On the distinction between principled and pragmatic justifications, see (Barry, 1996b; Van der Veen, 1997).

(1991, 1995b), where he argues that a basic income financed primarily by employment rents⁶ is justified on the grounds of securing real freedom compatible with equality. A second principled justification grounds basic income in democracy and individuals' foundational right to participation in the decision-making process of the polity (Pateman, 2003, 2004; Goodhart, 2007).

Pragmatic justifications also exist in bountiful variation. For pragmatists, basic income does not necessarily constitute a precondition for a just society; instead, the pragmatic case usually starts off by identifying a desirable social goal and then arguing that basic income fulfils this goal better than its leading competitors. Brian Barry writes “pragmatists are people who assume that social policy should serve certain ends” and then goes on to observe “that the existing forms of welfare state are not very successful at achieving these ends” (Barry, 1996b: 243).⁷ In recent years, basic income has gained considerable traction among scholars who claim positive effects on poverty and income inequality, unemployment, social inclusion, “discretionary time” and flexibility across the life cycle, and even gender equality among the scheme's many virtues (e.g., Van Parijs, 1992a; 1996; 2004; Standing, 1999; 2002; McKay, 2001, 2007; Groot, 2004; Wright, 2004; 2006a; Offe, 2008; Haagh, 2011; Zelleke, 2011).

There exist several important differences between the principled and pragmatic approach. On the one hand, pragmatic justification does not require that we buy into a particular theory of justice, merely a shared agreement on the desirability of a social goal (e.g., poverty reduction).⁸ This feature counts in its favour, as it partially bypasses the pervasive and persistent disagreement about social justice (Waldron, 1999).⁹ On the other hand, the validity of the pragmatic justification depends in the final analysis on empirical evidence corroborating the anticipated result — i.e., that a basic income will effectively reduce poverty and does so better than its main competitors (De Wispelaere and Morales, 2015b).

⁶ Employment rents comprise “the difference between the income and other advantages the employed derive from their jobs, and the (lower) income they would need to get if the [labour] market were to clear” (Van Parijs, 1995: 108). For Van Parijs, employment rents are captured by jobholders and can therefore be legitimately taxed and subsequently redistributed equally in the form of a universal lump-sum grant.

⁷ Barry rightly insists that pragmatism here should not be confused with political expediency.

⁸ Compare Cass Sunstein's (1995) arguments for the role of “incompletely theorized agreements” in law.

⁹ For an example of persistent disagreement internal to the basic income debate, see the dispute between Stuart White (1997) and Philippe Van Parijs (1997) about the role of the reciprocity principle (also De Wispelaere, 2000).

I must confess a personal affinity towards the pragmatic case for basic income, but in this dissertation I am not concerned with justifying basic income. Instead, I take for granted that there are good reasons for pursuing basic income, given the poor performance of current activation and austerity policies. Evidence from natural experiments and pilot studies suggests we have good reasons to believe basic income has a beneficial impact on a range of social goals (e.g., Davala et al., 2014). This does not mean that basic income is conclusively justified, as many factors may prevent the expected positive effects from materializing. While it is therefore perfectly conceivable that in some circumstances basic income may not be the best policy to adopt, this does not amount to a general argument against pursuing basic income. Similarly, the fact that there remain many open questions in terms of how basic income would perform once implemented is not an argument against basic income, as few (if any) social policies in advance of full implementation meet such an exacting evidentiary standard (Cartwright and Hardie, 2012).¹⁰

Importantly, having good reason to endorse basic income in general does not necessarily tell us which concrete basic income scheme to promote, for different ethical arguments impose non-trivial demands on the design and implementation of the desired scheme. Taking a principled perspective, different theories of social justice will proscribe one version of basic income rather than another. From a pragmatic point of view, prioritizing one social goal over another will likewise insist on distinct design choices within the generic basic income idea. I will return to this point again throughout this dissertation.

1.2 The Political Analysis of Basic Income

The main focus of this dissertation is on the politics of basic income, which I broadly understand as the examination of actors, processes and institutions that determine the enactment and implementation of a basic income policy. The political perspective takes into account a vast array of constraints that advocates face when promoting basic income, and is geared at both identifying those challenges

¹⁰ In addition, the interpretation of relevant evidence in terms of demonstrating policy success or policy failure remains problematic (McConnell, 2010; Marsh and McConnell, 2010). This is one reason why I am skeptical about the need for more basic income pilot projects. The sort of evidence we can obtain from large-scale pilot projects is already available from the NIT experiments in the US and Canada (Widerquist, Lewis and Pressman, 2005) and from the recent pilot studies in India (Davala et al., 2014), and large-scale pilot projects face a number of difficulties that hamper evidence-based policy-making (Widerquist, 2005; Noguera and De Wispelaere, 2006).

and finding ways to overcome them. Where ethical arguments merely give us reasons for pursuing basic income, political arguments sketch a trajectory by which those arguments can be translated into political actions and strategies that over time may result in basic income being instituted. As such, political analysis must go beyond the ethical persuasion of key actors, and enquire systematically into the constraints that hinder basic income moving ahead in the policy process.

The political analysis adopted throughout this dissertation is informed by Theodore Lowi's (1964, 1972) seminal work on policy feedback. Reversing the classical understanding of social policy as the outcome of an independent political process, Lowi instead held that *policy determines politics*. In a nutshell, different types of policies produce distinct political conflicts, which over time result in diverging political constellations of interests, actors and institutions. Building on Lowi's pioneering insight, Theda Skocpol (1992: 58) defined the concept of "policy feedback" as the ways "policies, once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes." More recently, political scientists and policy scholars have developed a strong research program examining the various mechanisms through which policy affects both elite and mass politics, including the powerful idea of *path dependence*.¹¹

In this dissertation I employ the policy feedback approach to examine the political effects of adopting a *particular* basic income design. This approach can be cashed out at two important levels of analysis. First, there is the question of whether basic income needs a distinctive politics. While basic income shares many features with other income maintenance programs, and must contend with many of the same challenges (political or otherwise), its radical design may nevertheless set it apart from the policy trajectories that characterizes more mainstream support programs. For instance, the precise political effects of a truly universal program capturing each individual citizen (or resident) remains uncertain.¹² Second, within the *generic* form of a basic income, the precise political impact of key design decisions that differentiate one concrete basic income scheme from another requires

¹¹ For excellent reviews, see Pierson (1993, 2004), Mettler and Soss (2004) and Campbell (2012). The notion of path dependence has unfortunately fallen victim to concept stretching (Rixen and Viola, 2014).

¹² There are of course plenty of universal programs in place in many jurisdictions, but the characteristics of these programs differ considerably from that of an unconditional basic income and therefore we must be careful when attempting to deduce particular political effects by analogy (Mossberger and Volman, 2003). The prime example is no doubt child benefit, which while universal (albeit not necessarily uniform) within the specified age category nevertheless faces different political challenges from a basic income tailored to the working-age population. I am grateful to Heikki Hiilamo for this suggestion.

extensive analysis. A leading theme throughout this dissertation is the competition between different models, and its impact on the political feasibility of basic income.

1.3 Policy Context: Basic Income and Welfare Regimes

It is a truism of sorts to argue that policy context matters for the politics of basic income. Much less clear, however, is which aspects of the policy context matter, and how they impact on basic income politics. Although this dissertation engages in theory-building and largely abstracts from a specific policy context, I want to make a few brief observations.

Instituting a basic income in a developing world context is likely to constitute a radically different enterprise than attempting the same in a context with a developed welfare state in place.¹³ Closer to home, in a mature welfare state basic income will interact with a large variety of social programs, but welfare states themselves exhibit considerable variation. Comparative social policy usually kicks off by invoking Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) influential typology of three welfare regimes.¹⁴ Based on a complicated set of indicators, combining institutional characteristics as well as outcome indicators, he distinguishes a liberal (residual, needs-based), conservative (earnings-related, contribution-based) and social-democratic (universal, citizenship-based) regime-type. Esping-Andersen's analysis has produced a small cottage industry of scholarship engaged in replicating, extending and revising his key insights (e.g., Lewis, 1992; Svallfors, 1997; Goodin et al., 1999; Arts and Gelissen, 2002).

What does the worlds-of-welfare typology have to tell us about instituting a basic income? It seems rather obvious that regime types will have important effects on the performance of a basic income scheme for the simple reason that it will have to operate in close interaction with a set of policies already in place. The same basic income model would arguably produce different policy outcomes, depending on whether it would be instituted in, say, Australia or Germany, the UK or Finland, and so on. Further, regime constellations would likely impose different design and implementation constraints on the precise basic income model to be adopted. In part this may simply be due to advocates wanting to ensure that a basic income will

¹³ This is one reason to be mindful about generalizing evidence from recent field experiments in Namibia or India to a mature welfare context.

¹⁴ Esping-Andersen of course builds on earlier typologies, notably those of T.H. Marshall (1950) and Richard Titmuss (1958).

slot easily into a set of pre-existing welfare institutions and make good use of implementation capabilities already in place (“administrability”).¹⁵

However, none of the above tells us much about the *political prospects* of basic income. At first blush one would think the universalistic social-democratic model, commonly associated with the Nordic countries, would be a leading candidate for adopting a basic income model. Finland has proven to be the notable exception (Ikkala, 2012; Koistinen and Perkiö, 2014), while the debate about basic income has been comparatively muted in the Scandinavian countries. Examining the different attitudes about basic income amongst the Finns and the Swedes, Otto Jan Anderson and Olli Kangas (2005) show important variation within the social-democratic regime type. Experience with universalism may seem to suggest a preference for basic income, but in practice support for universalist policies customarily retains a strong connection to willingness to contribute (Mau, 2004; van Oorschot, 2000, 2006; Slothuus, 2007).¹⁶ Relatedly, public support often favours social insurance over redistribution (Moene and Wallerstein, 2001; Iversen and Soskice, 2001).¹⁷ One should be careful about deducing support for basic income from general support for welfare state programs.

Moreover, it could be argued basic income fits equally well within a liberal welfare regime, where it complements existing arrangements by providing a residual floor. Similarly, Claus Offe has argued for years that the immense stress on the contribution-based conservative model must be resolved by partially disconnecting income and contribution (Offe, Muckenberger and Ostner, 1996; Offe, 2000, 2008). Thus, there is no *a priori* reason to expect one regime type to favour basic income.¹⁸ Where social-democratic regimes have the benefit of policy experience with universal policies grounded in citizenship rights, in contrast to the liberal and conservative models the former may simply exhibit less *demand for* basic income reform.¹⁹ To put it differently, if basic income reform is in part motivated by the

¹⁵ Compare the implementation difficulties reviewed in Section 5.

¹⁶ In Europe this trend has crystallized in the so-called “social investment” paradigm. See Cantillon and Van Lancker (2013) for a critical discussion.

¹⁷ Peter Baldwin (1990: 18) wrote that “protection against risk has been sought more universally than a redistribution of resources.” More recently, Brooks and Manza (2006) note that retrenchment trends are most visible for *cash entitlements* while resisted for social services.

¹⁸ Goodin (2001b) proposes a fourth post-productivist regime type, centred around the principles of “income adequacy”, “temporal adequacy” and “minimal conditionality”, which seems to be a natural fit for the basic income model (Van der Veen and Groot, 2006; Offe, 1992).

¹⁹ Anderson and Kangas (2005) likewise argue that the success of the Swedish welfare state paradoxically may explain why the Swedes aren’t as thrilled about basic income as the Finns.

experience of economic insecurity, the Nordic countries may be comparatively insulated.

A better explanation for the political prospects of basic income may lie in the *political* rather than *policy* context (Korpi and Palme, 1998; Jordan, 2013; also Anderson and Kangas, 2005). It is entirely to be expected that political institutions of various stripes will play an important role in mediating how basic income ideas translate into policy (Häusermann, Picot, and Geering, 2013). Similarly, variation in political institutions across jurisdictions is likely to explain both public attitudes in relation to basic income — e.g., through framing effects (Kangas, Niemelä and Varjonen, 2012) — as well as windows of opportunity for basic income advocates to shepherd their scheme through the policy process. In what follows I largely abstract from the detailed political context to examine the core political questions that surround the basic income proposal in general.

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

In the remainder of this general introduction I offer a systematic examination of basic income design, implementation and politics. Section 2 kicks off by outlining the policy background for the subsequent analysis, briefly reviewing several recent efforts at moving basic income onto the policy agenda. The purpose of that section is to illustrate the variety of concrete schemes as they appear in the basic income debate. At the same time, I will offer reasons to think none of the existing schemes are all that promising in terms of generating a clear political trajectory that basic income advocates should adopt. These cases are interesting and informative up to a point, but basic income advocates should refrain from drawing too firm (or too fast) conclusions without further analysis.

Section 3 outlines the “many faces” of universal basic income, discussing briefly eight key dimensions along which basic income design can be varied. Several of these dimensions are typically unspecified when advocates debate basic income, yet they do need to be specified at some point to become policy. Other dimensions are very live in the debate, but here too it pays to briefly chart the possibilities for variation and, indeed, compromise. Section 3 concludes by suggesting that basic income advocates must start paying attention to the difference between arguing for basic income as a *social ideal*, (a vehicle for social criticism, as it were) and developing basic income as a concrete *policy proposal*.

Section 4 continues with a discussion of political feasibility. The section first briefly outlines a model framework for thinking about different feasibility dimensions, before introducing three key problems that hamper the political feasibility of the basic income proposal. The first problem pertains to the search for a robust basic income constituency. Basic income advocates often argue for the many advantages of basic income and throughout attempt to identify who benefits from its introduction, but identifying beneficiaries is not the same as identifying a political constituency. This subsection briefly reviews several factors that complicate the production of a stable and robust basic income constituency.

The discussion next moves to another key strategic issue: which political agents must be targeted in an attempt to build a robust political coalition in favour of basic income? I identify two difficulties that interfere with the process of coalition-building: the problem of cheap support and the problem of persistent disagreement. Section 4 concludes by examining the political stability of basic income, once enacted. Maintaining that basic income advocates ought to take seriously challenges to its resilience and robustness, I review a number of processes of policy change to which basic income seems particularly vulnerable. Examining ways to boost stability over time is an important topic of future research.

Section 5 moves to the implementation of basic income and adopts a public administration perspective to examine challenges emerging at this stage of the policy process. The section briefly reviews several arguments that might explain why basic income research has systematically ignored basic income administration, and finds these wanting. Inspired by the work of Christopher Hood, Section 5 introduces a model of basic income administration that informs the subsequent discussion. The remainder of the section then covers a range of different issues surrounding the administration of basic income. The main argument of this section, arrived at via different routes, is that administration is *inherently political*. Many of the challenges basic income advocates face at the level of implementation directly feed back into the discussion of political strategy in the previous section.

The dissertation concludes by reviewing the main points of the general introduction and outlining its relevance for future basic income research, notably in relation to identifying feasible political trajectories.

2. Basic Income – An Idea Whose Time Has Come?

“The history of social policy is more of a winding country lane, with poorly signposted crossroads, than a majestic highway. Important new principles have seldom arrived in gleaming splendor; they were more likely to be delivered in a mud-spattered condition, along with other, more dubious, baggage.”

Bill Jordan, 2012: 1

An obvious starting point for a dissertation examining the politics of basic income is to study the political debate surrounding basic income across the world. The last decade, and in particular the past few years following the successful Citizen’s Initiative in Switzerland proposing to give each adult citizen a monthly stipend of €2800, have witnessed an exponential increase in media and popular interest in the basic income idea, including a surge in basic income movements at local, national and international level.²⁰ This suggests that the time is ripe to push basic income onto the political agenda.

Of course, a boost in policy attention amongst traditional and social media and increased basic income activism is only the start of a successful political campaign, and the question remains how basic income advocates can build on this window of opportunity. Some advocates in fact argue that we have already moved on from mere discussion to genuine policy diffusion. One major achievement of the last decade has been a series of pilot projects, the most important of which has recently been completed in India (Davalá et al, 2014). New pilot studies are being proposed as well, including a surprise announcement by Juha Sipilä’s centre-right coalition government to conduct a large pilot study in Finland by 2017.²¹ The Guaranteed

²⁰ The passing of the Citizen’s Initiative in October 2013 commits the Swiss government to holding a referendum on basic income. For more information, see <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/04/us-swiss-pay-idUSBRE9930O620131004>.

²¹ There is also considerable interest in basic income at municipal level: Santo Antônio do Pinhal, near São Paulo (Brazil) has piloted a basic income scheme for its 6500 inhabitants since 2009, while in the past months the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary (both in Alberta, Canada) and Tilburg (Netherlands) have come out in support of local basic income pilot schemes.

Annual Income (GAI) field experiment that took place in Dauphin (Manitoba, Canada) between 1974-1979 has recently received significant renewed attention, largely due to the analysis of the health impact of the Dauphin data by Evelyn Forget (2011).²²

In addition, several countries have witnessed important legislative efforts furthering the cause of basic income, have implemented a version of basic income (notably, Alaska and Iran), or have instituted (or are in the process of instituting) a scheme that appears to lay the groundwork for introducing basic income. Each of these schemes offers important opportunities for drawing lessons that may positively impact on policy diffusion (Rose, 1991; Mossberger and Volman, 2003; Shipan and Volden, 2008). Allowing policy scholars and decision-makers to closely examine how a basic income scheme operates in practice is one key advantage of examining these schemes, but more importantly is the opportunity to study the respective *political trajectories* that helped to push the scheme from idea to (some form of) policy reality (Robertson, 1991).²³

In this section I briefly examine some of these cases, with no pretence towards comprehensiveness. The purpose of this section is twofold. First, the discussion illustrates the extensive variation in concrete policy proposals (and their origins) associated with the basic income debate. This variation plays a key role in the political analysis of this dissertation, as explained more fully in subsequent sections. Second, this section also briefly evaluates the lessons we can learn from these cases, in particular in terms of the political trajectories towards successful basic income implementation. I must confess at the outset to adopting a skeptical stance in this regard. The specific policy attributes in the most developed cases (Alaska and Iran), as well as several cognate schemes sharing important features with basic income, is argued to considerably hamper policy learning.²⁴ Furthermore, a leading theme of this dissertation, explored more fully in subsequent sections, is that lumping

²²The Dauphin experiment is part of the MINCOME experiments, which constituted the Canadian branch of the well-known NIT experiments in the 1970s-1980s in the US (Widerquist, Lewis and Pressman, 2005). Dauphin was a unique experiment in large part because it was a so-called “saturation site”, which meant that “[e]very family in Dauphin, with a population of approximately 10,000 and another 2,500 living in its rural municipality, was eligible to participate in the GAI” (Forget, 2011: 289).

²³ Gilardi (2010) argues that policy learning is about figuring out the *policy consequences* of adopting a policy but equally (or even more so) learning about its *political effects*, which may explain variation of similar policies across polities. In some cases political gains also explain foregoing policy learning for immediate adoption (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009).

²⁴ On the role of policy attributes in explaining policy learning, see Makse and Volden (2011).

together concrete proposals in a way that obscures key design differences between the schemes makes for poor politics.

2.1 Early Beginnings: Two Radical Proposals

In *Agrarian Justice* (1797), the American revolutionary Thomas Paine advanced two radical proposals to mitigate the extreme poverty of his time:

“To create a national fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property: And also, the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age ... It is proposed that the payments, as already stated, be made to every person, rich or poor.” (Paine, 1997 [1797]: 326–327)

Paine’s first proposal went through several permutations and received considerable attention in the 1990s under the name of “basic capital”, “capital grant” or “stakeholder grant” (Cunliffe and Erreygers, 2004; Dowding, De Wispelaere and White, 2003b; Wright, 2006b). In one familiar proposal, each US citizen at age 21 who has obtained a high school diploma and stayed clear of crime receives a “stake” of \$80,000 from the government for her to spend as she wishes (Ackerman and Alstott, 1999; 2004).²⁵ Another version, this time aimed at the UK, proposes to give each youngster upon reaching eighteen the sum of £10,000, paid into designated Accumulation of Capital and Education (ACE) accounts with qualified ACE trustees ensuring that the grants are spent towards genuine investment projects (LeGrand and Nissan, 2003; also LeGrand, 1989).²⁶

In 2005 the UK government introduced a version of this idea in the form of a Child Trust Fund (or “Baby Bond”). In this scheme the government contributes an initial £250 at birth to all parents of British children born after September 2002

²⁵ Guy Standing (2006) refers to this version of basic capital as “Coming-of-Age Grants” (COAGs), and argues they are inferior to capital sharing devices like “Community Capital Grants” (COGs).

²⁶ Approved investments include higher and further education, down-payments on a house or flat purchase, start-up costs of a small business, or even contributions towards a personal or stakeholder pension (LeGrand and Nissan, 2003: 38-39).

(£500 for the poorest families), followed by another £250 at age seven. Families can contribute top-up payments up to £1,200 per annum, all of which is kept in trust until the child reaches eighteen (LeGrand, 2004; Prabhakar, 2008). Although often publicly justified as a scheme countering wealth inequality and improving equal opportunity at the start of one's economic life (Ackerman and Alstott, 1999; White, 2003a; White, 2011), the scheme proved particularly controversial with those who believe we need new radical ideas to combat the plight of the worst-off in society (e.g., Standing, 2006). One recurring complaint maintains that the Child Trust Fund is inherently regressive, allowing those who have sufficient wealth to top up the account while mainly imposing a "savings culture" geared at improving financial literacy on the poor (Finlayson, 2008; 2009).²⁷ In the end little of this matters, as the Child Trust Fund was one of the first schemes to fall victim to the previous government's austerity policies, and effectively discontinued in 2011 after a mere decade in operation.²⁸

In this dissertation I focus on the second of Thomas Paine's proposals: to grant "the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age" (Paine, 1997 [1797]: 326). Paine here gives us an early incarnation of what is today most commonly referred to as basic income.²⁹ While Paine sets an age restriction to the receipt of this grant, contemporary proposals typically envisage granting each individual adult, irrespective of age, a regular income without means test or work requirement (Van Parijs, 1992a, 1995, 2004). Similarly, while Paine envisages a citizen's right to an unconditional income to follow from the fact that one's natural inheritance ("access to land") has been curtailed, contemporary justifications for basic income do not necessarily restrict themselves to compensation for lost entitlements but instead branched out to comprise the whole gamma of ethical theories (Van Parijs, 1992b).³⁰

²⁷ Financial literacy is integral to the asset-based welfare agenda (Sheraden, 1991).

²⁸ The Savings Accounts and Health in Pregnancy Grant Act 2010 amends the Child Trust Funds Act 2004 by closing the funds to new applicants starting in January 2011, while existing accounts continue to function as before. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10147773>.

²⁹ I subscribe to the view that basic capital and basic income are radically different ideas because of the likely effects on recipients and their respective justification (Van der Veen, 2003).

³⁰ For a revival of basic income as a resource dividend, see Widerquist and Howard (2012a, 2012b).

2.2 The Ascent of the Basic Income Idea

Thomas Paine and his fellow revolutionaries in both continents³¹ sparked an idea that two centuries later seems to have gained a proper foothold in contemporary policy debate. In the words of one of its most ardent supporters, “the idea of an unconditional basic income is now more than the sheer dream it was when it was first formulated by Thomas Paine in 1796” (Van Parijs, 2013: 176). In modern days, the basic income debate seems to have advanced in three waves.

The first wave focused entirely on the mature welfare states of Europe and the US. Following the criticism of welfare state arrangements in the 1980s and the rise of the workfare state intent to “end welfare as we know it” (Peck, 2001, 2003; Solow, 1998), basic income advocates argued that social insurance and social assistance programs fail to protect individuals from the precariousness of modern capitalist societies (Standing, 1999, 2002, 2009, 2011b; Offe, 2008; Handler, 2004).³² A universal basic income, it is argued, more efficiently plugs the holes in the patchwork of categorical and conditional support measures that make up the modern welfare state, guaranteeing an adequate safety net for all (Goodin, 1992; Offe, 2008).

Furthermore, proponents insist we need to rethink the strict focus on formal employment as a condition for receipt of assistance, pressed upon us by ecological, economic and equity concerns in the context of emerging post-productive welfare arrangements (Offe, 1992, 2008; Goodin, 2001a, 2010; Van der Veen and Groot, 2006; Haagh, 2011).³³ Of course, the idea of a universal and unconditional basic income guarantee still played second fiddle to the dominant paradigm of the active welfare state through targeted and selective labour market activation policies (King, 1995).

A second wave of debate emerged in the late 1990s. Much to the surprise of observers and advocates in Europe and the US, basic income entered the policy debate in developing countries in Africa and Latin-America, where welfare

³¹ Other historical figures proposing a version of basic income include, amongst others, Condorcet, Charles Fourier, Joseph Charlier, John Stuart Mill, and Henry George.

³² Bill Clinton’s campaign pledge to “end welfare as we know it” led to the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, which has come to epitomize workfare in the US and beyond. Note that the interest in guaranteed income in the US predates this era, with the 1960s Guaranteed Income Movement culminating in President Nixon’s (ill-fated) Family Assistance Plan (Harris, 2005; Steensland, 2007).

³³ Related to this debate is the need to address gender inequalities in current care arrangements (Robeyns, 2000; McKay, 2001, 2007; Zelleke, 2011)

programs are either non-existent or else take a highly fractioned and residual form (e.g., LoVuolo, 2012c; Matinsonn and Seekings, 2003; Natrass and Seekings, 2005). Following a 2002 recommendation for a basic income grant by the government-appointed Namibian Tax Consortium (NAMTAX), the first basic income pilot project took place in 2008-2009 in the village of Otjivero, Namibia (Haarmann and Haarmann, 2012).³⁴ Meanwhile, in 2004 Brazil enshrined a Citizen's Basic Income (Law No. 10.835) in legislation (Suplicy, 2005; Lavinias, 2006, 2012).

In response to these developments, in 2004 the leading international basic income network BIEN, originally conceived as a European network, reconstituted itself from as the Basic Income Earth Network, while regional networks devoted to the promotion of this idea have mushroomed outside Europe.³⁵ Nevertheless, it seems that in recent years most developing countries are by now fully wedded to moving down the road of *conditional* cash transfers (CCTs), which some critics argue have closed off the road to universal and unconditional basic income grants (LoVuolo, 2012a, 2012b).

The third wave of the debate brings us back to Europe, where the basic income proposal in recent years got a second wind as one of the leading ideas resisting the increasingly bankrupt politics of austerity (Standing, 2011a; LoVuolo, Raventós and Yanes, 2010). The 2008 financial crisis and subsequent barrage of austerity policies has in no way dampened the enthusiasm for basic income in Europe. On the contrary, basic income plays a growing role in social movements' battle against the austerity agenda (Malleon, 2014), and features prominently in public debates about alternative routes out of the crisis.

A good example is the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) for an Unconditional Basic Income aimed at initiating a public hearing by the European Commission.³⁶ The ECI ran from April 2012 to January 2014, and collected more than 285,000 signatures from EU citizens in 28 countries. While it failed in meeting its goal of one million votes, as required by the European Commission, the resulting mobilization and media attention dramatically raised the visibility of basic income

³⁴ The pilot project was run by the Basic Income Grant Coalition, a group of civil-society organizations, trade-unions and church groups. The project became rapidly marred in controversy, however, with critics challenging both the evaluative outcomes and any future impact on policy development (Osterkamp, 2013).

³⁵ For more information on the history of BIEN and details of the 20 affiliated national networks, see <http://www.basicincome.org/bien/>. BIEN also runs the dedicated BINews feature.

³⁶ See <http://basicincome2013.eu/>.

across Europe. It appears grassroots movements as well as policy entrepreneurs in countries as diverse as Spain, Germany, Belgium, Finland, Brazil, Mexico and India have made basic income an integral part of the social policy debate (for a recent overview, see Caputo, 2012a; Murray and Pateman, 2012). The Finnish government's commitment to conduct a large pilot study in 2017 represents the most prominent example of the recent surge of interest in the basic income idea across Europe.³⁷

2.3 The (Unbearable Lightness of) Basic Income Reality

Basic income has inspired decades of scholars and community activists, and continues to do so. Nevertheless, this fascination with basic income has yet to translate into widespread policy development. The lively discussion in town halls and cyberspace so far is not reflected in tangible policy outcomes. Basic income advocates counter by pointing at recent international experience, which seems to suggest that (embryonic) versions of basic income have already taken root throughout the world (Caputo, 2012a; Murray and Pateman, 2012). In this subsection I evaluate several recent developments on the ground.

2.3.1. *Legislative Efforts*

Let us first look at some recent efforts to legislate for basic income. Ireland is often referred to as an example where basic income made considerable headway onto the policy agenda (Healy and Reynolds, 2000). In 2002, following the Partnership 2000 Working Group on Basic Income, the government commissioned and published a Green Paper (Department of the Taoiseach, 2002). In contrast to previous studies (e.g., Honohan, 1987), the Green Paper concluded that a tax-integrated basic income would not only be affordable but have important distributive effects (Healy and Reynolds, 2012a, 2012b). However, the Green Paper (and basic income) was chiefly ignored in subsequent policy development.³⁸

³⁷ <http://www.basicincome.org/news/2015/10/finnish-government-research-team-design-pilots/>.

³⁸ One of the few political parties who adopted basic income in its election platform, the Green Party, never acted on its commitment when (briefly) becoming a government coalition partner following the 2007 Irish general election (ARTICLE V).

A similar fate seems to have befallen legislative efforts in the US. After a marked interest in guaranteed income in the 1960s and early 1970s, policy attention seems to have shifted decidedly towards support of the working poor through the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in combination with highly residual programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Steenland, 2006, 2007; Caputo, 2012b; Widerquist and Sheahen, 2012).³⁹ A recent attempt to build on the tax credit mechanism proved ill-fated. In 2006, the Tax Credit for the Rest of Us Act (HR 5257) was introduced in the 109th US Congress by then Congressman Bob Filner (D-CA), co-sponsored by then Congressman Jesse L. Jackson (D-IL). The Act proposed “to transform the standard deduction and personal exemptions into a refundable standard tax credit (STC) of \$2,000 for each adult and \$1000 for each child” (Widerquist and Sheahen, 2012: 25), which would include the non-working poor. The Bill failed to gather legislative momentum and is currently stuck in the House Ways and Means Committee, with both sponsors since having moved on.⁴⁰

In Spain, and in particular in the autonomous region of Catalunya, the basic income debate reached the parliamentary floor on various occasions (Raventós, Wark and Casassas, 2012). Legislative bills were presented and discussed in both the Catalan and (twice) the Spanish parliaments, but again with little concrete results. In a move that many a basic income proponent thought would present a unique opportunity, on 28 April 2009 the Spanish parliament decided to set up a parliamentary subcommittee with the explicit remit to study the viability of basic income. However, this opportunity rapidly turned sour when the conservative Partido Popular, hostile to the basic income idea, gained electoral majority and Spain’s economy rapidly spiralled out of control. Spain is today experiencing one of the most traumatic manifestations of the economic crisis in the EU – youth employment stands at more than 50% — and discussion of basic income has become entirely relegated to grassroots movements such as the *Indignados*. For a brief time Podemos, a new political party firmly grounded in the anti-austerity movement and populated by many basic income supporters, became the standard-bearer of the Spanish basic income movement. Having won a significant number of seats in the 2014 European Parliament election and in the recent regional elections, Podemos was expected to be a leading contender for the 2015 general elections. The impact of a strong electoral performance by Podemos on the fate of basic

³⁹ EITC is an example of what Christopher Howard (1993, 1999) terms “the hidden welfare state”.

⁴⁰ Jesse L. Jackson retired from politics, while Bob Filner first became the 35th Mayor of San Diego in 2012 only to end up resigning less than a year later under a barrage of sexual harassment complaints.

income remains uncertain, however: for tactical reasons the party has downgraded the proposal to a long-term aspiration in its 2014 economic policy program (ARTICLE V). Despite this tactical move (or perhaps because of it), in recent months the electoral appeal of Podemos went in free-fall as many of its erstwhile supporters appear to be returning to the mainstream parties.⁴¹

The most telling example, however, comes from Brazil. The widely heralded Law No. 10.835 (*Lei de Renda Básica de Cidadania*), authored by Senator Eduardo Suplicy and signed into law by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on 8 January 2004, appears to have achieved little more than enshrining the basic income “principle” into Brazilian legislation. Although by all accounts a unique political achievement, in practice the Law is hampered by internal contradictions as well as too many provisions accommodating an “executive opt-out”. As Lena Lavinas (2006, 2012) has documented, one concern is the fact that a law which is meant to legislate for a universal grant contains a provision that the government implement the law in stages, prioritizing the poorest. “Its format thus combines mutually exclusive requirements, targeting the poorest and aiming for uniformity and universality” (Lavinas, 2012: 30).⁴² This problem is compounded by the absence of a timetable for implementation and its subordination to budgetary and developmental priorities, with decision power entirely relegated to the sole discretion of the Executive.

Meanwhile, Brazil has devoted all its resources to instituting the flagship policy of the Bolsa Família, a conditional and means-tested program. Although the leading proponent of basic income in Brazil, Senator Eduardo Suplicy, believes this to constitute a step towards instituting a full Citizen’s Basic Income, critics insist the Bolsa Família program has entirely usurped and “ostracized” the basic income legislation (Lavinas, 2012; also LoVuolo, 2012a, 2012b). Consider the recent discovery of 15.1 to 20.5 billion barrels of oil and gas in the pre-salt fields, a situation remarkably similar to the case of Alaska. This petroleum windfall generated ample political debate but failed to kickstart the budgetary process necessary to complete to implementation of the Citizen’s Basic Income, as stipulated by Law No. 10.835 (Lavinas, 2012: 42-43). Nearly a decade after

⁴¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/19/us-spain-politics-poll-idUSKCN0PT08G20150719>.

⁴² As Lavinas (2012: 40) explains, the original bill drafted by Senator Suplicy contained no reference to the controversial last sentence in paragraph 2, which details how the implementation will proceed in stages “at the criterion of the Executive Branch, prioritizing the neediest segments of the population.” This is an example of political compromise on relatively minor design elements having a disproportionate impact.

legislating for a Citizen's Basic Income, preciously little of a universal and unconditional income guarantee can be seen on the ground in today's Brazil.⁴³

2.3.3. *Alaska's Permanent Fund Dividend*

When basic income advocates talk about existing basic income policies, they principally point to the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD), which since 1982 has paid each eligible resident an unconditional annual grant (Widerquist and Howard, 2012a). The Alaska scheme comprises two separate programs: the Alaska Permanent Fund (APF), a publicly owned investment portfolio funded by 25% of the state's oil revenue, and the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) which allocates an annual grant of roughly \$1,200 to each man, woman, and child who meets the residency requirement.⁴⁴ The PFD is the sole example of an economic policy combining resource taxation — effectively transforming a depleting natural resource into a “sovereign wealth fund” — with the distribution of (part of) the revenue stream to each individual resident shareholders.

The PFD has proven to be a very successful program, enjoying tremendous support from citizens across demographic, socioeconomic, and political divides. As Scott Goldsmith (2005: 558) pointedly relates, in Alaska today it amounts to “political suicide to suggest any policy change that could possibly have any adverse impact today, or in the future, on the size of the PFD.”⁴⁵ In addition, advocates of this Alaska model claim the PFD is a strongly egalitarian policy, for it grants each citizen an equal share of a natural resource that is held in common ownership, rendering it immune to many of the intricate problems facing tax-and-transfer-style redistributive programs.

Is the Alaska model a good example of a basic income scheme? While the PFD meets the conditions of universality, individuality and unconditionality (Widerquist and Howard, 2012c), several elements of the Alaska dividend limit its

⁴³ The municipality of Santo Antônio do Pinhal, which in 2009 established a small municipal CBI pilot project for its 6500 inhabitants, is a notable exception (Lavinias, 2012: 46).

⁴⁴ The 2015 dividend will amount to \$2,072 per person (<http://www.pfd.alaska.gov>), but the size of the dividend fluctuates in line with the value of the APF earnings (Goldsmith, 2005, 2012).

⁴⁵ The recent budget crisis in Alaska has nevertheless put considerable pressure on the Alaska Permanent Fund, leading Senator Bill Wielechowski (D-Anchorage) to propose a constitutional amendment to protect the Fund from political interference (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jan/9/first-wave-of-prefiled-legislation-introduced/>).

usefulness for the basic income debate writ large.⁴⁶ The first is the meagre level of the grant: fluctuating between a low of \$628 (in 1984) and a high of \$2533 (in 2000) depending on the value of APF earnings (Goldsmith, 2012 [all figures in 2010 dollars]), the level of the dividend is substantially smaller than what basic income advocates — even those advocating a modest partial basic income — have in mind.⁴⁷ My concern here is not just with the low level of the grant but also the fact that the amount fluctuates significantly from one year to another, which is highly problematic for any policy that has anti-poverty or equality-promoting ambitions (Zelleke, 2012). Finally, the fact that the grant is paid out annually importantly differs from the customary basic income model that emphasizes regular monthly payments (Van Parijs, 1995; Standing, 2006).⁴⁸ These design features raise questions about generalizing insights from the Alaska dividend in its current form on expected individual-level or aggregate effects of introducing a basic income.

A different concern arises from the particular funding source of the Alaska dividend and its associated politics. Resource dividends is one model that can be used to finance and justify an unconditional basic income, but it has very particular features that may poorly apply to models that depend on raising income or consumption taxes, or reducing other social programs to secure its funding.⁴⁹ Many commentators insist resource dividends are windfall gains that appear to create little opposition as they do not rely on appropriation or disentanglement. “No one has reason to feel burdened by its creation and continued existence. The yearly dividends are financed by the returns on state-owned investments. They don’t cut into anyone’s perceived ownership” (Widerquist and Howard, 2012c: 226). But if this is true, one cannot help but wonder why the Alaska scheme is the only one of over 50 Sovereign Wealth Funds that pays out individual dividends (Cummine, 2012)? One answer to this puzzle may be that “the case for a resource-funded basic income policy may not be compelling prior to its enactment”, even if it becomes “very popular very quickly once instituted” (Bryan and Castillo, 2012: 74). The politics of resource dividend *predistribution* is undoubtedly different from the

⁴⁶ Zelleke (2012) disputes that resource dividends should be regarded as a proper basic income.

⁴⁷ These figures correspond to 1.7% and 6.4% of per capita personal income (Goldsmith, 2012: 49-50). Karl Widerquist and Michael Howard (2012c) believe this amount is non-trivial for low income families once we take into account the pooling of resources, but this also entails basic income can no longer remain indifferent to personal circumstances (here, household composition).

⁴⁸ A meagre yearly dividend falls short of what Standing (2002) terms the “Basic Security Principle”, in a manner that is reminiscent of the problems of stakeholder grants (Standing 2006).

⁴⁹ An extreme example of the latter is Charles Murray’s “Plan”, which proposes a basic income of \$10,000 per annum almost entirely funded by dismantling the US welfare state (Murray, 2006).

traditional politics of *redistribution* (Korpi and Palme, 1998; O’Neill and Williamson, 2012; Taylor-Gooby, 2013).

But here precisely lies another problem, for a basic income grounded in a resource dividend scheme may fail to be properly accountable, and even become regressive. On accountability, Bryan and Castillo (2012: 77) argue that since governments don’t have to obtain their revenue directly from the electorate, they will perceive opportunity costs of expenditures less clearly and this in turn implies less accountability.⁵⁰ The absence of income taxation — the feature that its proponents argue make resource dividends politically palatable — implies that resource-taxed basic income schemes have at best a modest impact on inequality reduction but more likely have “an overall regressive effect on income distribution” (Zelleke, 2012: 151). While the PFD is sometimes held to be responsible for making Alaska the most equal state in the United States (e.g., Vanderborght and Van Parijs 2005: 25), the empirical support for this bold claim remains weak.⁵¹ At the very least, this urges caution when relying on the Alaska model to argue for the benefits of introducing a basic income elsewhere (*pace* Widerquist and Howard, 2012b; Casassas and De Wispelaere, 2012).

2.3.3 Iran’s Basic Income Out of Price Subsidies

In recent years a second scheme has inspired basic income advocates as a model of how to institute a basic income. Both its location – Iran – and the pathway by which it came about are peculiar, to put it mildly. Like the Alaska scheme, the Iranian model is based on oil resources. However, in this case the funding does not come from a sovereign wealth fund, but instead from reforming the price subsidies on consumption. Iran, a major oil producer and exporter, for many years used the proceeds to implicitly subsidize the domestic consumption of private individuals and enterprises by keeping oil prices at one of the lowest in the region.⁵² This

⁵⁰ This argument puts the common view that resource dividends immunize revenue from political influence into a critical perspective. See Levi (1988) and Steinmo (1996) for an in-depth discussion of the politics of taxation.

⁵¹ This is true despite *some* evidence of a levelling effect of the dividend on after-tax income in Alaska (Goldsmith 2005, 2012).

⁵² “By official estimates, the subsidy bill in recent years has been of the order of \$100–120 billion annually, of which 70 percent went to only 30 percent of the population, mostly in urban areas” (Tabatabai, 2012b: 20). Thus, in addition to encouraging massive oil consumption the subsidy also disproportionately benefited the urban population at the expense of the rural, worse-off population.

extraordinary situation is untenable in the long run and, in a move towards rationalization, in December 2010 Iran initiated the first stage of a five year reform program (Tabatabai, 2011, 2012a, 2012b).

The reform program removes implicit subsidies, which amounts to a manifold price increase, in combination with the provision of a monthly cash transfer of Rl 455,000 (roughly \$45) per resident Iranian.⁵³ The explicit aim of the transfer is to compensate private individuals, business (e.g., to stimulate use of energy-efficient production technology) and even the government for the cost of rapid price increases on oil and fuel products.⁵⁴ Any effects on poverty or economic inequality are surplus to the goal of effectively rationalizing oil consumption without causing a massive uproar or widespread economic devastation.

Cash transfers are universally and uniformly paid independent of means or work tests, albeit to household heads — thus conforming to a de facto basic income (Tabatabai, 2011). The Iranian government initially wanted to restrict the transfer to the 70% of the population with incomes lower than the national average. However, it ran into many practical problems trying to identify the relevant beneficiaries, and in the end pragmatically decided to drop any restrictions.⁵⁵

“Rather than alienating a part of the population, the government eventually decided to abandon the exercise and declared everyone eligible for transfers, at least initially. The universal basic income was thus born as a means of ensuring wider public support for the price reform.” (Tabatabai, 2012: 20)

Government appealed to the better-off to voluntarily withdraw from the scheme, but as the value of the cash transfer became apparent and registration modalities simplified, many more applied for the transfer than originally planned: immediately after implementation, “the number of participants rose from 60 million to 72.5 million, or from 80 percent of the population to 96

⁵³ Both non-resident Iranians and non-Iranian residents are excluded from the benefits, whereas the latter nonetheless face the burden of the price hike.

⁵⁴ The scale of price increases ranges from 75% to 2,000%, depending on the item (Tabatabai, 2012a: 290).

⁵⁵ Government faced discontent over attempts to register individual households (which required providing social and economic information most objected to revealing to the government), the use of individual-level proxy indicators such as family loans or car ownership, or the use of broad categories such as regional residence (for variation in the amount of cash transfer) (Tabatabai, 2012a, 2012b).

percent” (Tabatabai, 2012b: 22). The near-universality of the basic income grant in Iran emerged quasi-spontaneously, rather than by design.⁵⁶

There are several intriguing features to the Iran basic income model. First and foremost, there is a marked similarity with the Alaska dividend, where politicians faced a decision on how to preserve the wealth associated with a newly discovered (and finite) natural resource. In Iran, too, there appears to have been no explicit discussion of providing a guaranteed income floor to resident Iranians out of concerns with poverty or inequality. Instead, as Hamid Tabatabai (2012b: 24) explains, “the birth of a *de facto* basic income owe much to the fact that cash transfers are universally seen as compensation for the loss of subsidies, not as a right or entitlement without a *quid pro quo*. That is how the hurdle of reciprocity was overcome.” In Iran, even more so than in Alaska, basic income emerges as a byproduct of economic policy. In both cases, the boost in income security was a fortunate side-effect.

The question remains whether the model is easy to export elsewhere.⁵⁷ In Iran, several factors combine to explain the fortuitous emergence of basic income: a pre-existing (implicit) price subsidy on a widely consumed good, at a level that is so high it is both distortionary — which gives government strong incentives for reform — and able to fund a basic income through the price differential after reform. The closest alternative for countries where such clear-cut price subsidies are not present would be a basic income funded through a consumption or a green tax.⁵⁸ However, this implies a distinctive type of politics altogether, departing from the focus on compensating-for-loss that defines the Iranian experience.⁵⁹

Moreover, even in Iran it is an open question whether the current cash transfer system will remain in place once the five year reform period is completed. Given its reliance on oil, the provision of the cash transfer is vulnerable to fluctuations in international oil prices and, to a much lesser degree (at least in the short run), availability of oil production (Tabatabai, 2012b). Once the reform completed, government may decide to keep the cash transfer nominally in place but at a

⁵⁶ For a model that introduces near-universality by design, see Eyal (2010).

⁵⁷ Philippe Van Parijs (2010) believes the price subsidy model is far superior to the resource dividend scheme because it is applicable to resource-poor countries (or, presumably, countries that have resources but are unwilling or unable to turn them into sovereign wealth funds).

⁵⁸ There are interesting similarities between the Iran model and the cap-and-dividend approach advocated by Howard (2012) in the context of reducing carbon emissions.

⁵⁹ The Iran case constitutes a clear example of the politics of blame-avoidance (Weaver, 1986).

deflated real value, thus further eroding the income guarantee component of this basic income.⁶⁰

The immediate challenge, however, appears to be the intense financial pressure on the system.⁶¹ In part because of miscalculating the expected revenue and in part because of increased demand after eligibility criteria were relaxed, 80% of the revenue from higher fuel prices go towards funding private household transfers (instead of the originally budgeted 50%). With the budget fixed by law, the future stability of the program requires a significant adjustment by either reducing the transfer amount for all or else giving up on the principle of near-universality and reintroducing the notion of eligibility criteria (Tabatabai, 2012a, 2012b). Neither solution is very appealing from the perspective of basic income.⁶²

Other elements of the Iranian case may also limit its suitability as a general basic income model. Cash transfers are paid to household heads because they are presumed to pay the fuel bill, and are thus the ones entitled to the compensation. As Tabatabai (2011) rightly notes, the Iranian basic income is independent of household composition — and in this sense, appropriately “individualized” — nevertheless there are good reasons why advocates insist that a basic income is paid to each individual separately (e.g., Pateman, 2003, 2004).

Furthermore, the same questions about effects on poverty and inequality that concern critics of the Alaska dividend such as Almaz Zelleke (2012) appear in the case of the Iranian cash transfer. Tabatabai (2012a: 292) believes the reform to have positive effects on income inequality, but since hard data are not available it is impossible to say how much. However, we should keep in mind the specificity of fuel consumption in Iran when considering exporting the Iranian model to other countries: effects on poverty and inequality will vary considerably depending on the choice of goods affected by any price reform. Moreover, the strict compensation rationale underlying the Iran model prevents it from addressing these concerns head on.

Finally, it is interesting to compare the Iranian experience with public support with that of Alaska, where the mere implementation of the PFD and the receipt of

⁶⁰ As a result of the economic sanctions against Iran and the resulting inflationary pressures, the real value of the cash transfer is conservatively estimated to have halved since 2010 (Hamid Tabatabai, personal correspondence on 24/05/2013).

⁶¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/19/iran-ahmadinejad-cash-handouts-rouhani>.

⁶² The strict choice between transfer level and universality is of course a consequence of the Iranian basic income being a byproduct of price reform. But this precisely shows the limits of using the Iranian case as a model for instituting a basic income explicitly designed to set a guaranteed income floor.

regular dividends appeared to have built its own constituency (Goldsmith 2005, 2012; Bryan and Castillo, 2012; Widerquist and Howard, 2012c). In Iran, the prospect of subsidy reform caused major anxiety across the population, and the purpose of the cash transfer was precisely to stymie public concern.⁶³ In part this was successful, as the population by-and-large seems to have accepted the reform. Nevertheless, the public response to the scheme is far from universally supportive. Many think compensation is better “redirected to other priorities, for example, job creation or expansion of public services” (Tabatabai, 2012b: 30). There is certainly no support for universality as such. The results of a recent opinion poll seem to suggest that a majority (62%) doubt the transfer is able to cover the extra expenses due to increased fuel prices for most households. Further, more people rate the likelihood of the cash transfers enduring over time as low or very low compared to those who rate it high or very high (42% compared with 36%) (Tabatabai, 2012b: 30). Whereas in the Alaska case there seems to have emerged a strong political constituency in favour of dividends, in Iran the public support remains comparatively weak.⁶⁴

2.3.4 *Basic Income Cognates as Stepping Stones?*

Whatever the merits or demerits of the two schemes outlined above, they may prove too idiosyncratic to serve as apt models for instituting a basic income guarantee in a policy context that diverges considerably from Alaska or Iran. There is another option. Perhaps we should take a closer look at policies that are not basic income models strictly speaking, but nevertheless have one or more elements in common with a basic income scheme. We can call these “basic income cognates”.⁶⁵ Isolating these elements could still teach us important lessons to move the institution of basic income forward in a piecemeal manner. Taking it one step

⁶³ Government consideration of public anxiety went as far as to affect the particular design of the scheme: in addition to making the cash transfer universal, government also decided to pay out on a monthly rather than bi-monthly basis as originally planned (Tabatabai, 2012b: 29).

⁶⁴ This does not mean we should not expect a significant reaction if cash transfers were abruptly discontinued. The results of the poll referred to earlier could as easily be explained in terms of general lack to trust in government as an assessment of the subsidy reform, but I have no information to confirm either option.

⁶⁵ I borrow the term from Van Parijs, Jacquette and Salinas (2000), who refer to policies that produce *outcomes* similar to basic income. By contrast, I employ the term to designate policies that share *design properties* without conforming to a genuine basic income model.

farther, cognate policies could quite literally serve as a *stepping stone* for implementing a basic income policy (e.g., Jordan, 2011, 2012).

One such cognate policy are the Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), already briefly mentioned in a previous section. CCTs have become one of the dominant anti-poverty tools in Africa and especially Latin-America (LoVuolo, 2012b).⁶⁶ The details vary extensively but the general approach in all cases is to combine short-term poverty alleviation with long-term human capital-building. A typical scenario is for poor households with children to receive a cash grant on condition of school attendance and regular health check-ups for children, including vaccination requirements. Failure to comply with these conditions may result in financial penalties or even being removed from the program. The resulting incentives, proponents argue, ensure not only effective poverty alleviation but also a significant positive impact on health and education, which is a strong factor in reducing poverty in the long run (World Bank, 2009).

The effectiveness of CCTs remains disputed, in part because the more stringent schemes may have negative effects on those households — including the children (Barrientos and DeJong, 2006) — found to be non-compliant. One important study employing a randomized control trial designed to compare the effects of conditional and unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) found that “CCTs are likely to be more effective in improving outcomes that may be strongly affected by compliance with the conditions, such as test scores. UCTs may be preferred if there are many non-compliers who might experience strong and socially beneficial effects from regular income support. If non-compliers can be thought of as a vulnerable group in a given context, UCTs may deserve careful consideration given the possible trade-offs indicated in this study” (Baird, McIntosh and Ozlek, 2011: 1749). Nevertheless, CCTs play an important role in establishing the superiority of cash transfers, to be used by the recipient without strings attached⁶⁷, over vouchers or food aid in addressing issues of poverty and social inequality (Standing, 2008). Even in a developed world context, the idea remains prevalent that when we give people a non-directive benefit, many will use it in an inappropriate manner (Paxton and White, 2006; Goodin, 2003; LeGrand, 2004).

⁶⁶ Mexico’s *Progresas*, recently renamed *Oportunidades*, is often credited as the main inspiration for CCTs. Brazil’s *Bolsa Família* discussed before is perhaps one of the best known examples of a CCT. CCTs are also implemented in developed countries. For example, a three-year pilot CCT program in New York City ended in early 2010 (http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/html/programs/opportunity_nyc.shtml).

⁶⁷ The receipt of a benefit entails two dimensions of conditionality: eligibility for receipt and conditions of use. CCTs allow the free use of cash transfer but retain conditionality on (continued) eligibility; by contrast, a basic income scheme removes both types of conditionality.

CCTs of course remain highly conditional and thus are far removed from the universal approach basic income advocates. Ruben LoVuolo (2012b: 7) raises a key question, asking “whether they can then be viewed as a first step toward the application of a [basic income]” or instead “constitute a deterrent for such a proposal?” While some seem optimistic that there is a straightforward road from CCTs to a more universal and inclusive unconditional transfer approach (e.g. Standing, 2008), the case of Brazil seems to indicate the contrary (Lavinias, 2006, 2012).⁶⁸ While establishing the case for using cash transfers rather than directed aid, CCTs may nevertheless plant firm hurdles in the way of policy avenues to graft an unconditional basic income approach onto this basis. The resulting path dependence should not be underestimated (Pierson, 1993, 2004).

A similar fate afflicts a second cognate policy that has recently been likened to a basic income. While there has been little explicit acceptance of the basic income principle in the UK, Bill Jordan (2012: 1) argues that a first step towards the establishment of a universal basic income lies “concealed within a load of cuts, conditionality and means-testing” of the former coalition government’s proposals for administrative simplification of the tax–benefit system through the Universal Credit.⁶⁹ The UK has embarked on a major overhaul of the welfare system, to be phased in from October 2013 onwards.⁷⁰ The main goal is to make work pay and reduce administrative waste and fraud by integrating several benefit programs into one refundable tax credit that applies a single, progressive withdrawal rate to in-work benefits (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2012: 41).⁷¹ Combined with increasingly stringent work requirements, the Universal Credit is meant to incentivize recipients

⁶⁸ The most recent development of the *Bolsa Familia* sees it expanded in a manner that further strengthens its “workfarist” dimension (Lavinias, 2012: 39–40), making its transformation into a basic income even less likely.

⁶⁹ The 2015 General Election returned a majority Conservative government, which has pledged to continue rolling out the Universal Credit.

⁷⁰ The planned pilot in four local authorities, scheduled to precede the national launch of the scheme in October 2013, was delayed and radically scaled down to a single borough in Greater Manchester (barely covering 300 claimants per month) due to persistent IT failures and delays in implementation (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/apr/26/universal-credit-pilot-launch>). Meanwhile, the program is gradually rolled-out across the UK, with completion forecast around the end of 2019 (revised upwards from 2017).

⁷¹ Specifically, the following working-age programs are subsumed under the new Universal Credit: Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income-Based Employment and Support Allowance, Income-Based Job Seeker’s Allowance, Income Support, and Working Tax Credit. Child Benefit and Council Tax Benefit remain separate. See Royston (2012: 70ff) for details.

to work (or work more) by allowing them to retain more of their benefits even when working in so-called “mini-jobs” (low pay, few hours work).⁷²

The newly minted program has proven highly contentious, even before its fraught implementation became public knowledge. Estimates suggest work incentives will not be universally positive and, contrary to the proclaimed aims, many workers will face higher marginal deduction rates and thus still face a benefits trap (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2012). Council Tax rules that vary across the UK are likely to undermine the supposed advantages of the Universal Credit, and create severe horizontal inequality (Royston, 2012). Relatedly, paired with increased work conditioning for both groups currently out of work, the Universal Credit will impose further hardship on many individuals and households already hit hard by the economic crisis, notably the severely disabled.⁷³ Claims by the government that the Universal Credit will generally benefit low income groups seem hard to sustain in light of the focus on cuts as part of the coalition’s austerity program (Dean, 2012). Clearly, the Universal Credit is very far removed from being a basic income, whatever its name might suggest.

This point is of course well taken by Bill Jordan (2011, 2012) and other basic income advocates. They are perfectly aware how far removed Universal Credit is from the basic income ideal, but insist that tax benefits integration is a precondition for — and thus one big step towards — establishing a basic income.

“But whereas New Labour’s tax credit scheme emphasized the difference between in-work support and out-of-work benefits, the new proposals aim at simplicity and consistency by integrating benefits into the tax system, and this is the step which *opens up the way to gradually de-stigmatizing all state payments, and ultimately removing all the conditions which surround them.*” (Jordan, 2011: 2-3, italics added)

⁷² The initial proposal in the White Paper was for a 55% withdrawal rate, which changed into 65% in the actual legislation. However, even this simple rate is misleading, since the taper applies in combination with tax and social insurance contributions, the effective marginal tax rate can rapidly rise to in excess of 80% for some workers (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2012: 47). It is worth noting that the estimated administrative cost of rolling out Universal Credit has been revised from an initial £2.2billion to £12.8billion in August 2014, a more than five-fold increase.

⁷³ Disability groups in the UK have been increasingly protesting the government’s emphasis on “sorting” the disabled into a group that “really” can’t work and those “shirkers” or “scroungers” that seem to take advantage of their purported illness or disability (Garthwaite, 2011).

Others have similarly emphasized tax benefits integration as a necessary condition for basic income to genuinely have a universal scope (LoVuolo, 2012b; Healy and Reynolds, 2012a).

A further important feature is that administration will be centralized through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which ought to make it easier for claimants to obtain the benefit — at least in theory.⁷⁴ This contrast with the current system, where HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) manages tax credits and the DWP administers most means-tested benefits (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2012: 46). However, a Major Projects Authority (MPA) review of major Whitehall projects rated the welfare reform flagship at amber-red status, the category designating a project as being in danger of failing, and more recently listed it as “reset”.⁷⁵ What looks simple on paper proves rather complicated to deliver in the real world. These unfortunate developments are in line with recent work in the administrative hurdles faced by exceedingly “simple” policies such as basic income (ARTICLE II and III).

Granting Bill Jordan and Rubén LoVuolo their view that tax benefit integration is a key element for making basic income work (also Noguera, 2001), the question still remains whether a highly conditional program such as the UK Universal Credit should really be regarded as a stepping stone towards basic income. Bill Jordan seems to waver on this point. On the one hand, he observes “there is a real danger that the Duncan Smith⁷⁶ reforms will not be the first step towards a more just and equal order, but the consolidation of a profoundly unequal and exploitative one” (Jordan, 2012: 12). On the other hand, Jordan now⁷⁷ seems to think the imperative of cost-saving will over time turn against the labour market activation components, resulting in a more relaxed attitude towards voluntary participation instead of work conscription (Jordan, 2012: 14).

Unfortunately, this amounts to an example of wishful thinking. Historical evidence and public opinion clearly favours a strong moral division between the deserving and undeserving poor (e.g., van Oorschot, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2013), the so-called “cultural categories of worth” permeating the ideology of the welfare

⁷⁴ See in particular Seddon and O’Donovan (2013) for a critical review of the practical issues.

⁷⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/23/universal-credit-reset-ian-duncan-smith>.

⁷⁶ Ian Duncan Smith, MP is the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions responsible for the Universal Credit. The program was conceived in 2009 at the conservative think tank he founded and chaired, the Centre for Social Justice.

⁷⁷ He used to take a more skeptical view, see Jordan (1988).

state in Europe and the US (Steensland, 2006).⁷⁸ This gives us little reason to think conditions of need and, especially, willingness-to-work will disappear any time soon merely because they are costly. In the absence of identifiable policy levers that move us towards a genuinely universal scheme, we have little reason to regard tax benefit integration in the UK as anything but a scheme that reinforces the workfare state. I will return to this point in subsequent sections.

2.4 Political Lessons in a Constrained Policy Environment

Basic income advocates have high aspirations. Inspired by Thomas Paine's vision, they view basic income as a policy instrument that is capable of addressing many of the economic and social ills that permeate societies in both the developed and developing worlds. Ensuring every individual citizen a guaranteed income, they argue, plays a key role in combating poverty and promoting equality and social inclusion. It is true that this broad view comprises many variegated proposals, but on the standard view these are mere details to be resolved at later stage.

Putting basic income on the political agenda and push governments to seriously consider its implementation, however, has proven quite a challenge. On this front, there seems to be uncertainty and disagreement both in terms of where we are — has basic income now moved up on the political agenda, or not? — and where we should go next. What lessons, if any, can we learn from the diverse attempts at pushing for basic income around the world (Rose, 1991)? The brief survey of attempts to move basic income up on the political agenda in the world points at three broad sets of cases, each raising a particular concern regarding the politics of basic income.

To begin with, the bulk of campaigns to directly push for a basic income guarantee were blocked at various points on the long (and winding) road towards legislation. The cases of Ireland, Spain and the US demonstrate how important windows of opportunity nevertheless fail to produce basic income legislation, with legislative efforts effectively thwarted at various points in the political process. Basic income advocates often point at successes, such as the Irish Government producing a Green Paper or Spain setting up a Parliamentary Commission, in a way that fails to appreciate the many political hurdles that must be scaled before basic income

⁷⁸ Active framing of poverty discourse in the media plays an important role in maintaining the distinction between those deserving or undeserving of social support (Slothuus, 2007; Bang-Petersen et al., 2010; Rose and Baumgartner, 2013).

becomes policy reality. As I argue below, a critical problem beseeching basic income is the misplaced optimism attached to “gratuitous” support from political entrepreneurs or political parties, which fails to pay off in terms of political resources spent to shepherd the policy across the many hurdles (ARTICLE V).

The Brazilian experience is even more instructive of the Herculean proportions of the task at hand. Despite having dedicated basic income legislation on the books, the odds of the *Lei de Renda Básica de Cidadania* ever becoming instituted in a way that remains faithful to its aspirations seem very remote. As Lavinás (2006, 2012) has pointed out, this is partly due to how the law itself was drafted — small compromises in wording for the sake of getting the legislation approved are now having a disproportionately negative impact — but in large part because of the broader policy context, notably the existence of the *Bolsa Família* as a dominant competitor.⁷⁹ Here, there is an important political lesson to be learned about being wary about compromising legislative efforts in a way that subsequently renders its implementation hostage to the whims of political agents with little sympathy for (or interest in) furthering its cause. The larger lesson, however, must be an appreciation of the difficulties of pushing through a basic income in a direct manner, without having secured sufficient political support to steer the proposal around the many bottlenecks in the legislative process.

Basic income “stepping stones”, such as the CCT programs in place throughout Latin America or (more controversially) the Universal Credit in the UK, at first blush offer a more feasible approach to instituting basic income. Instead of taking the principled high road to pushing for what many still deem a radical proposal, basic income advocates might instead opt for the “low road” (Jordan, 2012) of building on existing policies, using an incremental approach of “muddling through” (Lindblom, 1959, 1979). Its proponents argue that the low road to basic income already puts in place some key conditions — such as the role of cash transfers or the integration of tax and benefits — without which a well-functioning basic income would not be feasible. With these steps already in place, the subsequent rolling out of basic income should prove much easier (compare Bonoli and Palier, 2007).

There are several problems with this line of argument, however. The fact that some background conditions are required does not as such mean that having them already in place implies a decisive advantage. First off, it may be possible to institute the necessary conditions for successful implementation fairly easily at a

⁷⁹ The Brazil experience points at how the layering of programs and the internal competition this generates can thwart the stability of a policy (Schickler, 2001; also ARTICLE VI).

later stage, in which case the alleged benefits of using cognates as a stepping stone are overplayed. More importantly, having these background conditions in place may hamper rather than help the case for basic income. One way in which this could happen is if the aspect of the cognate policy that is supposed to put us on the low road to a basic income fails.⁸⁰ A different problem is that moving from here to there is far from “automatic”: advocates of incrementalism still need to identify the *policy levers* that would transform the cognate policy into a proper basic income. This is a major impediment to gradual policy reform.

This is certainly the case where cognate policies remain wedded to the idea of means-testing or work-conditionality, which is a very difficult barrier to overcome (Steensland, 2006, 2007). Even with cash transfers and tax benefit integration in place, conditional cognate policies may simply have moved onto an entirely different path from that of a universal and unconditional basic income — a path from which it is very difficult to deviate over time.⁸¹ The main lesson of this set of cases is that, in the absence of clear mechanisms that function as policy or political levers, we ought to be careful about imputing the sequence, direction or speed of dynamic policy transformation. The low road to basic income is an important contender for a political strategy that takes into account the difficulties of pushing head-on for a basic income guarantee, but merely constituting an alternative road does not guarantee its success.

What about the third set of cases, the PFD in Alaska and the compensations for oil pricing reform in Iran? Here we seem to find policies that all but in name amount to a basic income, and are indeed put forward as models to be emulated elsewhere for that reason (Widerquist and Howard, 2012b). Here too, the picture is not as straightforward as often painted by its advocates. First, there is little dispute that the schemes currently implemented in Alaska and Iran leave something to be desired from the perspective of a full-blown basic income guarantee, whether it be the low level and variation of the grant, payment on a yearly rather than monthly basis, payment through households rather than individuals, or indeed uncertainty of the stability of the program over time (ARTICLE VI). Addressing these shortcomings within the particular policy context in which these schemes emerged

⁸⁰ In the UK example, the current difficulties of practically implementing the reform may lead the government to alter its proposed tax benefit integration in a way that would negate its role in a future basic income policy, or even abandon the approach altogether. The difficulties of integrating the council tax into the proposed scheme is often mentioned in this regard.

⁸¹ On the importance of path dependence and in particular the role of timing and sequencing in policy processes, see Pierson (1993, 2004).

may be problematic, for reasons mentioned (Zelleke 2012; Tabatabai, 2012a, 2012b).

The main limitation of these programs lies elsewhere, however. Both Alaska and Iran provide us with a (limited) basic income as a *byproduct* of a process aimed at, respectively, creating a sovereign wealth fund (Alaska) or reforming implicit subsidies on oil (Iran). These schemes may be performing admirably given their intended purpose, but this purpose is explicitly *not* to grant each citizen a basic income guarantee. Differences between the two examples aside, the many different grounds by which we can justify a basic income provide us with a radically different rationale for policy development from the one underlying Alaska or Iran. The absence of a well-formulated *independent* rationale for a basic income guarantee restricts not only the expansion of the extant programs in Alaska or Iran, but more importantly also limits their use as models for introducing a basic income elsewhere.

2.5 Under the Hood: Diversity Within the Basic Income Idea

I want to conclude this section by arguing that the cases discussed in the previous section points at a major challenge for basic income research and advocacy. Taken together, these cases strongly suggest that basic income advocacy is not about promoting the *generic form* of basic income outlined at the outset of this section. Instead, there are multiple reasons for endorsing a basic income, each of which specify a *particular* basic income model. For instance, some reasons for having a basic income insist on it being sufficient to cover basic needs — with some commentators even insisting on this feature as an integral part of the definition of basic income (Zelleke, 2012) — while others deliberately leave open this aspect (Van Parijs, 1991, 1995, 2004). This has important implications for the politics of basic income, as I will explain below: not only is the scope for forming a broad coalition in support of basic income smaller than expected (ARTICLE III and V), but the *strategies* available to pursue one's goal are equally reduced.

In particular, political strategies that may only get us partly to the goal of adopting a basic income guarantee congruent with the reasons for having such a scheme appear to be of little use. Consider again the cases of Alaska and Iran. Both of these cases depend on basic income essentially emerging as a byproduct. But the failure to enunciate strong reasons in favour of a basic income guarantee in both cases affect the design — and, by implication, the outcomes — of the policy

implemented. From the perspective of the basic income advocate, this generates at best a seriously watered-down version of the intended policy.⁸² By contrast, staying true to one's policy rationale and directly pushing for a specific design that will faithfully deliver a proper basic income guarantee is likely to encounter political resistance, as the cases of Ireland, Spain and even Brazil illustrate.

What emerges is that basic income advocates face a strategic choice between either promoting a *specific* basic income model, which they believe is justified by a particular set of principled or pragmatic reasons, but in doing so they face tremendous political opposition from political entrepreneurs and the general public who oppose *this* basic income model; or promoting the *generic* idea of basic income, which allows them to use a wider range of policies as stepping stones, but at the cost of potentially⁸³ ending up with a basic income scheme that falls short of the social ideal. There are no easy solutions, for the politics of basic income requires that we continuously balance the requirements of feasibility and desirability. In this dissertation I propose to examine in some detail the internal disagreements and division within the basic income debate, taking seriously the notion of basic income as a *policy instrument*.

⁸² One might think having a watered-down version of a basic income is better than none at all, but this precisely depends on the particular normative arguments that underpin one's case for a basic income (Casassas and De Wispelaere, 2012).

⁸³ "Potentially" here refers to two different type of contingencies. On the one hand, there is the contingency of whether a policy lever can be found that pushes the generic basic income as close as possible to one's preferred design. On the other hand, along the way, different factions supporting the generic model of basic income will separate into those whose preferred specific model gets adopted, and those who will have to compromise.

3. The Many Faces of Universal Basic Income

“Asking about the pros or cons of basic income as such is rather like asking about the pros and cons of keeping a feline as a pet without distinguishing between a tiger and a tabby.”

Brian Barry, 2001: 63

In this section I briefly discuss several aspects of basic income design that feature in the contemporary policy debate and the associated scholarly literature. The main aim is to show how the generic basic income model (“type”) that we encounter in such debates in fact masks a wide variety of concrete policies (“tokens”).⁸⁴ This opens the prospect of ethical disagreement and political division around specific basic income schemes; disagreement which is often obscured by the more visible opposition between those advocating basic income as an unconditional citizen’s right and those wedded to traditional welfare policies that retain a strong commitment to selectivity.

I would like to stress at the outset that the discussion in this section does not diminish the fact that basic income constitutes a significant departure from the familiar welfare state models based on Bismarkean or Beveridgean principles (Van Parijs, 1995b; Noguera, 2001). Nevertheless, I believe the basic income debate should welcome a corrective which sheds an important light on its *internal variation*, for reasons that are developed in Sections 4 and 5. Basic income constitutes not a single ideal, but rather a family of policies that harbours “many faces” in terms of design, aims, and expected social as well as political effects.

3.1 Dimensions of Universal Basic Income⁸⁵

As the debate on the desirability and feasibility of universal basic income reaches maturity, the standard definition of basic income as “an income unconditionally

⁸⁴ On the role of basic income “types” and “tokens”, see ARTICLE VI.

⁸⁵ This subsection is a revised version of De Wispelaere and Stirton (2004).

paid to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement” (Van Parijs, 1992a: 3), may no longer capture the diversity of policies advanced within the basic income community. In this section I briefly outline eight key dimensions along which concrete basic income proposals can be differentiated.

3.1.1 Universality

Universality refers to the extent of the population that is covered by a given policy. Typically, universal policies are open to all, while more selective measures single out a subset of the population as beneficiaries. One category of subjects often excluded from even the most universal schemes is non-citizens (however defined), while more selective measures discriminate even farther to restrict eligibility to a subset of individuals (or groups) within the reference population (Van Parijs, 2004). Selectivity immediately invokes debate regarding the principles and mechanisms employed to decide on eligibility (van Oorschot, 2002). In practice this implies building in some level of conditionality, discussed further below. The crucial point, however, is that universalism and selectivity are mutually exclusive.

Selective measures should not be confused with targeting in policy, however. Although all selective policies are necessarily targeted, *targeting within universalism* exists as well (Skocpol, 1991). For instance, policies can be designed to disproportionately benefit, say, the lower income percentiles by granting them a more generous allocation of an otherwise universal benefit.⁸⁶ Policies can also be targeted within universalism to the extent that even the same uniform allocation clearly benefits one group over another. This is arguably the case for basic income, where “giving to all, rich and poor, is not meant to make things better for the rich” (Van Parijs, 2004: 13). Interestingly, as the two scenarios above indicate, targeting can occur both at the level of *policy intention* (through differential allocation rules) or at the level of *policy outcomes* (same rules with different impact) (Van Lancker and Van Mechelen, 2015).

Basic income advocates often favour an incremental approach to instituting a full basic income (Jordan, 2012). One way in which this could be done is to have basic income type policies in a specific domain — child benefit, basic pension or sabbatical accounts — which are then gradually expanded or “universalized” over time (Offe, 2001; Frankel and Mulvale, 2014). However, we must remain cautious

⁸⁶ To illustrate, the (now discontinued) Child Trust Fund granted each newborn a £250 start-up fund, while those from poor families received an initial £500 stake. See Section 2 for discussion.

about attaching too much importance to the label and ignoring what happens on the ground. As I argue in Section 5, basic income advocates sometimes put too much faith in *nominal* over *substantive* universalism: the former obtains when formal barriers to eligibility are removed, while the latter requires that all those entitled effectively receive their basic income (ARTICLE III). In what follows I review various ways in which basic income schemes satisfy different degrees of universalism, as well as other salient dimensions in which concrete basic income proposals can be practically differentiated.

3.1.2 Individuality

Individuality refers to the standard unit at which a policy is directed. Welfare policy schemes commonly face a choice between administering their services either directly to individuals or to the household unit.⁸⁷ Basic income is routinely advocated as a form of income support that caters to individuals in two senses: the level of the grant is calculated independent of household situation, and it is allocated to individuals directly (Van Parijs, 2004). However, some advocates, mainly for reasons of goodness-of-fit with traditional approaches in welfare policy, have been willing to compromise on this and recommend instituting a basic income targeted to households (e.g., Offe, Muckenberger and Ostner, 1996). The dimension of individuality therefore does not lose its relevance for the basic income debate.

In the case of households many questions arise with respect to the appropriate definition of a household and its internal composition. Tony Atkinson (1998) distinguishes four types of household units, each with its own delineation and composition problems: “households” based on common residence; “spending units” based on common spending patterns; “family units” defined by blood ties or marriage; and finally the “inner family” defined in terms of a sustained dependence relationship. Switching from one household base to another in policy design has been shown to imply up to a quarter of reductions in the measurement of people on low income (Atkinson, 1998: 34-35). In short, measuring the actual effects of welfare policies is highly sensitive to choice of household type, and the same applies to basic income (Zelleke, 2007).

⁸⁷ The household unit is then assumed to be an indirect conduit for allocating benefits to individuals. However, many difficulties prevent this from happening in practice (McKay and Vanevery, 2000; Jepsen and Meulders, 2002).

From a normative point of view, the chief sources of concern are the often arbitrary discrimination of life-style choices associated with household-based policies; unacceptable inequalities between single-income and double-income households and between single persons and double-income households, at times leading to perverse redistributive effects from the poor to the well-off; and the fact that non-individualized rights often generate employment traps or lock partners into a dependence relation (McKay, 2001, 2007; Zelleke, 2011). While conservative political factions are often keen to use welfare policies to strengthen the traditional nuclear family unit (Lewis, 1992; Wax, 2009), the increasing variation of living arrangements within and across generations suggests this argument may have outlived its usefulness (Esping-Andersen, 2009). Although much attention has recently been devoted to the effects of individualizing benefits on intra-householder power relations, the research remains surprisingly ambivalent about its implications for basic income.⁸⁸

3.1.3 Conditionality

Conditionality refers to the extent of conditions built into a policy that may restrict a person's (continued) eligibility for a service. Most welfare policies come with different types of conditions attached that recipients need to satisfy to gain or maintain eligibility. Basic income is distinctive precisely in that it is purportedly unconditional or, failing that, at the very least only employs conditions that do not violate the programme's inclusiveness. An example of a conditionality requirement that ostensibly barely affects inclusiveness is Tony Atkinson's (1996, 2014) well-known proposal for a participation income. Atkinson's intention was to design a scheme that avoids political resistance by imposing a broad and inclusive participation requirement (including, for instance, care work, volunteering and education activities).⁸⁹

To understand better the dimension of conditionality a number of distinctions need to be kept in mind (Dowding, De Wispelaere and White, 2003a). Conditionality refers in the first instance to formal criteria of entitlement. Jochen Clasen and Daniel Clegg (2007) offer a useful three-fold classification of conditionality levels and associated policy levers. In the first instance, they

⁸⁸ For a contrasting view arguing that basic income may not necessarily promote gender equality because of an "inactivity trap", see Robeyns (2000).

⁸⁹ See Section 5.5 and ARTICLE I for a more detailed discussion of participation income.

distinguish *conditions of category*, which essentially refers to the membership of a politically defined social support category.⁹⁰ Next, there exist *conditions of circumstance* that determine the precise eligibility or entitlement of individuals to a particular scheme. Where “categories” are categorical (pun unintended), “circumstances” typically take a more gradual form, allowing for considerable variation in terms of width (what counts as “means” in means testing) as well as depth (how much income or assets disqualify one for means-tested support). The third type is arguably the most controversial: *conditions of conduit* regulating a host of behavioural requirements as a condition upon continued receipt of support. Regarding basic income both the lack of demonstrated willingness-to-work conditions and the absence of stipulations pertaining to the responsible use of the basic income are singled out as problematic by the critics, but in principle each of these admits to compromise.

Conditionality levers need not necessarily be formal, however. We can discern *hidden* or *implied* forms of conditionality: a universal basic income can become more conditional (in the “conduit” sense) because of the interplay with contingencies that result in a scheme effectively treating recipients differently within a formally uniform framework. Suppose we institute a fully unconditional basic income at a variable level related to a macroeconomic performance indicator such as GDP or employment rates. The level of the grant decreases when more people opt out of formal employment or if productivity decreases below a certain threshold indicator, which serves as a soft incentive to push people back into work. While such a scheme does not have any formal levers attached to it, it nevertheless institutes a set of incentives to contribute towards maintaining a certain level of production or employment; and these incentives will apply differently to differently situated individuals or groups.⁹¹

Next, conditions can be *strict* or *weak* depending on whether they are set in stone or there is a significant measure of bureaucratic discretion in assessing when a claimant has satisfied a requirement (Titmuss, 1971; Mashaw, 1983; Goodin, 1988). Bureaucratic discretion invites a measure of arbitrariness, and may induce welfare administrators to engage in behaviour that violates professional standards (Brodkin, 1997; Brodkin and Majmundar, 2010). Interestingly, welfare workers often oppose discretion and prefer a system that rigorously outlines their duties

⁹⁰ Clasen and Clegg (2007: 172) explicitly refer to “basic income for all” as a category confined by citizenship or residency.

⁹¹ For instance, a decrease in the level of basic income will more directly impact on a person who has no other sources of income, pushing her comparatively faster back into the labour market.

precisely because they want to minimize the risk of unprofessional conduct (Bane and Ellwood, 1984). In addition, bureaucratic discretion may boost administrative error, particularly when rules change rapidly and become increasingly complex (Atkinson, 1998: 131-133; Diver, 1983). At the same time, basic income research should be aware of the literature in public administration and administrative law that points to the limits of administration by rule and rote, and to the appropriate uses of discretion (Hood, 2010; Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2011).

Finally, conditions can also be *narrow* or *broad* depending on whether they result in more or less exclusive programs — that is, policies that capture a smaller or larger subset of the population. The Earned Income Tax Credit, for instance, only applies to those in work, whereas a participation income is meant to encompass a broader range of activities, and hence a broader range of target beneficiaries (Atkinson, 1996; Pérez-Muñoz, 2015). This of course raises the notorious problem of who ends up making the decision to value certain social activities by including them in the participation requirement (ARTICLE I). This is not a moot point: conditions are often introduced within a universal basic income for political reasons, because decision makers believe there will not be sufficient political support for unconditional measures, or to further a specific ideological agenda.⁹² Increased target efficiency associated with improved take-up rates is often cited as the strength of unconditional measures (Goodin, 1992; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Offe 2005; also ARTICLE III), while legitimation concerns lie at the basis for imposing some form of conditionality (White, 2003a).⁹³ In practice, the choice of a basic income scheme with or without any residual conditions attached will depend in large part on which constraint we believe to be the stronger.

3.1.4 Uniformity

Uniformity is the extent to which all those who are eligible receive a *similar level* of benefit.⁹⁴ Universal basic income schemes can deviate from this strict interpretation

⁹² The distinction between “technical” and “political” rationales is important in the conditionality debate more generally (e.g., Babb and Carruthers, 2008).

⁹³ Proponents of conditionality often take a too narrow view of what may be required on grounds of fairness or reciprocity. Goodin (2002) and Mau (2004) demonstrate the diversity of policy models compatible with taking a broader view of what reciprocity might require.

⁹⁴ We could also think of uniformity in a different way, as the extent to which individuals receive their benefit *under similar conditions*. Basic income advocates typically assume this is not an issue, but Section 4 will demonstrate that salient uniformity problems may arise at the level of implementation.

in at least two ways. First, we may decide to allocate different levels of transfer to different categories of recipients, thus imposing a form of *ex ante* conditionality within the scheme. A familiar example is the use of age to differentiate the allocation of grants to children, adults of working age and pensioners. By making good strategic use of a distinction that is already embedded in existing welfare systems, basic income proponents have a better chance of bringing basic income in through the back door. Even noted opponents of unconditional basic income, such as Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1999, 2009), favour universal child benefits and basic pensions, effectively endorsing a basic income ideal for the non-working subset of the population. In short, differentiating uniformity provides a handy tool for policy design and advocacy.

Social contingencies also affect the uniformity of basic income. Imagine, for instance, a universal scheme that is formally uniform but with the value to its recipients fluctuating in line with the regional variation in cost of living. It is a matter of some discussion whether a basic income should remain uniform, as argued by Philippe Van Parijs (1995), or whether regional price differences provide a legitimate departure from a strict uniformity rule.⁹⁵ Of course, policy-makers may well decide to use the differential value of a basic income grant to actively influence certain behavioural traits: like taxes, grants may end up serving multiple purposes that need to be balanced.⁹⁶ In principle, then, both uniformity and differentiation are consistent with most forms of basic income. Of course, one should keep in mind that at the margin a heavily differentiated scheme may no longer satisfy the key requirement of universality, effectively blurring the line between “differentiation” and “selectivity”.

3.1.5 Timing

Until recently, the dimensions of frequency and duration were somewhat neglected within universal basic income schemes. But at the end of the 1990s, a real cleavage emerged between universal basic income proposals that provide a regular income

⁹⁵ We could imagine a basic income top-up for those living in large (and expensive) cities, along the lines of the London Allowance in the UK.

⁹⁶ In an interesting variation on this point, Cristian Pérez-Muñoz (2015) has recently proposed a participation income that is varied according to whether its qualifying condition (e.g., volunteering or care work) contributes to the provision of essential services. Unfortunately, the author abstracts from any implementation considerations for putting such a differentiated participation income in practice.

stream, as in unconditional basic income or participation income, and schemes where beneficiaries receive a one-off payment, constituting a capital *stock*, as in stakeholder or capital grant proposals (Ackerman and Alstott, 1999, 2004).⁹⁷ With respect to income streams, a further relevant distinction should be made regarding the *frequency* of regular instalments. After all, it makes a considerable difference to receive your grant on a weekly, monthly or even yearly basis.⁹⁸ Shorter intervals often draw support from those who emphasize basic security, whereas advocates of equal opportunity, suspicious of any form of paternalism, typically favour longer intervals (De Wispelaere and Pérez-Muñoz, 2015). Of course, timing may simply be determined by the surrounding administrative time frame: until recently, wages were commonly paid in weekly instalments in the UK and Ireland as compared to the majority of European countries which employed a monthly pay system. Having basic income “piggy-back” on whatever system is operative in a given jurisdiction typically makes good administrative sense (ARTICLE II).

While the distinction between streams and stocks informs much of the current debate, the distinction is prone to overstatement. Under the right circumstances income streams can be converted into stocks and *vice versa* (Van Parijs, 2001, 2004), though it remains unclear whether such conditions are currently present in even the most advanced welfare regimes.⁹⁹ In addition, many of the basic capital approaches seem to have some in-built mechanisms of ensuring that the entire grant is not wasted on so-called stake-blowing activities, which in one more respect brings them closer to the ideal of basic economic security (Ackerman and Allstot, 2004; White, 2004).¹⁰⁰ Once we take this expansion into account, the distinction between income and capital grant schemes arguably diminishes.

A final consideration concerns the *duration* aspect of basic income. Putting a time-limit upon receipt of assistance is a measure common to most selective income support policies, but could also be used to render universal basic income socially and politically acceptable. Stuart White, for instance, argues for introducing a time-limited basic income scheme to combat exploitation and free-riding (White 2003b; also Offe, 2000, 2008). Restricting the receipt of basic income to, say, a total of five years may deflect free-riding by recipients who would otherwise take advantage of

⁹⁷ For a review of the debate, see Dowding, De Wispelaere and White (2003) and Wright (2006b).

⁹⁸ Compare the Alaska scheme, and its discussion in this respect, in Casassas and De Wispelaere (2012).

⁹⁹ For qualifications and criticism of the conversion argument see Van der Veen (2003), Standing (2006) and Fitzpatrick (2007).

¹⁰⁰ But see Standing (2006) and De Wispelaere and Pérez-Muñoz (2015) for a critique of the inherent paternalism of these measures.

the scheme, or at the very least render its overall effect less socially damaging. In addition to these normative considerations, a time-limited basic income policy may also reflect practical considerations, for instance fitting neatly with other policies (e.g., child benefit or universal pension provisions) that make up the institutional background of particular welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

3.1.6 Modality

Modality refers to the particular implementation format that a universal transfer adopts. When debating basic income we commonly think about cash transfers, but certain forms of in-kind transfers (for example, food coupons, education or travel vouchers, housing benefits) should not be dismissed out of hand (Van Parijs, 1995). The defining feature of a universal basic income scheme is not the distinction between cash or in-kind transfers as such, but rather whether social support takes the form of a public or a private good. Universally distributed private in-kind measures such as education vouchers may be considered part of a universal basic income, as opposed to strict public goods such as road infrastructure. Having said this, there are many good reasons why most universal basic income schemes will rely on cash transfers (Standing, 2008), but in principle at least part of a basic income could be transferred in-kind.¹⁰¹

Few researchers seem to appreciate fully how many distinct delivery mechanisms can be employed to disburse cash transfers, and how these compare in practice. Consider, for instance, the difference between schemes that deliver the grant by postal cheque, through a basic income debit card with automatic top-up, or as a refundable tax credit. Each of these forms has benefits and drawbacks that need to be carefully considered at the level of design and implementation (ARTICLE II, III and IV). One important administrative factor is the *level of integration*, which refers to the ease with which a given scheme operates within the existing policy environment and is able to make use of pre-existing administrative capabilities. Highly integrated grants primarily make use of tax-and-transfer mechanisms already in place, whereas weakly integrated versions may require additional, often costly, administrative measures to be set up from scratch.¹⁰² The latter must of course be offset by the corresponding advantages: for example, higher levels of take-

¹⁰¹ For an argument favouring in-kind over cash support, see Bergmann (2006) and Panitch and Heath (2010).

¹⁰² Compare the discussion of the UK Universal Credit scheme in Section 2 above.

up of schemes that operate independently of other, more selective, welfare benefits. I discuss some of these options in some detail in Section 5.

3.1.7 Generosity

A further dimension of universal basic income schemes relates to its level of generosity, in particular its capacity to satisfy recipients' basic needs. Strictly speaking, a universal basic income need not be fixed at subsistence level: it can conceivably both exceed as well as fall short of what is commonly considered as an adequate income standard (Van Parijs, 1995).

Some scholars have made the case for a partial as opposed to a full basic income, and most cognate universal schemes can be varied along this dimension (Van Parijs, 1992a, 2001; Van Parijs, Jacquette and Salinas, 2000).¹⁰³ A critical distinction lies elsewhere, namely between partial proposals that allow for basic income to be complemented by other types of cash (or in-kind) assistance, and proposals where the partial basic income becomes the sole means of public support. Not surprisingly, ideological positions differ considerably as to which option is most desirable. Critics of the welfare state, like James Buchanan (1997), Milton Friedman (1962) or Charles Murray (2006), have all at times endorsed a welfare state that adopts a single universal program of social support, *provided we simultaneously cut most other forms of state support*. Social democrats and socialists, on the other hand, oppose such proposals and insist that a partial basic income must always be complemented by other forms of assistance (Van Parijs, 1995; Wright, 2004, 2006). With respect to one-off grants, things are slightly different: in this case the goal is not primarily income security but rather improving one's stock of personal assets, but here too the level of generosity is crucial for determining its range of application (White 2003b, LeGrand, 1989, 2004; LeGrand and Nissan, 2003).

Focusing for the moment on income stream versions of universal basic income, the adequacy dimension raises a number of problems. There is first the familiar problem of defining and measuring the level of subsistence at any given time or place. There exists an immense literature on various ways of delineating basic needs in contemporary welfare societies (Loyal and Gough, 1991; Goodin, 1988). While most of this literature accepts that there is something arbitrary about determining a uniform level of subsistence across society (Sen, 1983), we should nevertheless

¹⁰³ For important criticism of the partial basic income option, see Groot (2004).

appreciate that even arbitrary benchmarks often serve a useful purpose in social policy. This is not merely a matter of debating the proper criteria but also of finding ways to properly assess how different contingencies affect people's lives.

A related concern is whether the level of a universal grant needs to be fixed at all. Perhaps we should take a dynamic approach by making the level of the grant periodically revisable, which could be done in two ways. First, the level of the grant can be periodically revised by Parliament or an independent commission, taking into account reflections of economic performance, political will and so on. A second possibility is to link the level of the grant automatically to some macro-economic indicators, as is already the case with other policies in various European countries. This indexation approach has the clear advantage of minimizing direct political interference, but it remains a question whether this is in all cases a good thing (Weaver, 1988; also ARTICLE VI). Two further advantages of the dynamic approach, whichever form it takes, are that the resulting level of grant reflects the overall state of the economy as well as being able to respond much quicker to dynamic changes in behaviour that will inevitably occur with the introduction of a basic income. A potential downside of such a dynamic approach, however, is perhaps that it does not instil the same degree of basic security as a fixed level grant achieves, which in turn may have adverse effects at the personal as well as the social level (Van Parijs, 2004; Standing 2002).

3.1.8 Financing

There is one final critical dimension along which basic income proposals are likely to differ, namely the funding base. Proposals on how to fund basic income are legion, comprising both the "classics" of partially redirected or additional income taxation, higher consumer or corporate taxes, resource or wealth taxes, as well novel ideas such as a Tobin tax on capital speculation, cap-and-dividend (cap-and-trade with an earmarked dividend component) or the use of crypto-currency as an alternative funding source.

Within this plethora of funding options, we can distinguish some considerations to guide basic income design. First, some advocates propose funding basic income out of the existing budget — largely redirecting current budget commitments — whereas others are keen to at least partially finance basic income through an additional source. The latter supports the Alaska Permanent Dividend Fund, discussed in Section 2, and there is keen interest in exploring the use of resource

dividends as a funding source for basic income (Widerquist and Howard, 2012a, 2012b). Political expedience strongly suggests favouring a novel funding source rather than having to take from some to give to others as income or wealth taxation would require (Widerquist and Howard, 2012c). Nevertheless, the political expedience of resource taxation should not be overestimated, as the availability of such a resource will immediately introduce competing views concerning its most suitable use.¹⁰⁴ And in each case there exists a question about which recourses are available and suitable for exploration in a manner that would reliably fund a sizeable basic income.¹⁰⁵

Another set of considerations pertains to a basic income that would be funded out of existing revenue streams. A first question concerns the precise source of taxation: are we to mainly focus on income taxation, or instead opt for consumption tax or even a wealth tax? Each of these come with their own economic and political challenges. Using inheritance tax to fund basic income would be another interesting option, but is likely to meet with unsurmountable public resistance (Maxwell and White, 2006). A related question pertains to the rate of progressivity of the tax rates. Should we use a flat or progressive tax rate applied to income or assets? Should we include consumer taxes, which are typically regressive? A final issue is whether we should fund basic income through a general tax (possibly a combination of all the above) or instead institute an earmarked model along the lines of national insurance contribution. While the standard argument suggests funding models based on earmarked or dedicated payroll taxes are more resistant to dismantling, recent research has demonstrated even earmarked programs are vulnerable to erosion through *fiscal constriction* (Hertel-Fernandez, 2013).

Finally, a major question pertains to whether basic income must achieve budget neutrality. One option is to insist that basic income financing is matched by a reduction in spending elsewhere as opposed to increased taxation. In effect, this means basic income is meant to be substituted for a number of currently existing programs or tax exemptions (Howard, 1997). The “rate of substitution” — the number of programs cut to pay for a basic income — depends in part on the size

¹⁰⁴ One should keep in mind that the bulk of the proceeds of the Alaska Permanent Fund goes towards paying off Alaska residents’ federal income tax, which of course disproportionately benefits those at the upper end of the income distribution. Resource taxation will always raise political competition driven by opportunity costs.

¹⁰⁵ This boils down to a question about which resources can be reliably turned into a Sovereign Wealth Fund that produces sufficient revenue for financing a basic income (Cummine, 2012).

of the basic income and in part on the political commitments towards existing programs. Either way, it should be noted that arguments about basic income replacing existing programs face their own challenges, as detailed in Sections 4 and 5.

A different route is to argue that basic income will pay for itself once we appreciate the barely obscured (if not counted) costs of poverty and economic inequality. For instance, one might argue basic income produces a “Health Dividend”, which could be calculated (conservatively) in terms of reduced hospitalization rates and other medical visits (Forget, 2011). Taking into account the broader health impact of economic inequality (e.g., absentee rates at work) would increase the economic cost of ill health exponentially (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). However, deciding on which effects to count within the budget is again very controversial, politically.¹⁰⁶

3.2 Basic Income: From Social Ideal to Social Policy

The eight dimensions charted in the previous subsection outline the main design contours of basic income. Policy makers intent on pushing forward with the basic income proposal need to make key decisions on each of these dimensions. The policy context may introduce important constraints in terms of the range of choice available to decision-makers in each of these dimensions. Some of these dimensions will need to be fixed in advance, while others can be allowed to vary over time without risk of disruption (e.g., to accommodate changing circumstances). Institutions matter too, with some dimensions allowing for considerable discretion while for others options are more or less fixed (e.g., the role of veto points). Jurisdictions will also vary extensively in terms of who makes the relevant decisions: basic income policy may be determined by legislators, by the executive, or through a political system that merely shapes the broad contours while leaving bureaucrats to fill out the details.

The combination of all these factors suggests that within the broad “type” of a general basic income ideal, we will necessarily find many concrete “tokens” (ARTICLE VI). Importantly, it is the tokens that are eventually implemented, and their design features largely determine what social effects basic income will deliver. The effects on a myriad of social dimensions are the bread-and-butter of basic income policy: irrespective of whether one prefers a “principled” or a

¹⁰⁶ For instance, as I argue in Section 5, counting administrative savings achieved at through the implementation of basic income is not as straightforward as basic income advocates maintain.

“pragmatic” approach to the justification of basic income (Barry, 1996b; van der Veen, 1997), without producing detectable material effects basic income advocacy is pointless. Even the most principled defender of basic income must at some point think through the nitty-gritty of practical policy design, given that the resulting social effects are political in Lasswell’s (1936) classic notion of “who gets what when” (and on which conditions). Basic income design is political in a second, closely related sense: given the distribution of winners and losers of a particular basic income scheme, genuine political disagreement about design choices and even political division about design clusters is entirely to be expected. In short, basic income design has both social and political effects that only become apparent in full *once we appreciate the many faces of the generic basic income model*.

Basic income advocates who insist on debating basic income at the generic level of a social ideal are not only at risk of rendering their proposals difficult (or even impossible) to implement if their proposed scheme conflicts with the administrative capabilities of the policy context, but also fall foul of Brian Barry’s apt simile: “Asking about the pros or cons of basic income as such is rather like asking about the pros and cons of keeping a feline as a pet without distinguishing between a tiger and a tabby” (Barry, 2001: 63). Most importantly, they will most likely fail to see that a critical frontline in the battle over basic income policy is located on the inside, as it were. Sections 4 and 5 develop this point in more detail.

4. The Political Feasibility of Basic Income

“[T]he basic income idea is capable of taking on a number of different guises in the hands of political forces or regimes with various ends, and in the contexts of a diversity of economic circumstances.”

Bill Jordan, 2011: 10

For much of the last two decades debate around the proposal of a universal basic income guarantee centred on arguing the ethical and economic case for instituting a policy that grants each adult citizen a guaranteed income as a right, without a means test or work requirement (Van Parijs 1992b; Dowding, De Wispelaere and White, 2003b; Standing 2005; Widerquist, Lewis and Pressman, 2005). The question of how to bring about such a policy — the question of political feasibility — has only recently gained traction amongst basic income advocates. Leaving aside some notable exceptions, much work remains to be done to further our understanding of the challenges faced by basic income advocates, and the strategies available to overcome these.

This section outlines several key political challenges faced by basic income advocates. Basic income may be a “disarmingly simple proposal”, as Philippe Van Parijs (1992, 2004) writes, but its politics is complex. Basic income advocates generally appreciate how difficult it is to convince the general public or political entrepreneurs to support a policy that amounts to giving “something for nothing” (Goodin, 2001a, 2003). Viewed this way, basic income advocacy becomes a matter of persuading those in opposition of its alleged beneficial effects and alleviate their fears of widespread family dissolution or labour market withdrawal, often by pointing towards an increasing body of evidence in favour of universal cash grants (Baird et al, 2011; Davala et al, 2014).¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, this approach overestimates the extent to which ethically or ideologically motivated opposition is susceptible to factual revision (Feldman and Zaller, 1992).¹⁰⁸ In addition, the

¹⁰⁷ The focus on family dissolution and labour market withdrawal was the sole focus of the famous NIT experiments in the US and Canada in the early 1980s (Widerquist, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ For example, research suggests ideology determines how individuals perceive whether an adverse event is a matter of bad luck or personal responsibility (Esarey, Salmon and Barrilleaux, 2012).

political feasibility of basic income is mediated by the internal divisions and tensions alluded to in previous sections, which implies an impossibility to jointly satisfy all aspects of a particular basic income design to the satisfaction of all key stakeholders. This, in turn, will inevitably lead to disagreement, conflict and perhaps compromise amongst the relevant political agents — the bread and butter of political analysis. In a nutshell, one could say that basic income politics is not merely *difficult* but more importantly *complex*, where “complexity” refers to the many interconnecting aspects of basic income design that jointly affect the political feasibility of the basic income proposal.¹⁰⁹

4.1 A Model Framework¹¹⁰

This subsection offers a basic framework to analyze political feasibility applied to basic income. I embrace a broad conception of political feasibility according to which a policy is politically feasible when the background conditions are such that there exists a reasonable probability of the policy becoming actualized in the foreseeable future. Viewed this way, “feasibility” covers the broad domain where a policy is neither immediately realizable, nor impossible to realize (Gilbert and Lawford-Smith, 2012; Lawford-Smith, 2012; Wiens, 2015), and feasibility analysis is aimed at investigating the factors (e.g., social conditions) that hamper a policy from becoming actualized. I adopt a similarly broad notion of “the political” by focusing on those feasibility constraints arising from the human will, as opposed to natural, physical or technological impediments.¹¹¹ The proposed framework offers a toolkit to think about political feasibility in a systematic comparative manner, exploring both differences and similarities across “feasibility types”. When applied to the specific context of basic income, insight into the distinctive dimensions of political feasibility offers a better understanding of the many complex challenges faced by those advocating basic income schemes. Distinctive aspects often require a specifically targeted political response, but an effective response is complicated

¹⁰⁹ I understand complexity along the lines of the concept of polycentricity, as advanced by Lon Fuller (1978).

¹¹⁰ The material in this subsection is adapted from De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012).

¹¹¹ The concept of political feasibility embraces the Searlean notion that individual or collective manifestations of the human will are causally relevant in bringing about institutional facts such as basic income (Searle, 1995, 2010).

considerably by the need to jointly accommodate several types of constraints, whether *simultaneously* or *sequentially*.¹¹²

Let us begin by exploring the two dimensions that construct the matrix illustrated in Table 1 below. I start from the simple axiom that politics implies agency. In one well-known phrase, politics is the purposeful act of deciding who gets what when (Lasswell, 1936). Politics is intimately linked with power, which, in turn, is the ability to produce intentional effects on other people (Dowding, 1996). Political power presumes not merely agency in an abstract sense, but concretely at least two sets of agents: those who exert political influence and those who are at its receiving end. On the supply side different political entrepreneurs — individual, collective, even corporate — employ political resources in an attempt to exert power and influence outcomes. More interestingly, however, is the demand side of the equation: those at which political power is addressed and who are the proper subject of specifically designed political strategies.

Here we can distinguish two very different types of agency.

- (I) *Discrete agency*: political agency addressed at readily identifiable actors with distinctive interests, roles, capacities and intentions;
- (II) *Diffuse agency*: political agency addressed at an amorphous set of actors, a “collective” in the loosest sense of the term, with little or no apparent coordination or collective intention.

Discrete agents form the most visible part of the policy process, comprising politicians, policy-makers, party cadres, social movement leadership, or bureaucrats, but also clearly identifiable corporate actors such as organizations or distinctive formal institutions (e.g., the executive). By contrast, the typical example of a diffuse agent in the policy process is the general public, which often exhibits the properties of “mass” rather than “collective” behaviour (Kornhauser, 1998). Both types of agency coexist and interact in a myriad of complex ways to constitute the environment in which political entrepreneurs operate.

The distinction between discrete and diffuse agency is important for understanding the different challenges political entrepreneurs face when exercising political influence addressed to each of these groups. Discrete agents are the subject of highly targeted political strategies. Strategies aimed at diffuse agents, by contrast, are necessarily less direct and typically take on a broad, “catch-all” character. Where

¹¹² While I will not here engage in any assessment of how different feasibility types interact, whether simultaneously or sequentially, the existence of such interaction is a key feature of the political analysis of basic income.

we might think of discrete political agency as similar to a line fisher carefully selecting his bait to capture a particular type of fish, diffuse political agency resembles the trawler fisher who sweeps the ocean floor in the hope to catch as many fish as possible, knowing that much of what he catches may be of little value to him. Nevertheless, even the trawler fisher must carefully select where and when to put out his net to ensure as good a catch as possible. Both approaches require careful strategizing. The main challenge is to simultaneously affect both types of agents.

Moving on to the second dimension, politics takes place between agents in a context that is highly constrained, requiring valuable political resources — time, effort, money, political expertise and reputation — to be expended in order to achieve intended outcomes. The constraints that make up a particular political environment are again very diverse and can be usefully characterized by adopting a sequential perspective.

- (III) *Prospective constraints*: constraints that affect the probability of a policy being instituted;
- (IV) *Retrospective constraints*: constraints that affect both the robustness and resilience of a policy once instituted.¹¹³

Prospective constraints affect the most familiar aspects of the policy process: agenda-setting, policy advocacy, coalition-building, political negotiation and legislation. These are the sort of constraints policy advocates face whenever they attempt to move their proposal from the drawing board to its actualization. Retrospective constraints, by contrast, are those background conditions that affect the outcome variables of a particular policy, including whether a particular policy will be vulnerable to internal contradictions or external shocks that may result in it being a very short-lived event (the stability problem). Of course, as with political agency, both sets of constraints coexist in the same political environment and typically influence each other various ways.

The distinction between prospective and retrospective constraints bears some interesting similarities with recent work by Erik Olin Wright (2006c, 2010) on emancipatory social theory. Wright makes a helpful distinction between the criteria of *viability* and *achievability*, both of which can be regarded as a subclass of the concept of political feasibility. Achievability refers to the practical task of realizing a particular policy outcome (or a social transformation), while the criterion of viability “asks of proposals for transforming existing social structures whether, if implemented, they would actually generate in a sustained manner the emancipatory

¹¹³ On the difference between “robustness” and “resilience”, see ARTICLE VI.

consequences that motivated their proposal” (Wright 2006c: 97). Viability enquires into the policy congruence of a particular proposal, the extent to which its outcomes might cohere with or deviate from the stated (or implied) objectives that constitute the reasons for adopting it in the first place. While most theorists debate the value of constructing proposals that may be viable but not achievable in the short run, equally interesting questions arise when considering proposals that are achievable but perhaps not viable (i.e., they may lead to results that are, all-things-considered, less than desirable because of unintended consequences). Mapped onto the proposed framework, we can see that both achievability and viability are necessary conditions and that political entrepreneurs must squarely face up to both prospective and retrospective constraints.

Table 1: Typology of political feasibility

	Prospective constraints (achievability)	Retrospective constraints (viability)
Discrete agency	A. <i>Strategic feasibility</i>	B. <i>Institutional feasibility</i>
Diffuse agency	C. <i>Psychological feasibility</i>	D. <i>Behavioural feasibility</i>

The resulting matrix, illustrated in Table 1, generates four types of political feasibility. Strategic and institutional feasibility share a focus on discrete agency. But where strategic feasibility requires a direct engagement to further a policy, institutional feasibility directs our attention to preexisting sets of rules and regulations that may affect the performance of a policy over time. Similarly, socio-psychological and behavioural feasibility both concentrate on diffuse agency with the general public. The former addresses the processes that *ex ante* affect popular support for a policy (Schmidt, 2002; Kangas, Niemelä and Varjonen, 2012), while the latter is mostly concerned with how behavioural changes *ex post* affect the performance or continued survival of a policy. In the remainder of this dissertation I will mostly focus on the strategic and institutional components of political feasibility, making occasional reference to issues pertaining to socio-psychological and behavioural feasibility.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012) explores all four types in some detail.

4.2 Basic Income – A Policy In Search of a Constituency?

The first strategic question in democratic politics is to decide on the core constituency for the program or policy one wants to institute. A “constituency” is a decidedly political category, referring to a subgroup within the overall population that has a significant vested interest in the proposed policy, and is subjectively aware of this interest.¹¹⁵ In addition, for a target group to become a constituency it must have a capacity to influence decision-makers — including, but not limited to, the power of voting in democratic elections. In a nutshell, a constituency is willing and able to put political resources towards promoting (or maintaining) a particular policy or program (Korpi, 1980, 1989).¹¹⁶ In this respect, the *political* category of a “constituency” is markedly different from the *policy* category of a “beneficiary”. When policy-makers talk about the target population that is expected to benefit from a particular policy, they may not be talking about a constituency in the relevant political sense. The distinction between beneficiary and constituency is highly pertinent for the politics of basic income.

Basic income advocates somewhat naively assume that because of its universal scope, basic income reform *ex hypothesi* has a large constituency. Unfortunately there are a number of reasons to think the constituency of a basic income may be smaller than hoped for by its proponents. In the first instance, while under basic income everyone is entitled to the unconditional grant, in reality of course some will be *net beneficiaries* while others will be *net contributors*. This distinction is most salient when basic income is financed through a general income tax, but equally applies for other funding sources.¹¹⁷ One of the main questions determining the size of beneficiary is the precise level of basic income, but it is not the only parameter. A key consideration is what in Section 3.1.8 I called the “rate of substitution”: the extent to which basic income replaces rather than complements

¹¹⁵ A constituency may falsely believe that it has an objective interest in a program. While the subjective aspect of a constituency therefore appears the more important, because there is always the risk that a constituency wizens up to its objective reality a *stable* constituency necessarily entails both an objective and subjective dimension.

¹¹⁶ A basic income constituency competes with traditional welfare state policies in attracting support of two key political actors, namely trade-unions and left-wing parties. On the continued relevance of both actors for welfare state support, see Pontusson, Rueda and Way (2002), Allan and Scruggs (2004), and Pontusson and Rueda (2010).

¹¹⁷ For instance, even a basic income financed by a resource tax (e.g., oil licenses as in the Alaska PFD) divides the population in net recipients and net contributors once we take opportunity costs in the form of alternative uses of tax income into account.

existing support programs. A basic income that mostly harmonizes the support system by replacing a host of programs may be a major improvement generally speaking, but still leave the bulk of the recipients merely as well off as before. This suggests that the category of net beneficiaries — capturing those whose tax contributions do not strictly speaking finance the basic income — can be further divided into those who genuinely benefit from instituting a basic income and those who *ex post facto* are roughly equally well-off.¹¹⁸

Basic income advocates rightly suggest that even when not amounting to a major increase in cash value, basic income outperforms other schemes by providing genuine economic security through a less stigmatizing program (Standing, 1999, 2002).¹¹⁹ This is no doubt true, but from a constituency-seeking perspective it remains to be seen how many within the target group *perceive* these added benefits as sufficient to strongly prefer a basic income over the policy already in place. Here several factors may work against basic income. First off, there is the familiar *status quo bias* in policy, perhaps exacerbated in the case of basic income by the fact that the proposal ultimately remains untested.¹²⁰ Prospective beneficiaries might rightly wonder about the long-term impact of a basic income on rental housing or minimum wages, and in the absence of persuasive evidence prefer to stick with “the devil they know”.

In addition, basic income may be plagued by what Brian Steensland (2006) has called “symbolic contamination”. The lack of clear programmatic boundaries separating different social groups — customarily hailed as a major advantage of basic income by its supporters (Noguera and Raventós, 2005) — causes the “morally tainted status” of one class of recipients to pollute receipt of a basic income for those otherwise regarded as “deserving” (Steensland, 2006: 1286). Unless carried by a genuinely broad support base in the general population, basic

¹¹⁸ We can ascertain one further level of division, as the class of real beneficiaries is not homogeneous in terms of the social risks to which a basic income is meant to respond. The importance of *homogeneity in the risk pool* is explored by Rehm (2011) and Rehm, Hacker and Schlesinger (2012).

¹¹⁹ This argument would appear to gain in importance for those who are part of the rapidly growing “precariat” (Standing, 2011b). However, two points potentially mitigate against this argument. First, some studies show that individuals support measures that compensate not for losing a job per se but rather for the loss of a “good job” and its associated benefits (Mughan, 2007). The problem is that basic income, at any plausible level, will not compensate in full for lost earnings and privileges associated with good jobs. Second, while economic insecurity is a prominent factor explaining people’s political preferences (Hacker, Rehm and Schlesinger, 2013) experiences of economic security by the precariat may nevertheless only have a transient effect (Margalit, 2013).

¹²⁰ Note here again the limitations of large-scale field experiments carried out in the last decades for generalizing across policy contexts (Noguera and De Wispelaere, 2006).

income may not be able to shed its stigma which, in turn, impedes the extent to which recipients will genuinely identify it as an improvement. Furthermore, symbolic contamination increases when the division between those who are net beneficiaries and those who are net contributors is more transparent. Here we encounter another alleged advantage of basic income — increased transparency — that rapidly mutates into a political challenge. Transparency produces a further problem in that social solidarity in the welfare state typically requires that the precise division of who receives and who contributes (and how much) remains opaque (Baldwin, 1990; also Clasen 2001).¹²¹ Basic income thus faces a real problem in generating sufficient support amongst net contributors who can clearly identify the winners of a supposedly universal scheme (de Beus, 2013), and most tellingly may lose the all-important support of the middle classes without whom welfare state reform remains a mirage (Goodin and LeGrand, 1987; Korpi and Palme, 1998).¹²²

The arguments outlined before all combine against a basic income in a rather paradoxical manner. While it is often argued that basic income should start off at modest levels for political reasons (Van Parijs, 1992a, 2001), a too modest basic income may simply not get off the ground for lack of building a sufficiently large constituency.¹²³ In the case of a partial basic income, for instance, it is entirely to be expected that the size of net recipients who are genuinely benefiting from the new scheme is rather small, while both symbolic contamination and middle class resistance increases whenever the benefits of a basic income policy are progressively targeted towards low-income and socially marginalized groups. These groups are easy to ignore because, for a variety of reasons, they are typically politically excluded (Soss, 1999, 2000; Mettler and Stonecash, 2008; Bruch, Ferree and Soss,

¹²¹ Jochen Clasen has observed that the “blessing of intransparency” integral to complex social insurance arrangements is a key determinant for legitimating complex social insurance schemes: “too much transparency might have a counterproductive effect in terms of diminishing rather than increasing legitimacy and support, and this applies much more to systems which provide flat-rate benefits than to those which are predominantly wage-replacement-oriented” (Clasen, 2001: 655).

¹²² Combined with the blame-avoidance stance of many political actors, overly transparent policies may produce Hirschman-type of “perversity effects”, whereby the resulting outcome is the diametrical opposite of the intended effect (Hood, 2007). Applied to basic income, we risk witnessing a policy intended to blur social categories in reality exacerbating them.

¹²³ Compare the challenges analyzed by Suzanne Mettler (2010) under the concept of the “submerged state”, the large area of state activity that fails to attract sufficient attention (and support) from dedicated interest groups or the general public (also Howard, 1997).

2010).¹²⁴ For basic income recipients to become a genuine constituency they must either become individually politically active — notably by voting on a regular basis — or else reconfigure themselves as an organized interest group. Neither of these scenarios is very likely, especially if basic income is primarily targeted to the poor and socially marginalized who face the highest hurdles in terms of political “presence” in contemporary democracies. The first challenge for the politics of basic income, then, is to go on a systematic search for a stable political constituency.

4.3 Building Coalitions: The Struggle for Strategy

This subsection summarizes the main insight in ARTICLE V. As mentioned in previous sections, public awareness and interest in basic income has grown exponentially in the last few years following the success of the Swiss Citizens’ Initiative and the media attention surrounding the European Citizen’s Initiative (ECI). It is fair to say basic income that is no longer regarded as yet another crackpot idea of the radical Left. The key challenge now becomes how to translate increased policy attention and awareness into full-blown political support, especially support from those who are able and willing to invest political capital into pushing basic income farther along the political agenda. This is the task of building a stable enacting coalition geared at instituting a basic income.

ARTICLE V discusses two thorny problems that plague basic income advocacy in this regard. The starting point of the article is to denounce the overly optimistic tendency amongst basic income advocates to play a numbers game by which every instance of political support counts as a small step towards instituting basic income in the not-too-distant future. By contrast, I argue that basic income advocates ought to be much more realistic in terms of appreciating which expressions of political support are actually instrumental in furthering policy development. I am equally skeptical about the associated strategy of indiscriminately eliciting support from a wide variety of political agents (individuals and organizations alike), irrespective of their particular political affiliation or their reasons for supporting basic income. This strategy is less effective — and likely counterproductive — in

¹²⁴ Even where citizens are not excluded in a strict sense there exist a severe political bias in responsiveness in favour of those at the top of the income distribution, whether due to political institutions (Solt, 2008; Rigby and Wright, 2013; Hayes, 2013; Griffin and Newman, 2013), different policy preferences of the wealthy (Gilens, 2005; Page, Bartels and Seawright, 2013) or opinion polls “silencing” the voices of the marginalized (Berinsky, 2002).

bringing about a stable enabling coalition in favour of basic income. ARTICLE V reviews each problem and set out its implications for basic income politics.

The first problem I call *the problem of cheap support*. It refers to the fact that many of those expressing support for basic income are doing so while being unable to offer few (if any) political resources to further the cause of instituting a basic income policy. Even a cursory review of basic income supporters in Europe and beyond immediately identifies basic income support is comparatively frequent amongst those who are at best marginal players in the game of politics. Thus, we find basic income support is high amongst political parties who are comfortably situated on the opposition benches — notably the Greens in Europe — or interest group organizations who again have little real political influence on policy formation (e.g., small trade-unions). These expressions of support do little to further basic income policy, apart from offering moral support to those activists battling in the welfare trenches.

Even more disconcerting is the fact that when individuals or groups who in the past expressed support for basic income suddenly gain political power, they systematically drop their support for basic income. The Green Party in Ireland refused to discuss basic income when they got into coalition government in 2008, while more recently the Spanish anti-austerity party Podemos took out basic income from its economic platform in the lead up to the elections. Strategically speaking, it makes perfect sense for political agents to drop support for basic income once gaining power, for it is only at that time that they face a real choice between expending political resources (e.g., time, effort, funding, organizational resources and political capital) on basic income as opposed to other, less controversial policies. In other words, at the margins of politics basic income support is cheap in two senses: it incurs few costs for those who give it, while it is of little use to those who receive it.

Needless to say, this perverse dynamic between the supply and demand side of political support bodes ill for the chances of building an enacting coalition in favour of basic income. In the absence of a stable core of supporters who are both *willing* and *able* to push for basic income, the wealth of media attention and public interest in basic income may not translate into policy reality. In terms of strategy, one lesson of the problem of cheap support is that basic income proponents should carefully identify stakeholders that are in a position to effectively contribute to basic

income policy development, and prioritize political advocacy accordingly.¹²⁵ A second important lesson is that the basic income movement must find a way to hold basic income supporters to account: there should be some political costs attached to dropping basic income once in power. Of course, here we find yet another problem for basic income advocacy, namely its inability to make use of the traditional mechanisms for incentivizing (potential) partners to join or remain in a coalition. Basic income advocates have little to offer in terms of Olsonian selective benefits (Olson, 1965) or, due to their single-issue focus, repeat interactions as part of a long-term collaboration across policy fields.¹²⁶

ARTICLE V next outlines what I call *the problem of persistent disagreement*, which builds directly on the idea that basic income represents a multitude of concrete proposals that can differ quite radically in terms of design, implementation and, ultimately, social effects. Building on the tendency to regard all instances of political support as genuine contributions to the cause, basic income advocates appear to elicit such support overly indiscriminately. Specifically, many in the basic income movement believe that one key advantage of the basic income proposal is precisely that it seems able to transcend ideological barriers, gathering support across the political divides (Barry, 1996a; Torry, 2013). However, as I argue in detail, this belief is false and the resulting strategy illusory. What basic income supporters across the divides agree on is the *idea* of basic income, while they share little more than the basic barebones of anything like a concrete basic income *policy*.

Yet it is ultimately basic income policy that we need to agree on. To illustrate, consider how radically different conservative and progressive proponents of basic income will answer the question of what level the basic income grant should be pitched at. Or, to use an even more telling example, consider the contrasting opinions amongst both camps on how many existing social programs a basic income policy is meant to replace.¹²⁷ The basic income policy that progressives advocate for is largely incompatible with the scheme conservatives have in mind, and no amount of agreement on the basic ideal will prevent opposition from blocking the policy as it moves along the legislative process. Basic income proponents sometimes counter that having agreement on some key principles of

¹²⁵ ARTICLE V discusses the problem of “marginalization-by-association”, in which the cause of basic income may actually suffer from “noxious support” by individuals or groups that would antagonize others from joining an enabling coalition.

¹²⁶ This leaves us with “reputational costs” as a possible accountability mechanism (Hojnacki, 1998).

¹²⁷ Another important area of disagreement concerns resources devoted to implementing a basic income. I discuss this aspect in more detail in the next section.

basic income policy (individuality, universality, even unconditionality) is sufficient to bootstrap basic income into place (Van Parijs, 2004), making it somehow unavoidable that a partial scheme over time will expand into a full-blown (progressive) version. But this argument faces at least two objections. First, policy development is not automatic; on the contrary, each stage of development requires a political battle in which, due to the existence of multiple veto points (Tsebelis, 2002), those pushing for expansion are often at a disadvantage compared to those who favour the status quo. Second, the very idea of bootstrapping basic income underestimates the difficulties in ensuring the stability of a basic income over time, a point to which I turn next.

4.4 Bootstrapping Basic Income? The Problem of Stability

ARTICLE VI examines the problem of stability as it pertains to basic income. The starting point is the following: a stable coalition in favour of basic income will have an interest in its *continued enactment* over time. This follows from a general precept of “policy consumption”, according to which those who have invested in the enactment of a policy objective “care not just about winning a near-term gain but about creating an enduring stream of policy benefits” (Jacobs, 2010: 99). There are at least two reasons to think stability concerns are salient to basic income. On the one hand, many propose basic income as a means to ensuring income security (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Standing 1999, 2002), which presumes the stabilizing expectation of an income stream over time.¹²⁸ On the other hand, intergenerational justice considerations apply where the provision of basic income funded at least in part through the use of external resources requires that future cohorts too should receive an unconditional grant of at least the same level than what the current generation receives (Van Parijs, 1995).

Unfortunately, stability considerations are either virtually absent in basic income discussion, or else narrowly focused on the motivation problem (Pérez-Muñoz, 2014). Here I am more concerned with *political* stability understood in two ways. First, a policy is said to be “resilient” when it can resist pressure for program change, whether through program abolishment or displacement, or whether through changes that alter key program features to such an extent that the policy is

¹²⁸ On the role of stabilizing expectations as a rationale of the welfare state more generally, see Goodin (1990).

barely recognizable.¹²⁹ We can distinguish a second, even less acknowledged variant of stability, according to which a policy is “robust” when it continues to deliver on its stated or implied goals (independent on whether the formal rules or regulations have been altered). A basic income coalition, *ex hypothesi*, should be concerned with both the resilience and robustness of basic income policy legislation and implementation.

Basic income policy is vulnerable to political instability of either type.¹³⁰ Inspired by the literature on institutional change (Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010), ARTICLE VI distinguishes four processes of policy transformation and outline how they might threaten the resilience or robustness of basic income. In the first place, basic income is vulnerable to radical transformation when subsequent legislators decide to change tack and abolish basic income or replace it with a different social policy. While certain welfare policies — notably, pensions — have been shown to produce positive feedback effects that prevent such radical change (Pierson, 1993; 2004), it remains unclear whether basic income would have such effects.¹³¹ In fact, the constituency problem outlined before suggests it may not. In addition, one must also take into account the presence of negative feedback effects that undermine the stability of a policy (Weaver, 2010; Jacobs and Weaver, 2015). In the case of basic income the continued presence of “symbolic contamination” may prove to be a major hurdle for making basic income resilient to radical change. While institutional veto points may prevent basic income being outright abolished or replaced, there exist gradual processes of policy change that succeed in bypassing such veto points.

Layering is a process by which new rules are grafted onto existing policy, hollowing-out existing policy by siphoning off public and political support (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). To the extent that many basic income proposals operate in tandem with other selective or categorical benefit schemes, they find themselves in a constant state of competition over funding, organizational resources and public

¹²⁹ Policy abolishment means the program is taken off the books, while policy displacement means it is being supplanted with another, competing program.

¹³⁰ Ultimately the extent of vulnerability depends on the contextual/institutional features of the jurisdiction in which basic income has been implemented, so the general remarks in this section must be qualified accordingly. At a minimum, however, the arguments give sufficient grounds for basic income advocates to start taking political stability more seriously than they have done hitherto.

¹³¹ In relation to the Alaska PFD, ARTICLE VI argues that it remains unclear whether its stabilizing features can be generalized across other jurisdictions, in part due to the particularities of the Alaska case.

support. In brief, the more layers remain in place, the more programs basic income has to compete against.¹³²

A second gradual process, *conversion*, impacts on the robustness rather than resilience of basic income. Under conversion, policy actors use existing rules and regulations to divert policy towards new goals or reorient its application to new beneficiaries. Conversion is made possible because of the gap between policy design and legislation and its discretionary implementation by street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980).¹³³ Although most basic income advocates have shunned administrative analysis, important implementation choices remain to be made and, under those circumstances, bureaucrats may gradually change how basic income operates from the bottom-up, as it were.¹³⁴ The next section develops this point in more detail.

A final destabilizing process is change through *policy drift*, which operates by failing to update existing programs to meet new or continued needs (Hacker, 2004, 2005). Like most policies, basic income will require a regular “tune-up” to ensure it still responds accurately to a changing social environment. The best illustration of this point concerns the level of the basic income grant which, at a minimum, should increase in line with inflation to ensure its goal of providing income security. Those who oppose basic income must only refuse to support a periodical upward adjustment by vetoing the required budget increase in order to ensure that, over time, basic income will be deemed to be ineffective and in need of replacement.

ARTICLE VI offers a much needed analysis of the sort of stability challenges a basic income could face. The question remains what mechanisms are available to basic income advocates to promote future stability. The article examines one option that some have suggested would result in increased political stability: enshrining a basic income in a Bill of Rights and have it protected by strong judicial review. Unfortunately, a careful analysis of judicial decision-making casts serious doubt on the usefulness of this particular solution. Specifically, both *judicial deference* (judges

¹³² It is interesting to reflect on an important implication of layering: most progressive advocates insist basic income complements rather than replaces other layers of the welfare state, but this means they risk trading-off protection for the current generation against protection of future generations.

¹³³ A recent study suggests bureaucratic preferences override those of political actors when it concerns matters that are not salient to the general public, leaving ample scope for bureaucratic discretion and thus conversion (Bækgaard, Blom-Hansen and Serritzlew, 2015).

¹³⁴ The real danger of conversion through implementation is not just that basic income is becoming relatively ineffective, but also that over time it would lose important public and political support. In short, conversion facilitates abolishment.

refusing to rule on the particular scope or reach of a constitutional right to a basic income) and *judicial activism* (judges putting forward their preferred interpretation of the right to basic income) may be insufficient to guarantee the stability of basic income as intended by the enacting coalition. Instead of constitutionalizing basic income we may need to look elsewhere. Following on from this point, one of the interesting avenues for future research is to examine which properties of basic income would produce the sort of policy feedback loop that produces a Piersonian path-dependence. In line with the general outlook of this thesis, “bootstrapping” basic income requires paying much more attention to the different design features of distinct basic income schemes and their *political* impact.

5. The Public Administration of Basic Income

“No system of law or administration is perfect. ... Try as we might, we are bound to err.”

Robert Goodin, 1985: 141

The political tensions and challenges canvassed in the previous section receive their fullest expression when we move from political debate to design and implementation. It is at the point where the basic income proposal meets the myriad of schemes that make up our policy environment that its design details matter most. It is also here that the internal differences between competing basic income models are most pertinent, and consequently hard to skirt over by the heterogeneous group of basic income supporters. Significant disagreement amongst those who advocate basic income from wildly diverging perspectives may be kept at bay as long there exists a need to maintain a united front against those who favour selective welfare arrangements or, worse, dismantling the welfare state altogether. But when practical implementation problems emerge, persistent disagreement reasserts itself in a way that resists easy resolution. This section develops this point and its consequences for the politics of basic income along several dimensions.

A central claim of this section, and the four articles that underlie the present analysis (ARTICLES I-IV), is that basic income advocates ought to take the implementation stage of the policy process seriously — certainly more seriously than they have done hitherto. Basic income advocates ignore what Bernard Schaffer (1973) has called “the administrative factor” at their own peril.

The basic income debate is notoriously hostile to anything even vaguely reminiscent of bureaucratic intervention. This deep mistrust of administrative analysis is largely misconceived, and its continued avoidance of public administration untenable in the long run. Simply put, policy implementation is impossible without administration, which means basic income advocates inevitably will face the many administrative challenges inherent to implementing a social program at an unprecedented scale. Resolving the implementation challenges of basic income requires not only careful administrative analysis of the expected problems and potential solutions, but also a strong awareness that such analysis will

be highly politicized, pitching proponents of different basic income models against each other. A key claim of the present section is that basic income administration is an integral part of basic income politics.

5.1. Uneasy Bedfellows: Why Basic Income Ignores Administration

The argument that administration matters for basic income design and implementation may seem like a truism to the general political scientist or policy analyst, but nevertheless faces an uphill battle with those engaged in advocating for basic income. Several reasons may explain this general reluctance to embrace administrative analysis, but none warrants the pervasive neglect of administration in basic income research and advocacy.

Basic income advocates customarily adopt a perspective where administration necessarily takes the form of a *controlling bureaucracy* in which welfare clients are required to submit to invasive and degrading people-processing procedures in order to receive the support they are entitled to (Standing, 2002). It is unfortunately a hallmark of most targeted or selective policies that bureaucratic interactions — including face-to-face interactions with street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) — reduce claimants to a passive and subservient role, in which they are met with distrust and suspicion at every turn and their agency, dignity and self-esteem is hampered by the very system that is meant to assist them (Handler 2004, Handler and Hasenfeld, 2006). The outcome is not only the well-known negative effects on target efficiency (Craig, 1991; van Oorschot 1991, 1998) but also general distrust in government and a decline of political participation (Soss, 1999, 2000; Mettler and Stonecash, 2008; Bruch, Ferree and Soss, 2010).¹³⁵ A considerable literature reveals *bureaucratic disentanglement* (Lipsky, 1984) as a predictable side-effect of a system that prioritizes people-processing in line with a dominant eligibility-compliance culture (Bane and Ellwood, 1994), and in many cases even as a deliberate strategy for the state to exercise control (Piven and Cloward, 1993). For basic income advocates, the obvious solution is to combat bureaucratic discretion and paternalism by drastically reducing the scope of administrative intervention altogether (Standing, 2002; Offe, 2005). This perspective views basic income as an essential tool to “unclog the bureaucratic pipes” (Standing and Jhabvala, 2010).

¹³⁵ Considerable local variation in understanding of deservingness with frontline workers informs everyday practices in the interaction with recipients (Rice, 2013; Altreiter and Leibetseder, 2014).

We need not deny either the fact of administrative overreach — the pervasive extent of bureaucratic interference in welfare clients' lives — or its disastrous effects individually or in the aggregate to observe several weaknesses of this one-dimensional perspective on public administration. First, while social assistance is typically organized in a controlling fashion, many other support programs are not. In most countries a wide chasm separates the administration of entitlement programs, such as pensions or social security, from programs that embrace bureaucratic discretion, such as social assistance (Soss, 1999, 2000; Bruch, Ferree and Soss, 2010). This shows that revising administrative processes rather than reducing administration as such is a perfectly plausible — albeit a politically charged and operationally difficult — alternative. This last point, in turn, leads us squarely to a second weakness: laying the blame for controlling clients by intrusive measures solely on administrative systems and bureaucrats ignores the extent to which the latter operate within a political climate that is exceedingly hostile to providing a universal income guarantee. In the end, it is the political process that sets the goals that administrators must reach as well as providing the tools by which to achieve them.¹³⁶ To think that the problem of controlling bureaucracy merely requires getting rid of bureaucracy is largely misdiagnosing the real issue, namely the pro-activation and anti-welfare political climate that shapes and constrains administrative procedures and practices.

Of course, basic income advocates do not really believe we need no administration at all; rather, they advocate a policy that implies less rules, less regulation, less monitoring, and consequently less general bureaucratic involvement in people's lives. However, it is a fallacy to think that implementation without controlling bureaucracy — which basic income advocates rightly abhor — equates to basic income facing no significant administrative challenges. The fundamental mistake here is to reduce all implementation problems to what goes wrong when bureaucracies exert excessive and arbitrary control over the lives of welfare recipients. In reality, public administration covers numerous other aspects of the implementation process (Hood, 2010), many directly affecting the performance of whichever basic income model is instituted.

Several other reasons combine with the perception of a controlling bureaucracy to explain the reluctance to take the administrative factor seriously. For instance, basic income advocates may be buying into a version of the *transmission belt model* of public administration (Stewart, 1988), according to which implementation is

¹³⁶ There exists a large literature on the politics of bureaucratic discretion (e.g., Mashaw, 1983; Huber and Shipan, 2002).

mechanically concerned with executing legislative directives, allowing a clear distinction between politics and administration to be drawn (Wilson, 1887). The basic income version of the transmission belt approach maintains that fundamental questions emerge when we are discussing the ethics, economics and politics of the basic income guarantee; by contrast, implementation concerns are entirely instrumental, technical and presumptively a-political. However, the transmission belt model has long been discredited in public administration (e.g., Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2011), and so too should its basic income variant. It is simply not true, as I show in the remainder of this section, that administrative challenges are merely technical worries that require no hard political choices. Ditching the transmission belt model implies that public administration scholars be given a prominent place alongside philosophers and social scientists in the basic income debate.

A related view many basic income advocates ascribe to maintains that, with the rise of the technological society, implementation problems have declined sharply. Modern information technology may have increased the list of tools we have at our disposal to address implementation problems, and the temptation to think this means we have less to worry about on that score is understandable. Nevertheless, recent scholarship insists the emergency of new technology “does not mean that new policy problems have appeared or old ones disappeared” but rather that “they present themselves in new ways” (Hood and Margetts, 2007: 14; also Seddon and O’Donovan, 2013). The lesson is clear: implementation should not be equated with technological fixes.

A final reason for refusing to directly engage with the administration of basic income reflects the view that basic income will always outperform selective approaches to income support because it is simple, universal, uniform and unconditional, no matter what challenges arise at the implementation stage. Philippe Van Parijs, for instance, reflects this view by insisting that “assuming a computerized and efficient tax-collection and transfer-payment technology”, administrative costs are likely to be “lower under a universal, ex ante scheme than under a means-tested, ex post one” (Van Parijs, 2004: 20). The thought here seems to be that basic income administration only matters *comparatively*. Against this view I first want to point out that the comparative efficiency of basic income over that of selective programs is assumed rather than argued for, and we should be careful about deriving strong conclusions that can be robustly generalized across all basic income models.

More importantly, however, the comparative perspective contains a fundamental flaw: the *administrability* of a particular basic income proposal has important

implications on its ethical desirability and political feasibility, independently of how it fares against selective competitors. The comparative perspective gives basic income administration a free ride, as it were, by obscuring the extent to which competing basic income models resolve implementation challenges in radically different ways. The latter point matters because, as we shall see below, the resulting outcomes will benefit different target populations, which in turn directly affects the politics of basic income. This reinforces a critical point made earlier: basic income administration is inherently political.

To summarize, we may discern various reasons why the administrative factor continues to be neglected in the basic income debate, but none really justify doing so. Ignoring administration comes at a serious cost for those advocates committed to proposing a politically feasible basic income proposal that is not merely intended to stimulate debate about the foundational principles of an economically just society, but meant to be actually implemented. In the remaining sections I briefly discuss several aspects of the public administration of the basic income guarantee, with each section providing the main insight explored in full detail in a series of articles (ARTICLES I-IV). While each section focuses on a specific issue that is overlooked or under-analyzed in the current debate, together they lend support to the thesis that advocates and scholars need to fully engage with the administrative analysis of basic income as an intricate part of promoting the political feasibility of the basic income proposal.

5.2 Outline of a Framework for Basic Income Administration

In this section I first briefly outline the conceptual framework that underlies much of the analysis in the remainder of this section. Variants of this model underlies each of the articles discussed, with ARTICLE IV presenting its most developed form. The framework contains two dimensions. On the one hand, I distinguish four essential tasks that any income support scheme — including basic income — must perform: standard-setting; information-gathering and monitoring; payment disbursement; and oversight. On the other hand, I discuss two radically different senses in which implementing a basic income can economize on administration: minimizing on (governmental) resources and minimizing on intrusion/inconvenience.

5.2.1 Four Administrative Tasks

The starting point of the first dimension is to think about the different tasks that an administrative system would need to complete in order to successfully implement a basic income policy. ARTICLE IV distinguishes three key tasks, but here I add a fourth.

The first task is *setting the standards* that determine who is deemed eligible for receiving a particular kind of income support. From a public administration perspective it is of key importance that these are operational standards, and not merely conceptual or normative desiderata. Colin Diver (1983), for instance, has argued that operational standards should satisfy the requirements of “transparency”, “accessibility” and “congruence”. He also maintains that the internal tensions between these three desiderata means satisfying them simultaneously constitutes a serious challenge for any administrative system, immediately inviting discussion about strategic decisions regarding acceptable trade-offs and operational priorities. One key decision concerns the scope of bureaucratic discretion interpreting the precise meaning and application of such standard and rules, discussed before. While the unconditional and universal form of basic income appears to sidestep this first task — leaving aside issues pertaining to excluding non-citizens or non-residents — it is important to note that several proposals within the basic income family must nevertheless face squarely up to the challenge of standard-setting. This is most obviously the case with the participation income proposal, discussed further in Section 5.5.

The second task comprises designing mechanisms for *gathering appropriate information* to determine who meets the eligibility standards set out in the first task. This task also entails the *monitoring of eligible persons* to ensure they continue to meet the relevant criteria. This is the task most commonly regarded as responsible for the extensive bureaucratic interference in people’s lives as well as the lion share of administrative costs associated with selective income support programs. Again, basic income advocates rapidly claim that information-gathering and monitoring are superfluous for implementing a policy that has effectively eliminated eligibility criteria. However, in this basic income advocates move too fast, for eliminating restrictions to eligibility does not in itself identify those who are eligible; at least not in a manner that allows the administrators who are in charge of paying the basic income to identify them reliably. Following Hood (1985) I refer to the problem of “cadasterability”, and argue that in some

jurisdictions it constitutes an important bottleneck for the effective implementation of basic income.

A third task is one that is both of key importance — obviously so — and yet again insufficiently discussed: the *practical disbursement of the basic income*. Having properly identified those entitled to receive income support, a key part of basic income administration is to ensure that the money effectively ends up where it should — ideally without much extra cost or burden on those in receipt. In public administration this is known as the “conduitability” problem (Hood, 1985), and a number of mechanisms exist to handle the practical transmission of income support. Effective implementation would require a method (or combination of methods) by which all intended beneficiaries — in this case, roughly all citizens or residents — receive their basic income without undue inconvenience or cost, including vulnerability to error. Unfortunately, careful reflection reveals some of the leading candidates for disbursing the basic income grant are not without difficulties in this regard. Most challenging, in particular for those who favour basic income out of a concern for the worst-off, is the fact that some of the most vulnerable groups in the population are typically those who fall through the cracks of the usual payment conduits such as payrolls or direct bank transfers (e.g., the homeless and other “unbanked”).

Finally, a fourth task is the *effective oversight of basic income administration*. Oversight is a form of monitoring, of course. But instead of monitoring eligibility with the aim of excluding those who are deemed non-compliant with certain eligibility criteria, oversight is purposively inclusive and geared at ensuring everyone who is eligible receives their grant. Whereas basic income advocates resent monitoring, they should be supportive of oversight, in particular in a context that takes seriously the idea that implementation is near-always imperfect. Oversight is nowhere to be found in discussions of the implementation of basic income, whereas basic income arguably faces a number of specific challenges in this regard; in part because of the sheer scale of a policy that aims to cover the whole population (Seddon and O’Donovan, 2013), but in part also because basic income eschews traditional monitoring mechanisms upon which oversight could piggy-back (ARTICLE III).

5.2.2 *Economizing on Administration*

The four tasks outlined above paint one side of the implementation picture, namely the practical goals that need to be achieved for basic income to work as intended (“robustness”). The other side of that picture pertains to the capabilities of the administrative system tasked with carrying out the tasks at hand. Unfortunately, administrative systems rapidly run up to the “limits of administration” (Hood, 2010), imposing a need to economize on administration, where possible. Basic income advocates try to capitalize on this by arguing that making income support universal and unconditional is the best way to bypass some of the more stringent administrative challenges. However, at this point the question arises what is exactly meant by “economizing on administration”.

Inspired by the work of Christopher Hood (1983, 1986) we can distinguish two senses in which we can economize on administration. In its first sense, economizing on administration simply means administering basic income using the minimal amount of government resources possible, for any given level of target efficiency. The concern here is specifically with the transaction costs faced by governments of defining, monitoring and disbursing a grant, not with the overall program costs of a universal basic income (Offe, 2005). What makes administration costly is, on this view, the social opportunity cost of government resources spent on implementing policy (deadweight loss). The idea that basic income constitutes significant savings along this dimension is widespread and popular, but nevertheless needs to be scrutinized carefully and qualified in important ways (ARTICLE II).

The second sense of economizing on administration has quite a different focus. Here we are concerned with minimizing the level of (personal) intrusion of implementing a basic income scheme on its recipients. While much of the debate focuses on private intrusion in a strict sense, I favour the more expansive notion of minimizing inconvenience: this includes navigating the complexity of the system, obtaining relevant information, negotiating various stages of the application process (Van Oorschot, 1991; 1998), but equally the likelihood of administrative error and the processes of complaints and rectification associated with the latter. With respect to this sense of economizing on administration, basic income again easily seems to outperform any selective policy by a wide margin. But here too important qualifications apply (ARTICLE III).

The real challenge, however, lies in the fact that the two senses of economizing need not coincide. The two senses frequently point in different directions, most obviously in cases in which removing barriers to access and take-up of a scheme can

be accomplished only at the cost of expending considerable administrative effort or other resources. And, as I show in the next sections, basic income administration is not immune to this problem; in large part because the relevant considerations are of a political rather than a mere technical nature. Thus, a minimal governmental resources approach to basic income administration would be satisfied with the removal of formal barriers and conditions for eligibility, even if beneficiaries found the application process intrusive and burdensome. The minimal intrusion approach, by contrast, would justify going to great bureaucratic lengths to achieve a truly universal scheme, provided such universalism could be accomplished by relatively unobtrusive means. To emphasize again a point made before: where goals conflict and gather support from competing political factions or amongst the wider public, basic income administration is inherently political.

5.3 The Administrative Efficiency Thesis Re-examined

This subsection summarizes ARTICLE II. Basic income advocates regularly endorse one or other variant of the *administrative efficiency thesis*. The strong version of this thesis holds that reducing administrative costs is an important policy goal in its own right, and basic income is preferable amongst income maintenance policies precisely because it allows policy-makers to significantly economize on administration. The strong version is typically associated with conservative and libertarian proponents of basic income, who regard reducing bureaucracy as a chief political aim (e.g., Kliemt, 1993; Buchanan, 1997; Murray, 2006). A weaker but more broadly accepted version insists basic income is preferable over competing policies because it reduces administrative overhead costs (deadweight loss) for any given level of target efficiency.¹³⁷ The (weak) administrative efficiency thesis is both appealing and, when applied to basic income implementation, intuitively plausible. Nevertheless, upon careful examination ARTICLE II finds basic income advocates' reliance on the administrative efficiency thesis problematic in several respects.

Several reasons combine to suggest that administrative savings will either not materialize, or will likely be of a considerably lower order of magnitude than basic income advocates anticipate. One set of reasons applies to the administerability of competing basic income schemes, by which I mean that not all concrete proposals

¹³⁷ The main difference between both approaches can be illustrated as follows: where the strong variant supports reducing administration even when this implies some beneficiaries not receiving their entitlement, the weaker version prioritizes target efficiency over program efficiency.

entertained by basic income advocates imply a wholesale reduction of qualifying tests and associated implementation processing, which would be a necessary condition for generating the desired administrative savings. While the paradigmatic unconditional scheme proposed by Van Parijs (1995, 2004) appears to radically economize on administration in this regard, as soon as we compromise even minimally on one of the design features administration (and administrative overhead cost) is reintroduced.¹³⁸ To illustrate, the participation income variant that received considerable attention in the basic income debate is likely to require excessive administration, as I will argue in detail below. In short, the anticipated administrative savings critically depend on the particular model implemented.

But even where we restrict the choice of basic income schemes to those that seem to do away with the host of qualifying conditions present in selective programs (Offe, 2005), there are two further reasons to cast doubt on large administrative savings materializing in practice. The first reason is that even when basic income administration in principle allows us to dismantle a particular bureaucratic process, this process may still be required by other policies. For instance, if tax assessment requires continued administrative capacity for means testing, the savings from implementing a non-means-tested basic income will be considerably lower.¹³⁹ Second, much depends on whether basic income is supposed to replace or supplement other income maintenance schemes. The higher the “rate of substitution” — that is, the more basic income implies dismantling other policies — the more administrative savings basic income will generate. But of course, there will be plenty of other reasons of an ethical or political nature to resist such a move.

To summarize the argument of this subsection: the administrative efficiency thesis has some intuitive plausibility when comparing the administration of basic income with that of the patchwork of complex selective policies in the modern welfare state. But the precise extent of the anticipated savings is highly dependent on both the specific design of the basic income scheme and its implementation in the broader policy context. At the margin, these savings could be quite minimal, suggesting the weak version of the thesis may offer little in terms of independent reasons to support a basic income. Basic income advocates could still adopt the

¹³⁸ To put it differently: there exists a non-linear relationship between design features and their impact on administration costs, which means we cannot simply assume proportionality in savings as we approximate the “pure” basic income variant.

¹³⁹ In general, the more policies piggy-back on a particular administrative process, the less we can save on overhead costs.

strong variant, but only if they are willing to trade-off important advantages in terms of target efficiency.¹⁴⁰

5.4 Practical Bottlenecks in the Implementation of Basic Income

This subsection summarizes the material of ARTICLE III. Basic income advocates who refer to ease-of-implementation in regard to basic income do not necessarily (only) refer to the budgetary implications of implementing their pet policy. In many cases, what they have in mind is better captured under the second sense of economizing on administration outlined in Section 5.2.2 (Hood, 1983). What matters here is the relative ease by which basic income is administered that ensures that all eligible recipients effectively receive their entitlement. Here basic income administration responds to the problem of under-consumption or non-take-up identified in the literature of selective welfare programs (Craig, 1991; van Oorschot, 1991, 1998, 2002). ARTICLE III reviews the argument that basic income scores much better in terms of target efficiency when compared to more traditional schemes. The article finds that the assumptions underlying this claim again need careful assessment.

The starting point of this article is twofold. On the one hand, I accept the comparative advantages of basic income in relation to program take-up (Goodin, 1992). On the other hand, however, I also argue that basic income advocates cannot merely rely on the absence of eligibility rules to ensure higher take-up rates. This is because absence of rules that restrict eligibility (*nominal universalism*) is insufficient for ensuring that some hard-to-reach client populations effectively receive their entitlement (*substantive universalism*). It is the latter goal that motivates the bulk of basic income advocacy, which in turn implies that we need to examine in more detail if any barriers prevent take-up in practice. ARTICLE III argues that while basic income is likely to avoid some of the non-take-up trappings of selective schemes, it may also face specific bottlenecks of its own, for instance related to the large scale of the scheme (aimed at capturing, in principle, every citizen or resident in a particular jurisdiction). This scale effect also means that basic income implementation can only imperfectly piggy-back on existing (tried-and-tested) administrative processes.

¹⁴⁰ Importantly, the strong variant of the administrative efficiency thesis is also associated with lower political stability by removing any incentives for bureaucracies to combat political attempts at altering basic income implementation over time (Béland, 2010)

ARTICLE III reviews three distinct types of bottlenecks that basic income implementations needs to address. *Cadasterability problems* arise in those jurisdiction without a clear register of every entitled citizen or resident. Under such circumstances, basic income administration requires investment in the capability to generate a comprehensive and reliable cadaster, with particular attention devoted to capturing those vulnerable individuals who are often located off-the-grid (e.g., the homeless).¹⁴¹ A second bottleneck pertains to *payment modalities*, where again those in irregular employment or without proof-of-address are customarily excluded from the most common disbursement tools (payrolls, banks, postal cheques, etc). Addressing this bottleneck to ensure target efficiency amongst those most vulnerable again may require a considerable administrative investment. Finally, *oversight mechanisms* geared at detecting, redressing and preventing administrative error are also burdened by the scale at which basic income is meant to operate. Here too, important implementation choices will affect the extent to which error is minimized, but equally determine who bears the main cost or burden.

The difficulties reviewed in this subsection do not constitute an argument against basic income policy. They do demonstrate, however, that the refusal of basic income advocates to fully consider the range of administrative choices pertaining to basic income implementation is unwarranted.

5.5 Failed Compromise? Participation Income in Practice

This subsection summarizes the material in ARTICLE I. The two previous subsections already hinted at the extent to which administrative challenges are easily politicized. The remaining two subsections tackle the idea that implementation and politics are intricately intertwined. One of the best illustrations of how ignoring the administrative factor results in poor politics is the idea of *participation income*, a policy advanced by renowned economist Tony Atkinson (1996, 2014). ARTICLE I offers a detailed discussion of Atkinson's

¹⁴¹ The term “cadaster” originally referred to a tax register (*cadastre* in French), but here refers to any standardized list or register of individual activities or attributes that may be used to determine compliance with the eligibility conditions of a policy. “Cadasterability” refers to the ease with which eligibility criteria can be reduced to (or deduced from) such a list or register.

scheme from a public administration perspective.¹⁴² In brief, the article argues that participation income faces a trilemma, which results in it being unable to garner sufficient support from a broad enabling political coalition.

Politics is central to the inception of participation income. Atkinson (1996) believed that income maintenance should retain its individual and non-means-tested nature, but felt that making eligibility independent from a work or willingness-to-work requirement would render it politically infeasible. His solution was to adapt the scheme devised by Van Parijs (1995) to include a “participation requirement”, understood as “a wider definition of social contribution” (Atkinson, 1996: 69). His proposed participation condition would include a wide variety of socially useful activities — including working as an employee or self-employed, being absent from work on grounds of illness or injury, being engaged in training or education, caring or volunteering, etc. — which would render the receipt of this entitlement politically palatable (also Goodin, 2003). Many regard participation income as basic income’s politically feasible cousin: sharing a large number of design features and reaching an unprecedented share of the target population, while nevertheless being capable of garnering political support across a number of constituencies. Specifically, participation income is said to offer a compromise between those keen on universalizing income support as a citizenship right and those who insist on a reciprocal social contribution in return (White, 2003a, 2003b).

Unfortunately, a careful examination of the implementation challenges of participation income rapidly reveals the difficulties it faces on some of the key administrative tasks outlined before. ARTICLE I describes in detail how poorly participation income fares with respect to standard setting, identification and monitoring of beneficiaries, and payment disbursement. More to the point, it could be argued in each of these respects participation income is outperformed not only by basic income, but equally by workfare-type policies. From a public administration perspective, rather than constituting a workable compromise participation income is mired in implementation pitfalls.

Furthermore, I maintain that the resulting administrative instability translates directly into political instability, leading erstwhile political allies to opt for mutually incompatible routes out of a trilemma that imposes huge administration costs (budgetary/resource investment as well as personal vexation/intrusion) on a

¹⁴² It is worth noting that participation income gained fervour amongst basic income advocates with hardly any effort spent on analyzing the policy in any detail. For a recent exception, see the defence of participation income mounted by Pérez-Muñoz (2015).

commitment to simultaneously embrace both inclusion and participation. Contribution-leaning advocates would naturally prioritize participation over inclusion (*soft workfare strategy*), while basic income advocates insist on the contrasting route of ditching participation in favour of inclusion (*lax enforcement strategy*). A third option is to refuse any compromise and willingly accept the administration costs involved (*ironclad administration strategy*). What matters, politically speaking, is not so much which of these is the most appropriate option, but rather that the trilemma effectively forces the different partners of a political coalition in favour of participation income to go their separate ways. I conclude unambiguously that, politically speaking, participation income is a non-starter for getting anything like a basic income off the ground.

In his recent book, *Inequality: What Can Be Done?*, Atkinson (2014) revisits participation income and directly responds to some of the challenges raised in ARTICLE I. Atkinson believes the article overstates the case against participation income. After all, he writes, participation income is much simpler to implement than means- or asset-tested benefits and only requires the administration to make category decisions, many of which are already in place in other parts of the administration. In addition, he points out that where capability is too limited, the state ought to invest in social administration while acknowledging that what matters is “the quality of service rather than simply measuring cost-effectiveness” (Atkinson, 2014: 221). While I have little truck agreeing with any of Atkinson’s arguments in a personal capacity, it seems Atkinson has nevertheless failed to appreciate the main point of ARTICLE I: *once we accept the trilemma as a practical reality, political allies will likely opt for different routes out*. While many will wholeheartedly agree with Atkinson, there will be others who prefer to opt for a solution that inevitably puts them at loggerheads. As long as this is a plausible scenario, the trilemma and its political implications for participation income stand.

5.6 Basic Income Administration as Politics

In this final subsection I summarize the material in ARTICLE IV. The articles outlined in the previous sections take seriously the idea that basic income implementation implies a set of challenges that need careful consideration. These articles also share the view that the public administration of basic income is not merely a matter of resolving some practical problems following enactment, but instead amount to a series of first-order political problems. Whenever basic income

faces the sort of implementation challenges outlined before (the limits of administration), administrative decisions aimed at resolving the problem at hand take the form of *hard choices that trade-off one set of goals against another* and, in many cases, *pitch the interests of one social group against another* (also Goodin, 1985). While the administrative focus sheds an important light on the precise nature of the choices to be made, and offers insight in the variation of available solutions, the actual decision is political in the straightforward sense of allocating benefits and burdens amongst the different stakeholders. In short, basic income implementation implies a decision on who gains and who loses (and by how much).

In ARTICLE IV this political dimension of basic income administration is placed central stage. This article builds on the Hoodean distinction between the two senses of economizing on administration, and demonstrates how each takes a different approach to resolving some of the main implementation challenges. Adopting a political perspective, it is easy to see how the types of administrative decisions cluster along straightforward ideological fault lines.

ARTICLE IV proposes two ideal-type basic income models. First, the *aggregative* model primarily attempts to balance costs and benefits across the whole population. Concentrated costs on small subsections of the population are easily outweighed by overall benefits accruing across the board, which suggests a strong alignment with the “minimal resources” sense of economizing on administration. The aggregative model receives strong support from conservatives, libertarians and utilitarians who all (albeit for very different reasons) insist basic income implementation should retain a strong universal and non-targeted perspective. By contrast, a second model is explicitly *redistributive* and maintains a strong focus on prioritizing the fate of the worst-off in relation to allocating benefit shares as well as burdens, even where this implies higher overall costs. The redistributive model favours the “minimal intrusion” sense of economizing on administration, insofar as it applies to those who are most disadvantaged or economically and socially vulnerable. Politically, the redistributive model is strongly associated with a variety of progressive basic income advocates.

The politics of basic income administration reinforces many of the points made with respect to strategic feasibility in the previous section. In particular, basic income implementation lends further credence to the argument that basic income advocates should not indiscriminately gather support across the political divide, for the implementation stage will put the persistent internal disagreement between progressive and conservative basic income supporters in sharp focus (ARTICLE V). The radically different orientation with respect to resolving key administrative

problems may prevent basic income advocates from building a robust enabling coalition in the first place — as the case of participation income has illustrated (ARTICLE I). In addition, internal disagreement amongst basic income proponents is likely to negatively affect the political stability of basic income, whether through politically abolishing a basic income scheme one set of stakeholders no longer supports or resisting policy development through the processes of layering, conversion or policy drift (ARTICLE VI).

6. Concluding Remarks

This dissertation has contributed to the political analysis of basic income by examining the political challenges of basic income as a distinctive policy proposal. The basic income debate is not merely about constructing a social ideal to counter the current activation orthodoxy in welfare theory and practice, but also about designing a desirable and feasible program to be implemented in the near future. However, moving from social ideal to social policy implies that we take seriously a range of political challenges that impact on the prospects for enacting a basic income that robustly delivers on the expected benefits.

As this study has revealed, the politics of basic income faces many difficulties that are familiar from the politics of the welfare state more generally, but in certain respects basic income design entails unique features that translate into novel political challenges. The extent to which the individual, universal and unconditional design of a guaranteed basic income feeds back into long-term political effects remains little understood. The six articles underlying this dissertation contribute to this research agenda by discussing in detail some of these challenges, with primary focus on strategic issues (ARTICLES V and VI) as well as questions of implementation (ARTICLES I-IV). In this section I briefly summarize the main insights of the dissertation, and briefly explore future research and policy priorities.

6.1 Basic Income Politics: A Battle on Two Fronts

Adopting an explicit policy perspective implies realizing that the political battle for basic income is simultaneously fought on two fronts. The frontline that receives most emphasis is where basic income advocates encounter important resistance from elected officials, special interest groups, bureaucrats and the general public. Despite growing interest, basic income advocates continue to face entrenched opposition from a broad range of social and political actors.

Many opponents remain unconvinced basic income is affordable (especially at a time of crisis) or will generate the anticipated positive effects on poverty, education,

labour market reform, gender equality or health — to name but a few. In countering this criticism basic income advocates are hampered by the fact that evidence on the performance of basic income remains limited, in large part because there are no real-life experiences to refer to, or because the results of existing field experiments, while promising, cannot be easily generalized across jurisdictions. In addition, factual questions aside, a sizeable part of basic income opposition is grounded in persistent ethical disagreement about the desirability of indiscriminately giving income support to all citizens, irrespective whether they need it or are willing to reciprocate in return. Perceptions of deservingness and reciprocity are deeply entrenched in the general public and are shown to play a large role in the support for welfare programs (van Oorschot, 2000, 2006; Slothuus, 2007). Finally, opposition amongst political entrepreneurs is often tied in with strategic considerations, such as decades of explicit support for the active welfare state or, more recently, strong political commitment for austerity policies (Standing 2011a). The problem here is one of path dependence: political actors, once committed, are in need of a viable exit strategy before considering shifting policy tack (Weaver, 1986).

The divide between proponents and opponents of a basic income is a real and constant battleground. But there exists a second frontline which is often obscured by the former to even the most committed basic income advocate. This frontline consists of persistent disagreement on, and intense competition over, the details of basic income policy amongst the supporters. Basic income, I have argued, has “many faces”, a fact that becomes apparent once we appreciate the range of variation on a number of key dimensions. Policy analysis, as well as empirical observation of several schemes already instituted, reveals the generic basic income “type” consists of a large number of concrete “tokens”. This variation has a major political implication, insofar as distinct design features will produce different social outcomes that affect individuals (or groups) differently. Opting for one basic income scheme rather than another is hardly a trivial decision for those affected by the policy.

This dissertation argues that persistent disagreement about basic income design features will lead to intense political competition amongst its advocates. Internal political competition may prevent the establishment of an enabling coalition around a particular crystallized basic income proposal, cause an existing enabling coalition to fall apart, or even in due course threaten the political stability of a basic income already enacted. The *internal politics* of basic income is barely discussed in basic income research or the basic income movement. One contribution of this

study is to shed light on the undeniable fact that basic income advocates are engaged in a battle on two fronts, and that they need to tackle internal division head on.

6.2 Administration Redux: Design, Implementation and Politics

This dissertation has a second goal, namely to vindicate administrative analysis and the role of public administration more generally in the basic income debate. With a few exceptions, basic income advocates continue to adopt a negative perspective to all things administrative. Section 5.1 briefly reviewed the reasons for this aversion against administration, and by-and-large found these wanting. It is absolutely true that the administration of welfare as currently practiced is both demeaning and intrusive to welfare recipients and entails a massive deadweight loss to society. This warrants significant administrative reform, and the institution of basic income would offer an important window of opportunity in this regard.

Where basic income advocates go wrong, however, is to assume that basic income implementation itself requires no administration or, on a more charitable reading, that basic income simplifies implementation challenges such that its administration raises few concerns. The main reason for this assumption is that basic income advocates take a single-minded view of administration as a type of controlling bureaucracy predominantly aimed at restricting access to income maintenance. Viewed this way, the universal scope of basic income implementation by definition requires no administrative gatekeeping. The contribution of this dissertation lies in balancing out this one-sided perspective with a contrasting viewpoint, according to which important administrative challenges remain once we move from a focus on nominal universalism to one of substantive universalism. If one is serious about ensuring all those who are entitled effectively receive their basic income, bureaucracy is not something to happily get rid off.

The more important issue with the neglect of administration in the basic income debate, however, is one of politics. Basic income advocates seem to buy into the (much-maligned) transmission belt model of administration (Stewart, 1988), which assumes a strict separation of politics and implementation. By contrast, this dissertation expands on the work of Theodore Lowi (1964, 1972), which holds that *policy influences politics*. The public administration of basic income demonstrates the point made earlier that internal competition over concrete schemes is unavoidable. Basic income advocates of various stripes can avoid getting caught up

in design details when debating the general merits of basic income over selective welfare schemes, in an attempt at reaching agreement under a “veil of vagueness” (Gibson and Goodin, 1999). But the moment the policy enters the phase of implementation, concrete design differences matter critically in terms of producing the intended policy effects. These, in turn, directly feed back into the politics of basic income by determining who wins or loses from one scheme rather than another being adopted, which again will impact tremendously on the long-term stability of basic income policy. To ignore administration is to ignore a key aspect of the politics of basic income.

6.3 Where Next? Political Trajectories

Future research in basic income should build on the insights in this dissertation by examining in detail how specific design choices feed back into the processes that determine current and future political support for basic income. I call this approach “bootstrapping basic income”. Building on this approach, an important future research avenue concerns the *political trajectories* for moving basic income from social idea to concrete social policy.

Basic income advocates have proposed three avenues by which to pursue political progress in an incremental fashion. Underlying each of these proposals is the view that basic income is too radical a policy to enact in one go, and it is preferable to institute basic income gradually through the backdoor (Vanderborght, 2005; Offe, 2001; Goodin, 2003).¹⁴³ The first trajectory is to institute a partial basic income at a low level (e.g., half the poverty line) and build up towards a full basic income by incrementally raising the level (Van Parijs, 2001). A second proposal implements a version of basic income that compromises on unconditionality by introducing a participation requirement (Atkinson, 1996). Relaxing this requirement over time — in large part in response to the inevitable administrative challenges that were discussed in Section 5.5 — brings us closer to the ideal basic income scheme. A third avenue opts for implementing basic income sequentially for different target populations. A plausible scenario is to start with a basic pension, followed by an (expanded) child benefit, moving onto targeted

¹⁴³ The three avenues can be combined in more complex strategy that allows for multiple pathways that allow for expansion over time, as Claus Offe (2001) suggests. An additional advantage of the complex strategy is that it can build more straightforwardly on existing programs or policies, which may reduce some of the implementation challenges identified earlier.

education grants or a basic income for the disabled, before finally arriving at the most difficult group — working-age adults (Frankel and Mulvale, 2014). The political strategy is to start with politically favourable target populations and firmly embed the principles of basic income in each group before moving onto a more politically controversial target.¹⁴⁴

The political approach adopted in this dissertation offers some guidance for (provisionally) evaluating the political feasibility of each of these trajectories, pending empirical confirmation. Each of the three avenues focus on a *prima facie* plausible starting point, with variation in large part due to distinct beliefs about the main barriers hindering political acceptance. In the case of a partial basic income, the main worry is a combination of immediate cost and the ability to control for labour market effects: starting with a modest basic income would reduce anxiety in regard to both issues. In the case of participation income the main concern is to overcome resistance to citizens receiving “something for nothing” (Goodin, 2003). In the case of the sequential approach, the main target is a combination of all of the above: starting off a basic income for pensioners and children may sway those who worry about cost, labour market incentives, and social free-riding alike.

Unfortunately, good starting blocks do not guarantee a smooth run for the whole length of the track. Here all three trajectories must own up to important challenges. Partial basic income is vulnerable to the charge that the grant may simply be too low to demonstrate sufficient beneficial effects, or perhaps prevent them from materializing at a sufficiently early stage, to overcome continued resistance (Groot, 2004). As argued before, the lower the grant, the smaller the constituency. The concerns facing participation income evolving into a full-blown basic income have been described before (ARTICLE I), and need little rehearsing here.

The most interesting approach is likely to be the sequential model, but here again advocates tend to emphasize benefits without giving appropriate consideration to the potential drawbacks. At least three difficulties need to be addressed. First, a sequential approach assumes that constituencies who have obtained their basic income entitlement will not actively resist further expansion, perhaps out of a sense of solidarity with those who have not yet received their entitlement. But there is little reason to assume this is the case. Pensioners, for instance, may worry that if they support expanding basic income to other social groups, their basic pension may end up being at risk at some point in the future. In

¹⁴⁴ The policy logic here bears a close resemblance to the social construction approach pioneered by Schneider and Ingram (1993).

addition, pensioners may take the view that their basic income is a type of social insurance entitlement paid in acknowledgement of past contributions, and vehemently resist the idea that the same argument applies to other social groups.¹⁴⁵ In a nutshell, pensioners, children, students, the disabled and working age adults form distinct discrete constituencies that may fail to sufficiently overlap in their support for *expanding* the scheme into a basic income covering the whole population.

Second, the constituency problem also affects coalition building, with difficult questions of political strategy looming. For instance, should all political effort go into focusing on getting the first stage (e.g., a basic pension) off the ground, or should basic income advocates instead take the long view and avoid association with supporters who may prevent expansion over time?¹⁴⁶ Each stage amounts to a new battleground for expansion, and one cannot merely assume that political coalitions remain stable across each stage.¹⁴⁷ Third, each stage may also raise very distinct administrative challenges of the types discussed before (ARTICLE III). The administrative capabilities to ensure all pensioners or students receive their basic income is likely to be different from assuring the disabled or all working-age adults (including hard-to-reach populations like the homeless) are fully covered.

This discussion of the political trajectories for basic income implementation affirms a point made throughout this dissertation, namely that basic income advocates need to think through more carefully the specific political challenges faced by this proposal at every stage of the policy process. The political trajectories perspective also opens up a fruitful avenue for future research. Examining in more systematic detail the political pros and cons of each of the trajectories briefly discussed above is likely to generate crucial insight in the political feasibility of basic income. In addition, the notion of “bootstrapping basic income” must retain an important place in political analysis. If the particular design features of a basic income scheme produces political feedback in addition to policy outcomes, bootstrapping basic income through selecting the most politically feasible properties is a critical future research agenda.

¹⁴⁵ Needless to say this is mostly a problem the moment the sequential approach expands to cover working-age adult citizens.

¹⁴⁶ Compare the insights from Ingram and Schneider (1991) on the choice of target populations.

¹⁴⁷ ARTICLE IV and ARTICLE VI emphasize the asymmetry between those advocating and opposing basic income: the latter only need to block each subsequent step to prevent the full basic income from coming about. See more generally, Hacker (2004, 2005).

I have argued in these last paragraphs that the gradual approach to instituting basic income may face more challenges than its leading proponents admit. This in turn suggests perhaps we ought to consider again under what conditions a full basic income could be enacted in one go. Recent research into how risky policy adoption interacts with the politics of blame-avoidance may point towards scenarios where basic income becomes the lesser of several (political) evils (Weaver, 1986; Hood, 2002; Vis and Kersbergen, 2007). In my view, it is particularly fitting that a policy that offers a radical departure of the welfare state consensus comes about through radical politics.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ I am grateful to Joe Soss for stimulating conversations on this possibility.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES

The Public Administration Case against Participation Income

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Anthony Atkinson's proposal for a participation income (PI) has been acclaimed as a workable compromise between the aspirations of unconditional basic income proposals and the political acceptability of the workfare model. This article argues that PI functions poorly in terms of a number of essential administrative tasks that any welfare scheme must perform. This leads to a trilemma of participation income, which suggests that PI can only retain its apparent ability to satisfy the requirements of universalist and selectivist approaches to welfare at the cost of imposing a substantial burden on administrators and welfare clients alike. Consequently, the main apparent strength of PI, its capacity to garner support across different factions within welfare reform debates, is shown to be illusory.

Many scholars of the modern welfare state agree with Robert Goodin (2000) that the crumbling of its traditional pillars limits the ability of welfare policies to achieve a range of often contradictory objectives. However, they disagree about which policies might be introduced as alternatives. In particular, a fault line separates those favoring increased emphasis on universal mechanisms such as unconditional basic income (UBI), commonly understood as an income granted by right to each individual, without means test or work requirement, from those who favor increased targeting of benefits through a host of conditional and activating measures that are commonly captured under the label "workfare."¹ This article challenges the idea that the modern welfare state would be improved by the introduction of a participation income (PI) in an attempt to accommodate the twin objectives of universal social protection and broad social participation.

Superficially, PI appears to be extraordinarily well suited to bridge the

divide between welfare reform's universalists and selectivists, that is, between those favoring UBI (and its cognates) and those favoring workfare. Like UBI, PI grants each adult citizen a right to a secure basic income regardless of the individual's living arrangements and whether he or she has alternative sources of income or wealth (Atkinson 1995, 1996, 1998). However, unlike UBI, PI requires that recipients satisfy a broad participation requirement as a condition of support. Forms of participation include a range of such socially useful activities as caring for an elderly relative, volunteering in a neighborhood project, and engaging in a human capital-enhancing activity (e.g., vocational training or studying for an educational qualification). Participation income is thus conceptually distinct from workfare because PI expands the notion of social participation well beyond the narrow frame of labor-market participation. Nevertheless, PI retains a strong notion of eligibility conditions; this conditionality seems to allow PI to bridge the gap between, on one side, those who believe universal social protection and inclusion are the key objectives of the modern welfare state and, on the other side, those who think its primary task ought to be the increased activation (i.e., engagement in socially productive behavior) of adult citizens.²

In this article, we take issue with this view of PI. Unlike those who regard PI as a policy solution that merges the best features of two worlds, a welfare scheme that appears to be genuinely inclusive and activating, we argue that PI has very little to offer either side of this debate. By critically assessing PI from the standpoint of administrative analysis and by drawing on evidence of existing programs, we identify several concerns at the level of implementation and find that these concerns are largely ignored in existing debates. Once these concerns are confronted, we argue, it becomes clear that although PI may seem attractive as a political compromise, this does not translate into a stable administrative solution, given the divergent priorities and agendas of those within the universalist and selectivist camps.

Our first aim is to demonstrate that, in its current underdeveloped state, PI does not constitute a workable proposal.³ A closer examination reveals significant weaknesses in PI's administrability: the program's capacity to be administered in a practical and efficient manner, in accordance with its primary objectives, and in keeping with existing constraints. These weaknesses make PI's endorsement by UBI supporters, in particular, premature if not altogether gratuitous. Although recognizing these weaknesses primarily affects what we refer to as the first-best justification of PI, it also has important applications for what we will call the second-best case for PI.

This brings us to the second theme of this article. The administrative instability of PI, we maintain, confronts would-be supporters of the proposals with what we label the "trilemma of participation income." If one assumes that effective enforcement of a broad participation requirement

imposes substantial moral and economic costs on welfare bureaucrats and clients alike, the implementation of any PI scheme effectively presents the following alternatives: (a) institute a weak enforcement of any participation requirements, rendering PI barely distinguishable from UBI; (b) structure a participation requirement around narrowly selective eligibility criteria, effectively resulting in a version of workfare; or (c) accept the substantial administrative costs of ironclad enforcement. Because selectivists and universalists hold explicit and opposing views on how to resolve this trilemma, it is difficult to see how PI can attract a sufficient coalition in support of it. In short, because administrative instability produces political instability, PI may well represent the worst of all possibilities instead of a perfect compromise between proponents and opponents of universal welfare reform. The final section of this article considers the implications of this conclusion for the broader basic income debate.

Participation Income: An Analytical Outline

Participation income is the brainchild of Anthony Atkinson (1996, 1998), an Oxford economist with a distinguished track record of research into poverty and social exclusion. Since the 1980s, welfare policy in the United Kingdom has centered, as it did in many other countries at this time, on means-tested benefits. Increasingly dissatisfied with this focus, Atkinson came to look sympathetically upon arguments in favor of universal grants that would be allocated without a means test. He recognized, however, that “it will be difficult to secure political support for a citizen’s income while it remains unconditional on labour market or other activity” (Atkinson 1996, 67). The solution for Atkinson is a social assistance program that retains the politically salient notion of social participation but gives up on means testing. The broad outline of PI is best described by quoting Atkinson at some length:

In my proposal, the basic income would be paid conditional on *participation*. I should stress at once that this is not limited to labour market participation. While the qualifying conditions would include people working as an employee or self-employed, absent from work on grounds of sickness or injury, unable to work on grounds of disability and unemployed but available for work, it would also include people engaging in approved forms of education or training, caring for young, elderly or disabled dependents or undertaking approved forms of voluntary work, etc. The condition involves neither *payment* nor *work*; it is a wider definition of social contribution. (Atkinson 1996, 68–69)

The precise nature of PI depends crucially on the sort of activities that policy makers allow to satisfy the requirement of social participation. It is perfectly possible for a PI to barely expand on existing labor-market-oriented notions of economic participation (see, e.g., the social and

economic participation income [SEPI] proposal by Jordan et al. [1999]). Alternatively, a PI might define participation to encompass such a wide range of social activities that the program is virtually indistinguishable from a genuine UBI. Although this flexibility offers valuable maneuvering room in which policy entrepreneurs can construct an enacting coalition, it raises concerns about how (and by whom) the precise scope of participation is to be determined.

A second key concern relates to the question of how compliance is to be enforced. As Loek Groot and Robert van der Veen (2000) suggest, a PI with a broad notion of social participation and lax enforcement will bear a close resemblance to a UBI, but the same policy with a narrowly defined participation requirement and strict enforcement will in practice bear a close resemblance to a workfare program. Thus PI could equally be regarded as either a mutated UBI proposal or an expanded workfare scheme. However, the apparent symmetry masks an important distinction; the strategy behind UBI is to eradicate a host of social and economic ills solely by providing cash support. By contrast, workfare and closely related activating welfare policies in addition employ other forms of support, such as job training, job placement, transportation, or assistance with child-care responsibilities, with the aim of helping clients to negotiate various employment barriers. In practice, such support measures are often crowded out by a variety of other priorities (Handler 2004; Handler and Babcock 2006), but the analytical distinction between UBI and workfare nevertheless stands, suggesting a close alignment between PI and UBI.

Atkinson's proposal has gained almost universal, if at times implicit, support among basic income advocates, as well as from a number of UBI's more sympathetic critics. This support comes despite the fact that little has been done to flesh out Atkinson's original proposal.⁴ Of course, it may be that PI retains the support of scholars and advocates with widely divergent perspectives precisely because both the concept and the policy details remain vague. In order to advance the debate, it is now necessary to consider those features that make PI attractive to scholars, advocates, and policy makers advancing different positions.

We can discern three reasons for endorsing PI. Each reason may take priority for some subset of those currently in favor of the proposal. First, one might endorse PI, believing it to be a first-best welfare policy under contemporary conditions. For example, PI grants recipients generous income support as well as the freedom to engage in a wide range of socially useful activities. Thus, Stuart White's relentless and sophisticated arguments against unconditional welfare, rooted in the view that unconditionality fails to satisfy the basic requirement of fair reciprocity, has led him to endorse PI on several occasions (White 2003*b*; see also Gutmann and Thompson 1996). In addition to such justice-based ar-

guments, those who advance a first-best argument for PI sometimes also advance an incentive argument, asserting that PI promotes socially valuable activities without relying on overly coercive measures. Here, we could imagine PI complementing both feminist approaches to welfare reform (McKay and Van Every 2000; Robeyns 2000; McKay 2001; Pateman 2003, 2004) as well as postproductivism, in which narrow employment-driven policies are supplanted by schemes that induce the broad valuation of social activity, including care work (Offe 1992; Fitzpatrick 1999; Standing 1999, 2002; Van der Veen and Groot 2006). In practice, the justice-based and the incentive-based perspectives often coincide, but the arguments are sufficiently distinct to warrant separate mention.⁵

The two approaches differ markedly from what may be called second-best justifications for PI. Such justifications are put forward by scholars (like Atkinson himself) who favor unconditional policies but acknowledge that it may be impossible to gather sufficient political support for UBI. Many basic income supporters, including Philippe Van Parijs, Claus Offe, Robert Goodin, and Brian Barry, adopt this type of position. However, second-best justifications for PI come in two subtly distinct variants. One is held by those who regard political feasibility in static terms and thus accept PI, perhaps reluctantly, as a permanent settlement. Atkinson himself seems to hold this position. A second view holds that PI ought to be supported as a first step toward a more radically unconditional scheme. This is the more dynamic of the two views; it assumes that once a PI is in place, an important milestone is established in progress toward universalizing welfare. Subsequent strategy would then be directed toward adjusting the scheme along various parameters in order to move from PI to a mature UBI. Examples of such adjustment include increasing the level of the grant as well as broadening eligibility and limiting the conditions so that benefits coverage broadens (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2004).

Recently, a number of basic income scholars have drawn attention to the many ways in which existing welfare and social support schemes can be made to mimic basic income in one of its versions. The three most common strategies are (a) start with a partial income and then move toward a full UBI that provides benefits at the level of subsistence, (b) start with a UBI in one sector or for part of the population (e.g., basic pension or child benefit) and extend that gradually to cover the whole target group, or (c) introduce multiple schemes that operate in combination as a UBI (Van der Veen and Groot 2000; Van Parijs 2001, 2004; Standing 2005; Vanderborght 2005). Unfortunately, thus far we have not encountered a genuinely convincing strategy that indicates how to move from PI to a UBI; in the absence of such a strategy, it remains equally plausible that opponents of universalism might use PI to establish a fairly narrow criterion of social participation and then gradually

restrict eligibility. For example, opponents might impose the sort of time constraints enacted in the U.S. welfare reforms of 1996 (cf. White 2003*a*).

In summary, first-best justifications see PI as an ethical compromise between competing normative claims; second-best justifications regard PI essentially as a political compromise in a constrained policy environment. It can be argued that PI consequently emerges as a policy with the capacity to unite a range of different groups and, as such, it stands out as the welfare policy par excellence, capable not only of sustaining a coalition based on shared goals but also of allowing different groups to avoid more extreme policy choices like UBI or workfare. This apparent capacity to unite explains much of PI's success among basic income advocates and the apparent willingness of most advocates to lend their support without fully assessing how a PI would operate in practice.

In our view, this illusion is largely maintained by avoiding detailed discussion of PI. Even sophisticated thinkers like Van Parijs (2004) offer only an impressionistic analysis of PI. Once a detailed examination is carried out, the illusion rapidly disintegrates, and PI reveals itself to be risky as well as costly.

The Essential Features of an Income Support Mechanism

Any welfare scheme must perform three essential administrative tasks. First, a welfare scheme must establish the operational criteria of eligibility that define the intended beneficiaries. Second, it must identify those within the population who meet these criteria of eligibility and distinguish them from those who are not eligible. Third, it must transfer eligible beneficiaries' payments correctly. Accordingly, the design of an income-support mechanism involves, at a minimum, taking a position on how each of these tasks is to be performed. If a scheme is unable to perform one or more of these tasks as required, this inability may undermine or negate the reasons for preferring the scheme in the first place. Even where such differences in administrability are not decisive, how we resolve questions of administrative design may have important consequences for the way the scheme is expected to operate in practice and, thus, for the conclusions we draw about the normative appeal of different schemes. The following three subsections deal with each task in turn. We argue that PI performs poorly in each of these three tasks.

Standards Conferring Entitlement

The first step in the design of any welfare benefit is to determine what criteria, if any, should govern eligibility for a grant and how these criteria are best encapsulated in a set of rules or standards. The relative difficulty

of reducing alternative criteria of eligibility into a set of suitably precise rules is relevant to the balance of considerations for and against different income support schemes.

Colin Diver (1983) has examined the failure of a number of public policies to achieve their intended purposes, attributing such failure to inappropriate degrees of precision in the design of the rules that govern the implementation of the policy. Diver (1983) identifies three separate dimensions of rule precision. First, “transparency” (Diver 1983, 67) is defined as the extent to which the language in which rules are formulated is clearly defined and has universally accepted meaning. Second, a rule is “accessible” (1983, 67) to the extent that it is readily applicable by those who are required to interpret it in concrete or street-level situations. The third dimension is the extent to which verbal formulations are “congruent” (1983, 67) with the underlying policy objectives, so that compliance with the terms of the rules should lead to the outcomes consistent with the policy. A key part of Diver’s argument is that these three dimensions are not collinear. In order to produce effective rules, policy makers need to make compromises and trade-offs among the three dimensions.

Applying Diver’s analysis to the problems of designing an effective PI scheme reveals the complex administrative judgment involved in implementing such a scheme. As we noted previously, the key feature that distinguishes PI from UBI, on the one hand, and from workfare, on the other, is the incorporation of a broad participation requirement. Drawing on Diver’s rule-precision analysis, consider the problem of legislating Atkinson’s participation criterion into a set of rules. The following three models (inspired by Diver 1983, 69) offer alternative formulations of a participation requirement:

Model 1: A person shall be entitled to receive a PI if he or she devotes at least 10 hours per week in employment, self-employment, volunteering for a charitable organization, studying at a university or college, or caring for dependent parents, children, or spouses.

Model 2: Any person substantially engaged in an appropriate socially valued activity shall be entitled to receive a PI.

Model 3: A person shall be eligible to receive a PI provided he or she undertakes activities as prescribed in the following table. (Such a rule would then be followed by a detailed table displaying various types of employment, positions within voluntary organizations, approved college and university courses, disabilities, and care-work activities.)

Among these three alternatives, model 1 is clearly both transparent and accessible. The model is understandable, and it is relatively easy to determine whether the model applies to a particular case if one is familiar with the relevant facts. However, the model performs poorly in terms of congruence with the underlying policy of promoting an inclu-

sive conception of active citizenship demanded by such reciprocity theorists as Elizabeth Anderson (2001), William Galston (2001), and Stuart White (2003*b*). Specifically, the formulation is in certain respects underinclusive; one can envision many socially valuable activities (e.g., nonuniversity education, other noncredited forms of training, and caring for dependents outside the prescribed relationship) that are not captured by the formulation. Model 1 may also be overinclusive in other respects; it is debatable whether all charitable organizations contribute unambiguously to the public good. Moreover, in the absence of clear standards, one can expect a proliferation of charitable organizations, many of which may be set up with the explicit objective of exploiting the scheme. Such exploitation would be an example of “creative compliance” (McBarnet and Whelan 1991, 849), which is discussed below.

That a scheme might inadvertently support negatively valued activities while failing to support socially beneficial activities is a matter of some concern among both advocates and adversaries of PI. This concern is also well documented in the literature on welfare reform; this literature frequently refers to the issue of goal congruence, the doctrine that policy systems should transmit formal policy goals in a straightforward manner throughout the system and should provide street-level caseworkers with both resources and incentives to implement policy accordingly. Recent research argues that congruence between formal policy goals and street-level operational goals is a prerequisite for effective welfare administration (Meyers, Riccucci, and Lurie 2001). However, goal congruence is immensely difficult to achieve when either policy goals or the operational environment (delivery systems) is complex. Complex policy goals invite conflict and ambiguity regarding the proper interpretation and ranking of goals. Complex administrative environments introduce conflicting incentives into the equation. Marcia Meyers and her colleagues (2001) show that if both policy goals and the administrative environment are complex, a decoupling of stated policy goals and achieved objectives often occurs.

One strategy to avoid such decoupling would be to start with clearly defined policy goals (Riccucci et al. 2004). This is the approach taken in model 2, which directly elucidates the policy intention behind the rule. However, model 2 manages to avoid the decoupling of stated policy goals and achieved objectives only by offering a vague, all-encompassing criterion of participation. The criterion is so broad that it is open to conflicting interpretations by clients, welfare officers, policy makers, and even the general public. Because the model is ambiguous, it is not accessible. For various political reasons, “elected officials are predisposed to providing vague or ambiguous policy directives” (Meyers et al. 2001, 166). Especially where policy goals are contested, decision makers have the motive, and may exploit any opportunities, to shift responsibility to administrative agencies and caseworkers (Brodkin 1990, 1997).

Although this political predisposition toward vagueness may confer advantages, it may also encourage strategies of blame avoidance (Weaver 1986).

Model 3, in turn, may avoid excessive ambiguity, providing both high accessibility and congruence, but policy makers must foresee all the socially valuable activities of which individuals can conceive, and a list of such activities is likely to be extremely complex; the gains offered by this model thus come at the expense of transparency.⁶ Of course, this lack of transparency could be addressed by combining different versions of the models. For example, model 2 could be combined with a set of guidelines similar to those in model 3, and some official could be given discretion to include other cases not covered by the guidelines. But such a strategy risks combining the weaknesses of different approaches as well as their strengths and may furthermore come at the cost of considerable complexity.

Although models 2 and 3 may avoid problems of goal congruence, model 2 confronts another central problem in welfare administration; it confers excessively broad discretion on welfare administrations, enabling them to determine unilaterally the eligibility of clients (Diller 2000). Poor accessibility exacerbates this problem because unless there is a firmly established consensus among the interpretative community on which activities are socially valued, a consensus that is highly unlikely in modern plural societies (Black 1995), key decisions are typically passed through the system to street-level caseworkers.

Similarly, model 3 may be regarded as highly congruent with the underlying policy goal of instituting a broad participation criterion, but the model avoids these problems only by creating another; poor transparency increases the de facto discretionary power of street-level administrators because welfare workers and clients face imperfect and asymmetrical knowledge of the regulations (see Baldwin 1995, 15–33). The literature on the implementation of welfare policies demonstrates that caseworkers are frequently overwhelmed by forms, rules, and regulations; they are often forced to take on responsibilities for which they are insufficiently trained, and such engagements leave little or no time for actual engagement with clients (Sandfort 2000; Handler and Hasenfeld 2006).⁷ As a consequence of these pressures, nontransparent rules are shown in some cases to lead administrators to base decisions on cues and heuristics that may themselves be incompatible with underlying policy concerns. This has been shown to lead to the creaming of easy cases and the dumping of problem clients, the selective provision of key information to clients, and the arbitrary use of compliance and sanctioning (Handler 2004). Paradoxically, attempts to curtail welfare workers' discretion by expanding rules and otherwise routinizing welfare implementation have proven counterproductive because they incite caseworkers to ignore cumbersome procedures and to use their discre-

tion to achieve what they perceive as the primary goal, which is typically understood to be case-load reduction (Meyers, Glaser, and MacDonald 1998; Handler 2004; Handler and Hasenfeld 2006). Sandfort observes, "Because staff recognize the limited ability of the programs to move all clients into work, they develop alternative definitions of organizational success" (Sandfort 2000, 739).

How do alternative schemes compare with PI in terms of their capability to be expressed in appropriate, suitably precise standards conferring entitlement? It is often assumed that UBI sidesteps the problem of rule formulation because eligibility is nominally unconditional. Although this point is not entirely without force, it should not be overstated; even in its most inclusive formulation, UBI must restrict entitlement to some subset of the inhabitants of one country, or perhaps of some supranational region such as the European Union (Van Parijs 1995; Van Parijs and Vanderborgh 2001; Howard 2006). A UBI scheme must include rules that pertain to such issues as the level of the grant, its uniformity, and the time scale within which it operates. All of these issues involve considerably more regulation than is appreciated by many UBI supporters (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2004). Nevertheless, reducing a proposal for a radical UBI scheme into a set of transparent, accessible, and congruent rules is likely to be a relatively straightforward matter. In comparison with other forms of welfare grants, including PI, such a scheme is based on comparably well-defined criteria.

At the other extreme, there are a number of reasons why workfare might outperform PI in defining a standard for conferring entitlement. First, workfare and PI both require some form of participation as a condition of entitlement, but the sheer number of participation options in a broad participation scheme and the relative paucity of options in workfare are likely to affect the performance of each of the respective policies. Second, precisely because work conditions are typically part of a formal relationship (e.g., between employer and employee), they are likely to be more readily expressed as a rule than broad participation requirements, which are often embedded in informal social or economic relations. Third, because work conditions can be easily embedded in existing practices and labor-market institutions, workfare is more likely than PI to engender accessible and transparent regulations because the latter demands the institution of newly valued activities (or at least activities that are new in terms of formal institutional recognition). Of course, research shows that, in practice, workfare faces many complicated problems and in fact manages to gather support despite a record of failing to obtain its goals and objectives (Meyers et al. 1998; Sandfort 2000; Handler 2004; Handler and Hasenfeld 2006). Nevertheless, from both political and administrative perspectives, it makes a considerable difference whether entitlement standards are initiated through a clear and coherent process or instead result from one that, by its very nature,

covers a diverse and heterogeneous range of activities. Regardless of actual outcomes, workfare and PI in this respect do not appear to start on a similar footing.

In short, all welfare schemes face the sorts of hard choices and trade-offs inherent in Diver's (1983) optimal precision calculus, but different schemes vary in how well they negotiate these trade-offs. As a grant that lacks a means test but is subject to a broad participation requirement, PI ignores the distinctive ways in which participation can be operationalized. Bringing the operational dimension to the foreground, as we have done in this section, demonstrates that PI faces considerably greater problems in implementation than do UBI and workfare.

Identification and Monitoring of Beneficiaries

The task of determining whether individuals satisfy eligibility criteria, and whether beneficiaries have complied (or continue to comply) with conditions attached to the receipt of a grant, is familiar in welfare administration. From the perspective of administrative analysis, this determination focuses attention on the informational demands associated with different schemes. It also creates the potential for strategic behavior on the part of potential beneficiaries, who may evade conditions of entitlement or engage in creative compliance (McBarnet and Whelan 1991). These concerns are closely intertwined with the issues of rule design (addressed in the previous section); rules that perform poorly along any of the three dimensions of rule precision typically give rise to additional monitoring and enforcement problems. The following discussion addresses these issues by examining the features of benefit schemes that lend themselves to the effective identification of beneficiaries, by assessing how far the previously discussed alternative formulations of the participation requirement embody these features, and by suggesting how the challenges associated with monitoring and enforcement of a participation requirement compare with equivalent implementation issues posed by UBI and workfare, respectively.

Christopher Hood (1985; 1986, 74–81; 1994) discusses in detail the features that affect the administration of a tax in a given sociotechnical environment. The features identified by Hood can also be applied to the payment of income-support grants. First, Hood (1994, 118) coins the term “standard clarity” to denote “the property of being relatable to values that can be ascertained relatively economically and ‘objectively.’” Although Hood presents what is arguably just an enforcement perspective on Diver's (1983) criterion of accessibility, Hood's discussion of standard clarity reinforces the point that if standards cannot be applied readily to particular circumstances, determining compliance is likely to be costly and difficult, and potentially leads to policy failure. Hood (1986, 76–77; 1994, 118) also argues that ease of administration

requires that the scheme's targets must be "cadasterable."⁸ That is, in the case of taxes they must possess "the property of being applicable to a readily identifiable population of taxable units, if possible from sources which are available in advance and cannot be easily contaminated by evasive action" (Hood 1994, 118). Likewise, the payment of a grant is administratively easier if there is a readily identifiable population of beneficiaries. This also implies that, if individual circumstances (e.g., the amount of hours worked by casual employees) are likely to change frequently, they constitute a poor basis for entitlement because they lead to a rapidly changing and therefore unstable target population. This is a problem for both welfare administrators and clients themselves, as clients often fail to understand when they are in violation of an eligibility constraint (Handler and Babcock 2006; Handler and Hasenfeld 2006).⁹

Our hypothetical implementation of a participation requirement again helps to illustrate how alternative rule descriptions can affect compliance determinations and thus lead to divergent outcomes. In model 1 and model 3, decisions about what constitutes active citizenship are made in advance; determining compliance requires only knowledge of the facts of individual circumstances. While information about employment can be gleaned from payroll information and enrollment in education can be assessed from matriculation records, there are no comprehensive or reliable sources of information about the distribution and extent of care work in the home. Effective monitoring of care work would indeed require overly intrusive forms of monitoring; alternatively, some form of self-reporting may be used, but this would be susceptible to manipulation by those not meeting the participation requirement. In particular, this susceptibility increases if eligible clients are unaware of their entitlement.

Model 2 faces all of these problems and more. In particular, this model performs poorly in terms of standard clarity. In the absence of a strong interpretative consensus, basing entitlement on the model's abstract definition of a "socially valued activity" gives administrators a broad discretion to decide which activities qualify. Broad discretion raises concerns about due process and the procedures established to enable recipients to challenge administrative decisions (Danz 2000; Lens and Vorsanger 2005). This discretion may also be a recipe for inconsistent application. Inconsistency is an acute concern, especially if multiple agencies are involved (Stoker and Wilson 1998; Meyers et al. 2001).

Again, model 2 outperforms its competitors in that it is less susceptible to the form of manipulation termed creative compliance, that is, complying with the technical requirements of a rule or standard in such a way as to undermine the purpose of the rule (McBarnet and Whelan 1991). Model 1, for instance, might encourage enrollment at a university, and this may lead to a proliferation of what the United Kingdom's

former Higher Education Minister Margaret Hodge called “Mickey Mouse courses” (Lightfoot 2003; Woodward 2003). Policy makers might attempt to prevent such opportunistic exploitation by adopting detailed rules, such as those in model 3, but such rules require administrators to monitor course selections and to distinguish courses that are deemed acceptable from those that are not. Because model 2 avoids such formalism, it permits administrators to respond flexibly to such attempted exploitation, but this flexibility also gives administrators substantial discretionary authority.

Consideration of the task of identifying eligible beneficiaries and monitoring compliance also raises questions concerning what (if any) sanctioning mechanisms should complement information gathering. If clients fail to abide by the conditions of a grant, they normally face some form of sanction; these typically diminish or withhold the benefit itself (Handler 2004). The link between monitoring and sanctioning appears to be straightforward (Mead 1986; Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996; Riccio and Hasenfeld 1996). However, recent research casts doubt on various assumptions implicit in the design and operation of common approaches to sanctioning (Wilson, Stoker, and McGrath 1999; Hasenfeld, Ghose, and Larson 2004; Handler and Hasenfeld 2006). First, it remains unclear whether sanctioning is grounded in moral or utilitarian arguments (Hasenfeld et al. 2004; Handler and Hasenfeld 2006). In addition, it is questionable whether sanctioning really produces desired outcomes. That is, it is not clear if sanctions teach noncompliant welfare recipients a moral lesson or if sanctions merely preselect, or cream, the least demanding clients without taking account of the manifold “barriers to compliance” that may affect clients’ behavioral disposition (Hasenfeld et al. 2004, 306).

The unconditional nature of UBI suggests that monitoring and enforcement are not issues of central importance to the scheme’s implementation. If each and every individual citizen has an unconditional right to a grant, there is no need for, nor point to, monitoring compliance among recipients of the grant. There might nonetheless be other reasons for retaining some form of monitoring. For example, it may ensure that all citizens receive the benefit to which they are entitled. In the absence of mechanisms to monitor citizens, it is impossible to assess take-up rates (a point elaborated below). Although monitoring might constitute an important built-in safety mechanism, the need for a monitoring apparatus is nonetheless significantly reduced, if not eliminated, in a basic income welfare state. Similarly, UBI would reverse the sanctioning philosophy implicit in current welfare programs.

Workfare programs promote a narrow conception of active citizenship that is based on claimants fitting particular labor-market categories or being embedded within specific institutions. That most of these labor-market categories already feature prominently in various cadasters sug-

gests that they could be monitored easily, at least in theory. In practice, evidence shows that monitoring remains one of the most challenging aspects in the administration of workfare (Handler and Babcock 2006; Handler and Hasenfeld 2006). The evidence also suggests that monitoring is both costly and prone to error; caseworkers often make decisions on the basis of outdated, inaccurate, or incomplete information. This, in turn, has potentially disastrous implications for subsequent assessments of eligibility, sanctioning, and so forth. The situation becomes more complicated if the discussion shifts from pure people-processing technology to a focus on the people-changing requirements inherent in workfare's ambitious activation goals (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996, 240). Agencies that embrace an eligibility-compliance culture find it hard to endorse notions of self-sufficiency (Bane and Ellwood 1994).

We do not wish to downplay the problems associated with current welfare-to-work administration, but the point remains that where workfare faces difficulties, monitoring and enforcement of broad participation requirements become practically unworkable because of the ambiguities inherent in broad participation schemes. One important variable to consider is which presumption applies when there is implicit uncertainty about the outcome of a verification procedure. Do we assume that a client is eligible unless proof to the contrary is offered, or do we place the full burden of proof on the client (Stoker and Wilson 1998)? Proportionality is also problematic. How does one identify a sanction that is proportional in effect to the infraction for which it is imposed? In the case of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) in the United States, the majority of sanctions are applied for missing an appointment or for failure to fill out forms properly. Some clients lose the entire TANF grant as a result (Cherlin et al. 2002). Clearly, concern about the circumstances in which sanctions are applied relates to the types of participation requirements (whether narrow or broad) and their strict or lax enforcement. In addition, PI faces major obstacles to interagency coordination because broadening the list of approved activities also implies an increase in the number of agencies that need to cooperate to produce the required information (compare Stoker and Wilson 1998). Finally, the ambiguities inherent in PI will also bring uncertainty about when clients deserve to be sanctioned under the scheme. This uncertainty may introduce further arbitrary and unequal treatment.¹⁰

Disbursing Payments to Beneficiaries

The third essential feature of a welfare scheme is the means by which grant payments are disbursed to those identified as the proper beneficiaries of the grant. A set of standards may confer eligibility on a set of beneficiaries, may do so with an appropriate degree of precision, and

may accurately identify those who meet eligibility criteria, but the scheme must be judged a failure unless it includes an effective means of disbursing payments to beneficiaries. Further, a payment system's vulnerability to fraud or opportunism may undermine the legitimacy and efficiency of a scheme.

Hood's work on tax administration again offers theoretical inspiration for our attempt to identify how administrative concerns factor into debates on welfare reform. Hood's concept of the "conduitability" of a tax is defined as "the property of being assessable and collectable through a relatively small number of surveillable channels or 'bottlenecks' at which oversight can economically be applied" (Hood 1994, 118). The concept is equally applicable to the administration of welfare grants. In that context, conduitability can be considered analogous to the degree of fit or complementarity between the way in which beneficiaries are defined (and identified) and the means by which payments are disbursed. The arrangements for disbursing a benefit should ideally enable administrators to cross-check individual eligibility to a benefit (see Hood 1986, 78–79).

There are two ways in which conduitability, as the concept is applied here, may be considered important to the administrability of a welfare scheme. First, the monitoring of payments is essential to ensure that benefits are received by all those who are entitled. Second, by incorporating robust oversight mechanisms into the arrangements for payment of a benefit, the design of a scheme plays an important part in ensuring that payments are only made to those who meet (and continue to fulfill) conditions of entitlement. The first design combats false negatives; the second eradicates false positives. To the extent that these two desiderata have conflicting implications for the design of a scheme, addressing the question of conduitability calls for skillful administrative judgment.

Broadly speaking, two strategies ensure the effective disbursement of payments to beneficiaries. The first is to rely on as few alternate payment channels as are sufficient to reach the target population. The optimal arrangement would make use of a single but universally accessible payment mechanism. It is often suggested that a scheme with a small number of surveillable channels is to be preferred on administrative grounds because such a scheme avoids the complications that arise in managing multiple payment systems. For example, in the United Kingdom, the National Audit Office (NAO) has argued with reference to the frequently maligned Child Support Agency that "the parallel running of separate systems makes the customer interface more complex" (NAO 2005, 38). However, such cursory assessments should be treated with caution because the specific design of payment schemes matters a great deal. Consider, for instance, a heavily monitored single-payment channel in which a case officer presents a grant check after a face-to-face en-

counter. This design may effectively ensure compliance with the general eligibility requirements, but it is likely to prove costly, especially if the scheme is intended to benefit a large beneficiary population. By contrast, a single-payment scheme that eschews monitoring might more effectively reach eligible claimants, but the absence of monitoring may also make the scheme vulnerable to false positives.

The alternative strategy is to embrace redundancy and to disburse payments through multiple, overlapping mechanisms. This strategy lacks the ease of oversight provided by a single-channel system, but overlapping payment mechanisms may effectively ensure that beneficiaries can easily access their grant. Overlapping systems are also advantageous in dealing with difficult-to-reach beneficiary groups that require special policy attention. Beneficiaries who are homeless or excluded from the formal labor market, and hence from firms' payroll systems, are typical examples. Even so, the advantages of the multiple-channels approach may not always be as clear in practice. The effectiveness of payment systems may be undermined or negated by common mode failure; for example, electronic payment of funds and grant checks both require that the intended beneficiary have access to a bank account, and so both have the same disadvantages. As the NAO report (2005) suggests, any advantages of redundancy come at the cost of complexity. This complexity could lead both beneficiaries and caseworkers to make mistakes. In some circumstances, it could also increase fraud and barriers to accessing particular benefits. In summary, effective design of payment systems achieves an appropriate balance between targeting the full spectrum of beneficiaries and delivering benefits through a small number of surveillable channels. Administrative failure in these systems can make access to benefits unequal and lead to irregular take-up rates.

Because UBI is radically inclusive, the most important aspect of conduitability in this scheme is ensuring that payments reach all those deemed eligible. By eschewing conditionality and eliminating the requirement that payment systems act as a check on entitlement, UBI takes this approach to its extreme. Discussions of UBI usually propose one of the following payment schemes: UBI can be implemented through existing tax-credit schemes (such an implementation turns UBI into a refundable tax credit); UBI proponents alternatively advance the idea of a basic income debit card from which recipients draw their grant. The card functions just like a bank card; a recipient uses it to make a cash withdrawal. Both of these approaches reflect the implicit (and sometimes explicit) assumption among the basic income community that it is desirable to relieve caseworkers of the gatekeeper role, because it would increase beneficiaries' autonomy and improve take-up rates. One potential shortcoming of both tax-benefit integration and the basic income debit card may be that these approaches offer little or no means

of checking whether people have actually received their grants. So far, this point seems to have escaped the attention of UBI advocates.

By contrast, workfare approaches, far from dispensing with oversight, rely on extensive intervention from caseworkers. Such face-to-face oversight imposes considerable variable costs that increase with the number of claimants. Although such costs might be considered to be tolerable as long as benefits are targeted narrowly at those in formal employment and training, this approach may cease to be feasible as the target population expands. Obvious solutions to this problem include restricting access to benefits and proactively reducing the number of beneficiaries; however, these solutions significantly shift the goals of workfare (Handler 2004; Handler and Babcock 2006). A second advantage of workfare is that the focus on training and formal employment provides a host of institutionally embedded oversight mechanisms, including payroll systems and university matriculation records, that allow for effective cross-checking, at least as long as the necessary administrative resources are kept in place. Such mechanisms enable workfare administrators to properly monitor the delivery of payment systems, even if conduitability under workfare is achieved by restricting eligibility to those who are part of the formal employment sector.

Workfare and UBI clearly take opposite approaches to the issue of conduitability. Workfare restricts the population of beneficiaries to those who can be reached by existing well-defined channels; UBI minimizes the oversight requirements that enable enforcement of eligibility rules. Each of these approaches has problems, but both may be regarded as broadly viable strategies. By contrast, PI does not possess the strengths of either of these two schemes. Because eligibility for PI is limited to those who meet the participation requirement, PI does not share UBI's ability to dispense with oversight mechanisms that withdraw payment if conditions are not met. If either the tax-benefit integration or the basic income debit card idea is combined with monitoring and oversight of conditions associated with PI, the result invites the risks associated with complexity.¹¹ Similarly, because PI is intended to be more broadly targeted than workfare, the variable costs of face-to-face monitoring by PI caseworkers may become prohibitive. Furthermore, because PI's participation requirement may be satisfied by informal activities (e.g., care work), the scheme is limited in its ability to exercise control through such surveillable payment channels as employer payroll systems or payment to students at the point of college registration.

One might argue that PI has one modest advantage over UBI: because PI is targeted at a narrower set of beneficiaries, it may retain some of the capacity for ex post monitoring of benefit receipt. However, the breadth of the participation criterion and the stringency with which it is interpreted may negatively affect this capacity, leaving subclasses of

beneficiaries unprotected, particularly those who find themselves near the informal end of the participation spectrum. This violates a core goal of providing equal security across the population (Standing 1999, 2002). Even this modest advantage of PI is in turn trumped by workfare simply because workfare's beneficiaries will always be more restricted than those associated with PI, and such a restriction implies that the set of workfare beneficiaries will be smaller as well as more homogeneous.

It thus seems that, as was the case with the previous two administrative tasks, PI performs worse than either UBI or workfare in terms of the disbursement of payments to beneficiaries. Although not necessarily decisive in comparing these schemes, administrative analysis of the task of channeling payments does not offer countervailing arguments that might support the case for or outweigh the identified disadvantages of PI.

The Trilemma of Participation Income

From the analysis of the previous two sections, it follows that PI proponents face a trilemma of participation income. The first horn of the trilemma consists of the requirement that PI must remain substantively inclusive if it is to satisfy the concerns of basic income advocates. The second horn is represented by the equally important requirement, insisted upon this time by reciprocity theorists and soft workfare proponents, that recipients must satisfy a genuine participation requirement. Such a requirement in turn demands that any PI scheme must be capable of differentiating between those who fulfill their social obligations, however defined, and those who do not. Finally, the third horn is made up of the previously discussed concerns that pertain to the economic and human costs associated with administrability. The trilemma arises because PI can only avoid two of three horns simultaneously. The scheme inevitably gets pinned on a third. Each of the three routes out of the trilemma will appeal, if at all, only to a small subset of those attracted at a general level to PI, and each therefore has obvious negative consequences for the political feasibility of PI.

The Ironclad Administration Strategy

A first possible resolution of the trilemma would be to reject any compromise on ease-of-administration considerations; if these conflict with a participation requirement, the former should always give way. In this way, PI might hope to retain the support of both UBI and workfare supporters, as well as of those who support PI on first-best grounds. Although this constitutes a coherent position that some PI proponents

implicitly seem willing to adopt, there are nevertheless important consequences that adherents to this position may be reluctant to accept.

The ironclad administration strategy sacrifices some of the chief advantages related to providing benefits without a means test—notably, PI's ability to use bureaucracy sparingly. Hood (1983, 142) identifies two senses in which one may seek to use bureaucracy sparingly: first, by economizing on the administrative resources or on the administrative capacity used to execute welfare policy, and, second, by minimizing what Adam Smith (1776/1998, 454) calls the “trouble, vexation, and oppression” visited upon the citizenry by the welfare administrators. Concerns with using bureaucracy sparingly in the first sense are captured by the notion of program efficiency (Goodin et al. 1999). The second sense is captured in concerns that easy and objective measures of compliance are needed to limit welfare administrators' constant interference in recipients' lives. Such interference is an all too familiar issue in welfare policy; freedom from it is often cited as one of the key advantages of universal and unconditional measures (Van Parijs 1992, 2004; Wolff 1998; Fitzpatrick 1999; Standing 1999, 2002; Offe 2005).¹²

To the extent that one or both of these two senses of using bureaucracy sparingly is relevant to the feasibility and desirability of any income support scheme, considerations of administrability are obviously material to the choice between rival income support mechanisms. A PI scheme that fails to use bureaucracy sparingly by economizing on administrative resources may achieve its objectives only at considerable administrative cost, satisfying demands for improved target efficiency, if at all, only at the cost of poor program efficiency (Goodin et al. 1999). Poor program efficiency, in turn, is likely to negatively affect PI's capacity to attract a necessary enacting coalition. It would also negatively affect public opinion because one of the core arguments in support of UBI (that the cost of administration is low) no longer holds.

If a proposed scheme also fails to use bureaucracy sparingly in Hood's second sense of limiting administrative interference in beneficiaries' lives, the administrative demands of effectively enforcing a broad participation requirement are borne not only by administrators, but also directly by welfare recipients and by the general population. In the absence of easy and objective verification procedures, intrusive inspections, threats, punitive sanctions, and the like may all prove necessary to discourage cheating. This is an important observation with clear effects on the considerations, such as these for the freedom and respect of recipients, that often inform universal approaches to income support (Wolff 1998; Eyal 2006). In short, a considerable cost comes with negotiating the trilemma by embracing ironclad administration; workfare proponents will lament the increased resource cost of welfare admin-

istration, and UBI proponents will denounce the interference cost associated with increased monitoring and enforcement.

The Soft Workfare Strategy

A second approach would be to formulate the participation requirement in a deliberately underinclusive fashion. This effectively drafts a participation requirement in such a way as to include only those activities that are easy to specify precisely and to monitor efficiently. It includes (as far as possible) those beneficiaries to whom it is administratively simple to make payments. Such a strategy of creaming suitable welfare applicants is familiar in the workfare literature (Wilson et al. 1999; Handler 2004).

Although this approach is less attractive in principle than the broad participation requirement envisaged by Atkinson and others, it might be regarded as a viable compromise between the theoretical advantages of PI and the requirements for ease of administration. However, the approach also narrows the gap between PI and selective workfare schemes. In practice, the scheme will necessarily focus participation requirements to include those social categories or activities that already feature prominently in current administrative systems. In other words, such an approach exhibits the conservative tendency to reinforce existing institutionalized practices by excluding alternative social activities, such as voluntary work or care work, that PI in theory embraces. Such a solution would be unacceptable to those UBI proponents, notably feminists and postproductivists, who consider the recognition and valuation of nontraditional forms of work a key objective of welfare reform. Moving away from broad acceptance of nontraditional forms of work is likely to lose the support of political factions that represent these points of view and might even incur active resistance.

In the extreme, there is even a danger that PI would prove less inclusive than workfare because, as mentioned before, it lacks the myriad of support programs (e.g., training, in-work assistance, and placement) that, at least in theory, constitute an integral part of workfare.¹³ Advocates of PI may well acknowledge the need to supplement basic security with additional activation support. But what we might call PI-plus programs face two important constraints. First, if activation support is to be designed and implemented on top of a PI scheme, it is unlikely that such support will be instituted at a large scale with appropriate levels of funding. These efforts face a political environment of permanent austerity and the sort of political constraints that are common to workfare programs in the United States and United Kingdom (Pierson 2001). Second, even if we could resolve such concerns as they pertain to labor-market activation, part of the attraction of PI is that it expands the notion of social participation to include a wide range of activities. It remains unclear whether a PI-plus proposal would offer support for

individuals to engage in such activities over and beyond the grant they receive; also unclear is what form such support would take.

The Lax Enforcement Strategy

A third resolution of the trilemma, an alternative compromise between the incorporation of a participation requirement and ease of administration, is to adhere to a broad specification of the participation requirement, accepting that effective monitoring of compliance will be problematic. This resolution is the welfare state equivalent of “rigid rules” and “lax practice” that for De Tocqueville (1856/1962, 73) characterized France’s Ancien Régime. If the previous soft workfare approach narrows the gap between PI and workfare, the present strategy all but obliterates any distinction between PI and UBI.

Instituting an overly broad PI implies that a participation requirement represents only a symbolic commitment to eliminating free riders. This would more than likely be acceptable to those who prefer to adopt a UBI and only supported PI as a politically feasible, second-best option. In addition, it is likely to satisfy political entrepreneurs who oppose UBI on purely strategic grounds and who regard this second route as a unique opportunity to save on administrative resources, opposing big government and the like, while retaining a firm and public stand on the need for social participation in return for state support.¹⁴

However, this route out of the trilemma would hardly be acceptable to those who favor PI as a first-best policy. Symbolism aside, lax enforcement of a broadly specified social participation requirement does not engender commitment to promoting reciprocity or a stand against free riding. If PI ceases to meet the needs of a core partner in the fragile compromise, that party will seek suitable alternatives (with robust activation components) elsewhere. In addition to more genuine workfare schemes, research of the past 10 years has opened up some interesting possibilities. Time-limited policies represent one option under consideration. Stuart White (2003*b*), for instance, suggests combining unconditional, time-limited policies with conditional unlimited schemes. The recent surge of interest in (conditional) asset-based welfare schemes in the United States and the United Kingdom represents another possibility (Ackerman and Alstott 1999; Goodin 2003; Le Grand and Nissan 2003; Paxton, White, and Maxwell 2006).

Implications for the Basic Income Agenda

Our analysis of the difficulties in administering a PI scheme, and of the resulting trilemma, points to several potentially far-reaching implications for the basic income debate. First, the analysis calls into question the assumption that a PI can be easily slotted into existing social security

and welfare assistance arrangements. The discussion emphasizes the challenges posed in the formulation, application, and fulfillment of standards that institute a broad participation requirement, the defining feature of PI, as part of welfare policy. Because both UBI and workfare attempt to accommodate such difficulties, albeit in very different ways, these alternative visions of welfare may be regarded as better able to meet the challenges faced by all income support mechanisms. Our analysis of the trilemma points to various resolutions; each resolution has important consequences for first- and second-best supporters of PI.

Those who support PI on first-best grounds must squarely confront the issue of whether the advantages they claim for PI are sufficient to justify the high administrative costs, which are borne by both administrators and welfare recipients. If these advantages are not sufficient, the next step is to ascertain whether they might be sufficiently realized by a scheme that resembles workfare or, alternatively, by another that is barely distinguishable from UBI. The trilemma is still more uncomfortable for supporters of PI on second-best grounds. Because support for PI as a second-best option represents a political compromise, the risk arises that such a compromise will evaporate as policy makers face tough choices in the design and implementation of a scheme. Specifically, compromise may falter over the means by which the state will accomplish the tasks discussed in the previous section. Except under the somewhat implausible scenario in which supporters of universal and active welfare give up ironclad administration, these two positions opt for incompatible routes out of the trilemma. At some point in the implementation process, the political compromise is expected to collapse and, as noted earlier, solutions to the trilemma may essentially turn PI into UBI or workfare.

These considerations lead to a second significant implication for basic income debates. Implicit in many discussions of universal welfare reform is the assumption that, in key respects, PI closely approximates a UBI. The trilemma suggests, however, that depending on the fine-grained details of any proposed scheme, PI may just as likely come to resemble workfare schemes (though without the benefit of the activation mechanisms that in theory are part of the workfare program). This undermines the dynamic and the static versions of the second-best case for PI. In a recent essay, Brian Barry (2001, 66) writes, "My guess is that something like 'participation income' might be necessary politically to get a basic income introduced, but that the expense and intrusiveness of administering it (as well as its lending itself so easily to fraud) would lead either to abandoning the whole experiment or moving to an unconditional basic income." There is, however, a third plausible alternative; given the problems identified by Barry, criticism of such a scheme could lead to a tightening of both the formulation and enforcement of the participation criterion. The resulting outcome is essentially a work-

fare scheme. In response to such scholars as Barry, Offe, Yannick Vanderborght, and Van Parijs, we caution against using PI's political and administrative instability as a means to introduce basic income by stealth. Such a strategy might lead to the abandonment of experiments with universalism, and it is also plausible that the fine-tuning of such schemes might open the door for workfarist schemes. Furthermore, our analysis shows how this backdoor strategy might plausibly require universalists to sacrifice the two greatest advantages of their preferred policies: ease of administration and nonintrusiveness.

The final lesson of this analysis is that supporters of basic income and related policies cannot ignore the administrative realities of welfare reform. Abstract discussion seldom sets the supposed advantages of a broad participation requirement against the costs of administrative complexity in the implementation of such a requirement. This absence of administrative consciousness impoverishes discussion of universal welfare reform more generally. The risk arising from this neglect of the administrative factor is that conditions on which the feasibility and desirability of particular proposals depend may be ignored. The current analysis shows how administrative analysis can generate important insights that go beyond abstract theorizing. Supporters of UBI ignore these insights at their peril. Much progress can be made by applying the insights from welfare studies to anticipate the likely effects of proposed schemes. In this particular case, such analysis clearly suggests that PI proposals suffer from important weaknesses. Although none of our conclusions is necessarily decisive, the findings together present a strong public administration case against participation income.

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Notes

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1. While workfare advocates occupy the mainstream in contemporary welfare policy, a substantial literature on basic income and related policy proposals has developed over the past 2 decades. See in particular Van Parijs (1992, 1995), Atkinson (1995), Ackerman and Alstott (1999), Fitzpatrick (1999), Standing (1999, 2002, 2005), Van der Veen and Groot (2000), Van Parijs, Cohen, and Rogers (2001), Dowding, De Wispelaere, and White (2003), White (2003b), Cunliffe and Erreygers (2004), Groot (2004), Widerquist, Lewis, and Pressman (2005), Ackerman, Alstott, and Van Parijs (2006), and Murray (2006). In June 2006, *Basic Income Studies*, the first academic journal on basic income, published its inaugural issue (<http://www.bepress.com/bis/>).

2. Van Parijs (1996, 2004) proposes a UBI as a means of simultaneously combating exploitation and exclusion, but most policy analysts insist that inclusion in the form of labor-market participation can only be secured through an approach that increases participation.

3. Fairness requires us to mention that Atkinson is well aware of problems with PI that

might not arise with UBI. For example, some people may fail to secure a PI but would otherwise have received a UBI (Atkinson 1996, 69).

4. Zelleke (2005, 640–41) is one of the few exceptions. She explicitly denounces PI for its selective treatment of various tax and benefit measures.

5. In the language of political philosophy, the justice-based argument is substantially (though not solely) backward looking, primarily concerned with ensuring that people are held responsible for past actions; the incentive-based argument is genuinely forward looking, aimed at ensuring that individuals bring about a sizable social product.

6. The manifold presumptions that drive current social policy are often regarded as key advantages of universal measures that, in the words of Goodin (1992, 195), are “minimally presumptuous.”

7. For example, Jodi Sandfort notes that the mere list of standardized forms to be used in the processing and following up with welfare recipients adds up to an astounding 33 pages (Sandfort 2000, 735).

8. The word “cadastre,” though not now in common usage, originally referred to a tax register. The French *cadastre* is still used. Here, we use the term “cadaster” to refer to any standardized list or register of individual activities or attributes that may be used to determine compliance with the conditions of a PI scheme. Examples might include a company payroll or a disability register. “Cadasterability” refers to the ease with which eligibility criteria can be reduced to, or deduced from, such a list or register.

9. Conversely, basic income supporters often point out that rule complexity prevents many eligible individuals from understanding when they qualify for a particular benefit.

10. At least one study shows that sanctioning interventions do not teach clients any deep moral lessons on appropriate behavior; they instead provide simple lessons on how to properly cooperate with welfare workers who determine eligibility. “In the end, paternalist reform seems to be a lesson about power, not responsibility” (Wilson et al. 1999, 485; see also Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996).

11. Complexity poses risks for the implementation of tailor-made information technology systems designed to manage welfare payments. It may defeat attempts at automation and require substantial caseworker intervention (NAO 2005).

12. Although UBI is often advocated because of its optimal efficiency in regard to both senses of using bureaucracy sparingly, we urge some caution in this assessment because UBI has an inherent flaw; part of the administrative apparatus is made obsolete, and this may affect administrative redundancies or even administrative capacity. Lack of administrative capacity may cause problems that UBI proponents have thus far failed to appreciate.

13. In this respect, PI remains crucially underspecified; it is compatible with but does not explicitly require the installment of programs offering support to individuals who face difficulties entering the labor market.

14. Charles Murray’s (2006) recent proposal for introducing a “Plan,” his version of what essentially amounts to a neoliberal UBI scheme for the United States, would fit this scenario.

The administrative efficiency of basic income

Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton

Basic income advocates typically praise the administrative efficiency of universal income maintenance. This article exposes several misconceptions, unwarranted generalisations or careless assumptions that permeate discussion of the administrative properties of basic income. Each of these obscures a significant constraint on the possibility of administrative savings, or else inflates the likely size of such efficiencies where they do exist. Our analysis also reveals a number of important political choices faced by policy makers and advocates intent on implementing an administratively efficient basic income policy. The absence of systematic administrative analysis in the basic income literature has obscured these hard choices.

Introduction

Basic income advocates typically praise the administrative efficiency of universal and unconditional forms of income maintenance. Standing (1999: 362–3) writes that an unconditional basic income ‘would save on administration costs because it would simplify the complex schemes, make them more transparent and reduce the amount of intrusive enquiry’. Similarly, Van Parijs (2004: 20) acknowledges that ‘there are administrative costs’, but argues that ‘assuming a computerised and efficient tax-collection and transfer-payment technology, these are likely to be lower under a universal, ex ante scheme than under a means-tested, ex post one, at least for a given level of effectiveness at reaching the poor’. Most stridently, Offe (2005: 72) states that basic income ‘is an alternative to welfare policy that radically economizes on the administrative overhead costs of fighting poverty, provided that the BI [basic income] transfer is sufficiently high to afford the basic means of subsistence’.

In this article we argue that a number of misconceptions, unwarranted generalisations or careless assumptions permeate discussion of the administrative efficiency of basic income. Moreover, this *administrative efficiency thesis* is typically only implicitly assumed in the claims of basic income advocates, and where discussed explicitly is often done so in a cursory, general and often one-sided fashion. Our main goal is to subject this claim to a proper, systematic administrative analysis.

Underlying much of the discussion seems to be an assumption that administration is a ‘bad’ – at best a necessary evil, at worst a barrier to the achievement of basic income’s underlying policy goals. While we can sympathise with such negative perceptions, given the deliberate administrative obstruction sometimes faced by welfare claimants (Handler, 2004; Handler and Hasenfeld, 2006; Raventós, 2007), they obscure the necessary, positive contribution of administration to the realisation of *any* income maintenance policy. In particular, while a basic income may be *nominally* universal if no restrictive conditions are attached to a grant, for a scheme to be *substantively* universal, everyone within the population of eligible beneficiaries must actually

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receive a basic income. The policy choices and administrative challenges entailed by ensuring that basic income is substantively universal are considered in the first section.

Moreover, there are trade-offs between different types of administrative efficiencies. Basic income advocates tend to assume that reducing bureaucratic effort goes hand in hand with reducing the burden on beneficiaries – including the effort of claiming a grant and the indignity and hassle of an intrusive claims process. We suggest to the contrary that in some cases these two types of administrative efficiency run counter to one another. Basic income advocates must therefore decide which sense of administrative savings to prioritise. We address this choice in the second section.

Quite a different set of concerns arises from a tendency among basic income proponents to overgeneralise claims about administrative savings that may hold in restricted situations. In the third section, we argue that only a narrow subset of the many schemes that now increasingly fall under the rubric of basic income dispense with the sort of qualifying tests that are said to produce the most dramatic administrative savings.¹ Since these radical proposals have proven politically intractable, basic income advocates have recognised the need to consider various compromises, whereupon these qualifying tests and their administrative costs re-enter the picture.

Furthermore, as the fourth section argues, even the fully unconditional version of a basic income, as proposed most famously by Van Parijs (1992, 1995, 2001, 2004), may generate fewer administrative savings than basic income advocates suggest. This is the case when many of the administrative costs of such schemes are common to the administration of other policies, and could not therefore be avoided by the introduction of a basic income alone.

Finally, in the last section, we argue that the real extent of administrative simplification that might accompany the introduction of a basic income depends on a number of specific design features – for example the level of the grant – that determine whether they *replace* or merely *supplement* a myriad of selective benefits. In the latter case, administrative savings may be significantly lower than is suggested by some of the more extravagant claims of basic income advocates.

We believe that understanding these administrative issues is essential to the design of a viable basic income scheme. Our aim is therefore not to cast doubt on the feasibility of basic income in general, nor even to deny the possibility that unconditional basic income schemes might prove more efficient than its rivals in the final analysis. We merely propose that claims of its administrative efficiency should be properly grounded in a systematic analysis. In addition, we believe that such an analysis will further assist the case for basic income by requiring advocates to appreciate and accommodate concerns that hitherto have been neglected. As this contribution shows, administrative questions often raise *hard political choices*. If basic income is to make it off the drawing board into the policy arena, a more detailed and realistic outlook on familiar administrative challenges at the level of implementation will prove to be essential.

Nominal and substantive universalism

When basic income advocates think about administration they typically see only cost and intrusion. Much of the discussion of administration among basic income

advocates bemoans the high administration costs of means-tested and conditional selective policies. There is by now a wealth of literature on the many complexities inherent in the administrative processing of welfare policy, and its associated costs and burdens on welfare recipients and taxpayers alike (eg, Handler, 2004; Handler and Hasenfeld, 2006).²

But too much of a fixation with this negative experience of welfare administration obscures the extent to which an effective administrative apparatus is vital if an income maintenance or welfare programme is to be substantively, and not just nominally, universal – and this may be costly. Basic income is *nominally* universal when it does not impose any overt restrictions on eligibility so that every citizen is in principle entitled to a grant. But unfortunately this does not in itself ensure that every citizen ends up receiving a basic income. Hard-to-reach social groups – such as the homeless, people with a disability or mental illness, or immigrants – may still fall through the cracks of the system. Van Parijs (2004: 13) believes that, with a basic income, '[f]ewer amongst the poor will fail to be informed about their entitlements and to avail themselves of the benefits they have a right to'. But in our view he underestimates the problem: even if fully informed, it is not obvious that the poor will therefore avail themselves of those benefits. Moreover, to state merely that, with a basic income scheme in place, *fewer* of the poor will fail to access their entitlements implies a rather weak goal, in particular since those who remain excluded are among the most vulnerable in society. Instead, one might think it defensible to spend a higher proportion of the overall costs of a welfare programme on its administration if this results in a *substantively* universal scheme benefiting a larger proportion of these marginalised groups. In short, basic income advocates conflate nominal universalism (the absence of restrictions) with substantive universalism (the real inclusion of all eligible recipients).

To illustrate, consider that one of the central tasks of welfare administration is to identify those within the population who meet eligibility criteria for a grant, and to distinguish them from those not so entitled. Basic income scholars correctly assume that by establishing a universal scheme they can eliminate the task of monitoring compliance, but fail to appreciate that eliminating restrictions does nothing to identify all those who are eligible. Creating and maintaining such a list or *cadaster* of those eligible for a grant will be central to the effectiveness of any income support scheme. In his work on tax administration, Hood (1994: 118) identifies *cadasterability*, defined as 'the property of being applicable to a readily identifiable group of taxable [in our case "creditable"] units', as one of the properties of an administerable policy. However, the more universal an income maintenance scheme, the more encompassing the relevant cadaster, and the greater the effort required to keep it up to date and reliable.

Basic income is particularly demanding in this respect because the absence of restrictions and its universal scope quite literally implies that the relevant list must cover almost the whole population.³ While some countries have robust cadasters covering the entire population – in part because they employ a system of compulsory identity cards linked to a central database⁴ – many countries lack any suitable existing cadaster of beneficiaries. In such cases, the commitment to a substantively universal basic income would require the construction *ad novum* of a separate cadaster. The alternative would be to rely on less encompassing and typically less reliable cadasters

already in place, such as voting registers or social security databases. The problem with these is that they are not nearly as universal as often assumed: voting registers, for instance, typically exclude whole categories of people who would otherwise meet eligibility requirements for a basic income, especially in those countries that require individuals to register themselves on the electoral roll.

Once eligible individuals have been identified, the next administrative task is to disburse payments to beneficiaries. Again, Hood (1994: 118) provides inspiration, defining the *conduitability* of a tax as ‘the property of being assessable and collectable [in our case “payable”] through a relatively small number of ‘bottlenecks’ at which oversight can economically be applied’. The problem here too is that the vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups mentioned earlier are effectively excluded from the system by their lack of access to commonly used payment systems. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK), it is estimated that in 2007/08 some 890,000 people, or 690,000 households, had no access to a basic transactional bank account (Financial Inclusion Taskforce, 2009). Predictably, these ‘unbanked’ households disproportionately included some of the most disadvantaged groups.

It is often argued that payment of a basic income ideally ought to make use of a single but universally accessible payment mechanism, such as the tax-credit system or a basic income debit card (see Standing, this issue, p 18). However, there are grounds to think that overlapping systems may be more effective at reaching out to hard-to-reach beneficiary groups that require special policy attention: beneficiaries who are homeless or excluded from the formal labour market, and hence from firms’ payroll systems, are typical examples.⁵ Achieving a substantively universal basic income grant therefore presents considerable administrative challenges. On the one hand, monitoring the effective disbursement of a grant scheme that encompasses the whole population requires considerable administrative capacity and effort.⁶ On the other hand, because basic income does not require repeated monitoring of eligibility conditions – indeed, dispensing with such monitoring is an explicit goal – it cannot avail of an important instrument to cross-check whether payments are effectively received by beneficiaries.

The upshot of this section is that providing a universal basic income that robustly includes vulnerable and hard-to-reach social groups such as the homeless, disabled people, immigrants and many others requires positive administrative effort, not just the removal of barriers to eligibility. It would be a mistake, however, to think that all of this is just a matter of finding the correct technological solution. In reality these issues reflect *hard political choices*. One set of choices relates directly to the issue of cost: rather than treating administrative background conditions as a given, a substantive universal basic income requires considerable investment in building administrative capability.⁷ Another set of hard choices surround the inevitable trade-offs in cases where different feasible administrative solutions favour one social group over another: for instance, should we discount administrative costs to better-off basic income recipients in order to ensure that vulnerable groups are effectively included? Finally, how should we evaluate different types of costs associated with a particular implementation system where these might in fact diverge? This last concern is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Two types of administrative savings

When basic income advocates claim that an unconditional basic income saves on administration, they presuppose that different policy proposals can be ordered in terms of their administrative efficiency in a fairly straightforward manner. Accordingly, basic income scores well on this ordering because, all things considered, its implementation requires less administrative involvement than rival welfare schemes. However, Hood (1983) points out that the apparently simple canon of ‘using bureaucracy sparingly’ can give rise to potentially conflicting interpretations. Adapting Hood’s approach to the specific context of basic income, we can distinguish two important ways in which basic income might use bureaucracy more sparingly than its rivals: using bureaucracy sparingly could be taken to mean administering a welfare scheme using *minimal (governmental) resources*, while a second sense of using bureaucracy sparingly would require that a basic income scheme imposes *minimal (personal) intrusion*. Each of these is analytically distinct and, where they diverge and cannot be satisfied simultaneously, may indeed become political competitors.

On the first interpretation, the best income maintenance policy is that which requires the least bureaucratic infrastructure to administer, for any acceptable level of performance. This formulation requires an initial decision on an acceptable level of performance, and then opting for the implementation scheme that uses least administrative resources. In its starkest form this may seem rather implausible; a ‘leximin’ approach, by contrast, plausibly allows us to trade off small losses in performance for significant gains in administrative savings. This sense of using bureaucracy sparingly does not hold a view on the appropriate size or modality of a basic income grant as such: that is the task of the justificatory political theory underlying the argument for an unconditional basic income (eg Van Parijs, 1995). The primary concern, rather, is with the ‘transaction costs’ *faced by governments* of defining, monitoring and disbursing a grant.⁸

Using bureaucracy sparingly in this sense suggests a preference for a (nominally) unconditional scheme because it significantly economises on the bureaucratic effort required to draft rules with adequate precision and dispenses with the various tests identified by Offe (2005). Minimising the governmental resources devoted to the administration of a programme ensures that the greatest possible proportion of the programme costs end up with the recipients as opposed to being absorbed by the bureaucratic machinery charged with implementing it. Using bureaucracy sparingly in the minimal resources sense is thus said to promote the *programme efficiency* of a policy. At the same time, however, applying this interpretation (in its leximin version) limits the justifiable level of administrative effort spent on identifying or making payments to hard-to-reach beneficiaries, if the additional cost of doing so were excessive. To the extent that policy makers often pragmatically accept some trade-off between fulfilling policy objectives and the administrative and political costs of doing so, programme efficiency might conflict with *target efficiency* – the extent of coverage that a particular programme achieves. Of course, what we deem justifiable depends crucially on one’s normative perspective, and particularly on the comparable weight one gives to minimising bureaucratic resources over the achievement of other policy goals, but this reality characterises the hard choices

that decision makers face when adopting the minimal resources approach to using bureaucracy sparingly.

The second sense of using bureaucracy sparingly takes a more individualised perspective: it requires that a basic income scheme imposes minimal (personal) intrusion. Hood invokes Smith's (1910 [1776]: 307) principle of public finance, that taxes ought to be collected so as to impose the least 'trouble, vexation and oppression' on the populace. Taking a broad interpretation of this second sense includes the *inconvenience* of accessing a grant. This formulation therefore not only captures the extent to which administration often directly intrudes into claimants' lives – through requirements to detail increasingly private aspects of their personal lives or the excessive use of behavioural monitoring – but also more indirect vexations such as the complexity of the system, which affects the difficulty in obtaining relevant information or the effort at negotiating various stages of the application process.⁹

In part, this interpretation follows from what Goodin (1992) has termed the minimally presumptuous approach of basic income, one that avoids having to actively intrude or pry into claimants' lives. According to Goodin, such an approach improves the target efficiency of basic income schemes, but minimal intrusion is also deemed valuable in its own right by virtue of promoting a sense of self-respect and autonomy. Like the minimal resources interpretation, this sense of using bureaucracy sparingly easily leads to a condemnation of highly selective schemes that commonly necessitate a high level of intrusion and are associated with a significant loss of privacy, which is universally considered demeaning and debasing (Wolff, 1998).

For basic income advocates, both senses of using bureaucracy sparingly potentially offer persuasive reasons for why welfare schemes ought to economise on administration, where feasible, and thus constitute an important criterion by which to evaluate the comparative merits of alternative basic income designs. However, as a guide to the design of a welfare scheme, the two senses of using bureaucracy sparingly may end up pointing in different directions, most obviously in cases in which removing barriers to access and take-up of a scheme can be accomplished only at the cost of considerable administrative effort or other resources. While the minimal resources approach to basic income would be satisfied with the removal of costly formal barriers and conditions of welfare, the minimal intrusion approach, by contrast, would tolerate a large amount of bureaucratic effort to accomplish a truly universal scheme, provided greater substantive universalism could be accomplished by relatively unobtrusive measures. What is problematic in much of basic income advocates' reasoning on administrative savings is that they implicitly assume that the two senses of using bureaucracy sparingly will coincide. But there are good reasons to think that this may not be the case. Consider again the cadasterability and conduitability challenges outlined in the previous section: both in terms of maintaining a robust cadaster and in terms of designing a payment system that reaches everyone entitled to a basic income, the price of full inclusion may be the considerable expense of administrative back-up systems designed to cross-check at various points that every beneficiary receives a basic income; conversely, we might decide that this price is too high and allow that some people at the margin may fall through the cracks (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2009). Design issues like these invite conflicting responses from contending normative and ideological perspectives (Van Parijs, 1995, 2004; Murray, 2006).

Paradigmatic and cognate proposals

In the present section we suggest that basic income advocates face a political dilemma because arguments about the administrative savings of basic income have only limited applicability within the broader family of basic income proposals. Let us start with an important distinction between types of basic income proposals. Van Parijs has proposed what may be regarded as the *paradigmatic conception* of basic income: 'an income unconditionally paid to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement' (Van Parijs, 1992: 3). When looked at as a practical policy proposal, the paradigmatic conception is incomplete in at least two respects. First, it abstracts from a number of dimensions – such as uniformity, adequacy, frequency or modality of payment – that must be developed in some detail to fully understand the design of particular proposals as well as their impact on recipients (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2004). Second, basic income advocates have also begun to conceive of schemes that compromise on one or more of the core features of the paradigmatic scheme, such as its universality, individuality or even unconditionality. These *cognate proposals* only imperfectly mimic the design (and outcomes) of Van Parijs's paradigmatic proposal.

There are good strategic reasons to favour adopting an expanded conception, since this may provide crucial political wriggle room at the negotiation table. It is now accepted wisdom that, in most mature welfare states, there is little political appetite for the paradigmatic variant of basic income and that a stable political coalition around a radical basic income is unlikely to form. Nevertheless, there may be a large number of political agents (eg trades unions) who do regard some of the features of basic income appealing and who may be persuaded to support one or other variation. Additionally, there are reasons of implementation to consider. Maintaining some flexibility in design parameters has the advantage that the policy may better fit a variety of implementation structures and policy contexts; ease-of-fit is a desirable property of a policy because it does not require major restructuring of the background institutions, introducing a host of ancillary policy measures.

But accepting that any politically realistic and readily implementable proposal will likely take the form of a compromise leads to a political dilemma for basic income advocates. The problem is that the sort of claims about administrative efficiency put forward by basic advocates really only apply to the paradigmatic form. This dilemma effectively means that proponents can claim important administrative savings for basic income, *provided they restrict those arguments to the most radical paradigmatic form*, while simultaneously having to face up to the reality that this radical version of basic income may face insurmountable political obstacles.

Let us briefly illustrate the problem through the example of Atkinson's participation income. Atkinson (1996: 68) offers participation income as a politically feasible variant on basic income by introducing one key modification: 'the basic income would be paid conditional on *participation*'.¹⁰ Despite the apparent simplicity of Atkinson's participation condition, which is also attractive in a policy context obsessed about freeriding, reciprocity and economic incentives more generally, an administrable standard to express this condition is essentially elusive (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007). Leaving aside Atkinson's neat list of participation activities to be considered, in practice such a list can be as narrow or as broad as one wants it to be, and finding a clear and robust way to define participation in terms

that administrators can handle is much more problematic than one might think. Considerable administrative resources may be required to ensure that a definition of social participation is expressed in operational standards that administrators and recipients alike can accept. Furthermore, if participation is taken seriously – as it obviously *must*, if it is genuinely to serve as a politically acceptable form of basic income – participation income entails a robust monitoring and enforcement system. And to the extent that social participation eludes strict interpretation, it also defies easy administration: by expanding both the range of activities that qualify one to a participation income (without ever being genuinely universal) as well as the number of qualified recipients (again, without including everyone), participation income increases the monitoring and enforcement burdens of welfare bureaucracy manifold (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007).

As the previous paragraph suggests, participation income may have a number of advantages but administrative simplification or savings is not one of them. Barry (2001: 65–6) acknowledges as much:

[Participation income] opens up a nightmarish scenario of an enormous bureaucracy entrusted with arbitrary monitoring powers. My guess is that something like a ‘participation income’ might be necessary politically to get a basic income introduced, but that the expense and intrusiveness of administering it (as well as its lending itself so easily to fraud) would lead either to abandoning the whole experiment or moving to an unconditional basic income.¹¹

The real fallacy is to assume, however, that while basic income proper outperforms participation income (or any other cognate scheme) in its administerability, the latter nevertheless still offers *some* important advantages, in particular in terms of the minimal intrusion sense of using bureaucracy. But once we move even a small step away from a fully unconditional programme, bureaucratic involvement (and thus administrative costs) multiply exponentially. Moreover, it is not merely the number amount of conditions per se, but most importantly the extent to which they can be easily operationalised, that determines the administrative cost of a programme. The latter point applies to *both* senses of using bureaucracy sparingly, and basic income proponents should be careful about underestimating the extent of personal intrusion associated with a robust implementation of cognate policies.

The political dilemma mentioned earlier seems inescapable. On the one hand, only a narrow subset of the schemes that now increasingly fall under the rubric of basic income truly dispenses with the qualifying tests and other requirements that are the source of unconditional basic income’s alleged administrative efficiency, and precisely this narrow subset has in the main proven politically intractable. On the other hand, to ignore a crucial aspect of implementing the policy you believe will be most politically feasible – to the extent that it may prove to be prohibitively costly to implement – is hardly to make a genuine robust case for that policy.

Sharing administrative systems

While the previous section focused on the limited extent to which various compromise proposals were capable of producing the administrative savings claimed for basic income, in the remaining two sections we suggest that even in its paradigmatic form, there are limits on the *extent* of administrative savings that a basic income might generate. These supposed savings depend in large part on an institutional fit with other policies: the implementation of basic income typically piggy-backs on existing administrative capacities, and many of the associated costs are common to the administration of quite separate policies. Two separate concerns arise from this.

First, when basic income piggy-backs on existing administrative capacities there is a non-trivial sense in which it receives a free ride that is typically not counted among its cost. Consider the way even an unconditional basic income must apply a citizenship or residence test by virtue of being tied to a particular geographical region – typically a state, occasionally a region (Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2001; Howard, 2006). While nationality tests make use of the various mechanisms that determine and regulate citizenship in modern states, in terms of residency requirements, ‘the operational criteria may be, for non-citizens, a minimum length of past residency, or it may simply be provided by the conditions which currently define residence for tax purposes, or some combination of both’ (Van Parijs, 2006: 7). In both cases, basic income is designed to piggy-back on administrative systems that are already in place in mature welfare states.

Basic income advocates seem to assume that the nationality or residency test imposes no additional administrative burden, because such tests are routinely carried out in most countries for other policy reasons.¹² But such tests may have to be re-engineered if we accept the challenge of substantive universalism that *every* eligible recipient – say, all citizens or even all residents – should ideally receive a grant. There are few (if any) administrative systems that effectively cover every single person in the state and therefore a universal basic income requires either significant modification of extant mechanisms or else the institution of a totally novel layer of administration to ensure full coverage. Assuming that key administrative capacities are in place and can be used without further cost discounts the full costs of implementation.¹³

Conversely, to the extent that the introduction of a basic income dispenses with particular administrative activities – the assessment of income for example – one might argue that this constitutes a saving of sort. However, if such activities are required for other purposes, such as for the assessment of income taxes, such activities cannot be dispensed with by the introduction of a non-means-tested basic income alone. Put differently, the fact that basic income requires no means testing does entail neither that means assessment itself is avoided, nor that existing means testing will involve significantly less administrative costs (on either interpretation of administrative saving).

To be sure, welfare administration often needlessly duplicates the gathering of such information, but the solution is surely to advocate administrative simplification of existing policies and more joined-up government. Similarly, much of the current practice of gathering relevant information remains essentially demeaning or intrusive, and this again demands reform. In neither case would the introduction of a basic

income per se generate substantial administrative savings. More generally, claims about the administrative savings yielded by basic income can be made only in the context of a broader policy and institutional analysis, and outcomes could differ extensively across countries in this regard (cf Haagh, this issue).

Replacing or supplementing income maintenance

As well as depending on institutional 'fit' with other policies, the administrative savings from the introduction of a basic income are also contingent on features of the design of the basic income grant itself, notably whether it is intended to replace rather than supplement 'traditional' forms of income and social support.

Naturally, this question has attracted vehement normative, political and even ideological debate.¹⁴ We approach the problem from the standpoint of administrative analysis. Our starting point is Barry's (2001: 63) observation that '[m]any of the advantages that Van Parijs claims for a basic income scheme would be realized only if it were pitched at subsistence level or higher'. In the case of a *partial* basic income, presumably 'the entire apparatus of welfare benefits would still have to remain in place, though benefits would, of course, be reduced by the amount of the basic income' (Barry, 2001: 65). Van Parijs (2001: 8–9) concurs: 'Indeed, if a government implemented an unconditional income that was too small to cover basic needs – which, as I previously noted, would almost certainly be the case at first – UBI [unconditional basic income] advocates would not want to eliminate the existing conditional minimum-income schemes, but only to readjust their levels'.

Conversely, many of the administrative advantages of basic income only plausibly materialise on the assumption that a universal basic income would potentially replace the myriad of selective benefits and their associated bureaucratic machinery, which in turn presupposes that the level of the grant was sufficiently generous, as acknowledged by Offe (2005: 72). When the most plausible variant is a partial basic income, pitched at a level that is below subsistence, this functional relationship between administrative savings and the level of a grant needs careful analysis. Those who suppose an automatic and substantial link between universalism and administrative efficiency may be disappointed since a basic income policy designed to operate alongside important selective programmes ultimately requires much of the administrative machinery that basic income advocates would like to see abolished.

Here again an important political dilemma manifests itself: the basic income that is maximally administerable may be one that is neither normatively desirable – as it may require getting rid of support programmes that a basic income only imperfectly compensates for – nor indeed politically feasible – because either the required level of the grant would be prohibitively large or the scrapping of some programmes would be politically unpalatable. This political dilemma is similar to the Impossibility Theorem advanced by Groot and van der Veen (2000a: 36), where any partial basic income that is politically and economically feasible risks being socially unacceptable because 'the beneficial effects of a *partial* basic income would not be significant enough to make the reform worth the trouble'. Similarly, the basic income scheme that would produce greatest administrative savings may not be most advocates' preferred scheme, while the version they would find most acceptable (a

partial basic income combined with generous additional support programmes) may fail to produce any genuine administrative savings.

Of course, basic income proponents such as Van Parijs could counter that even if we were to replace some existing programmes, leaving some key selective programmes in place, this would still generate substantial administrative savings. First, an unconditional basic income could aim to replace some of the most administratively burdensome programmes. However, this argument depends very much on appreciating the administrative difficulties discussed in previous sections – and the general claim must therefore be squared with our analysis in these sections, if it is to have any merit. Second, the programmes that remain in place would affect a much smaller target population, which again would reduce certain administrative costs. For instance, with a basic income ‘far less people would need to claim social benefits, because a part-time job would be sufficient to lift them above the social minimum. This would mean cutting down on expenditure, and on administrative cost’ (Groot and van der Veen (2000b: 203). Such arguments address the variable costs of administering such programmes; any fixed costs remain unaffected, and in some cases these may be the larger part of a scheme’s administrative costs. Furthermore, the abolition of particular programmes may have the effect of pushing claimants into other schemes. This may in turn have an impact on the effectiveness and cost of those programmes, which would now face an increased administrative burden. In such cases, careful administrative analysis would be required to establish whether the administration of a targeted support programme would be better integrated with more general selective programmes than with a basic income.

Hard choices: the politics of administrative efficiency

In one of the earliest articles arguing the case for basic income, Van Parijs (1992: 3) refers to basic income as a ‘disarmingly simple idea’: give every citizen a monthly grant without a means test of work condition. But what at first sight might look like a simple idea in reality shares many of the administrative complexities that bedevil income support programmes throughout the modern welfare state at the level of policy implementation.¹⁵ In this section, we want to pull together the arguments presented above and demonstrate the reasons why we think that basic income scholars should take administration seriously. In brief, we argue that the careful examination of the administrative efficiency thesis demonstrates that the administration of a basic income is itself an irreducibly political problem, one that presents a number of hard political choices (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2009).

Let us start by anticipating an obvious response to our view. Basic income advocates may accept everything we say yet still maintain that our arguments are besides the point when compared to selective income maintenance policies. Such a comparative perspective makes no bold claims regarding the administrative efficiency of basic income in the abstract, but merely states that it will always outperform the selective programmes that predominate in modern welfare states. This argument is plausible, generally speaking: it makes good sense to think that, whatever administrative difficulties might bedevil the implementation of a basic income, things would be even more complicated for selective welfare policies. So why then should basic income advocates and scholars care about administration?

There are three types of responses to this question. To begin with the most straightforward response: good administrative design of a basic income policy is a necessary condition to achieve the administrative efficiency its proponents claim in its favour. Put differently, basic income is only *comparatively* efficient to the extent that we ensure that its design effectively meets the administrative requirements for its efficient implementation. All that this argument requires is an awareness that basic income is not administration-free, and that *some* form of administration is inevitable in the implementation of *any* income support scheme, basic income included. Earlier in the article we discussed the key distinction between nominal and substantive universalism, arguing that it is clearly the latter that matters in terms of achieving the sort of goals that motivates basic income advocates; but this in turn also implies appreciating the administrative challenges that inevitably accompany a move from selective to universal income support. So the first response to the question of whether basic income advocates should care about administration is really to say that, since implementation does not occur 'automatically' but indeed is a function of a set of administrative design choices, some level of attention to administration is warranted. Failure to make the right administrative choices has a significant impact on the achievement of the goals of a basic income policy.

A second response engages directly with the comparative perspective. Recall that the administrative efficiency thesis, when regarded from a comparative perspective, does not require basic income to be *maximally* administratively efficient but merely that it is demonstrably *more* efficient than competing programmes.¹⁶ But how much of a gain can we expect from basic income compared to the most administratively efficient selective programmes? It would be rather odd to make a big deal out of the administrative efficiency of basic income if in fact it proved to be only marginally more efficient than the leading competitors. What proponents in fact want to claim is that basic income is *significantly* more efficient than any selective income support programme we might want to institute. The discussion above shows the difficulty of making clear general statements in this regard. In fact, as we have demonstrated in previous sections, a number of the claims of the proponents of the administrative efficiency thesis need to be qualified in important respects.

First, it may be that maximising target efficiency of basic income schemes in fact requires additional administrative mechanisms that selective programmes may not require. Similarly, since the notion of administrative efficiency may refer to quite different (and possibly conflicting) goals, a situation of incomparability may arise where one programme economises on administration in one sense and another in another sense, without an obvious way to reach an overall judgement on administrative efficiency. Second, some of the claimed advantages of basic income over selective programmes only hold for the paradigmatic basic income variant, and basic income advocates must be careful not to overgeneralise: just because a certain proposal – such as participation income for instance – shares more features with a basic income than a selective programme, does not imply that it shares the former's administrative advantages (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007).

Finally, even where we restrict ourselves to the paradigmatic basic income, there are two cases where the administrative advantages of universal over selective programmes may be considerably less than is commonly assumed: where administrative mechanisms are shared across different policies, or where a basic income scheme

requires supplementing with other selective programmes. In both cases, the savings supposedly produced by replacing a selective programme with a basic income do not fully materialise. All of these complications, outlined above in detail, not only demonstrate the futility of talking about administrative efficiency in general terms, but also make it difficult to reach a robust comparative assessment even where we intuitively agree that basic income is likely to outperform selective programmes.¹⁷

However, the most important response to the question of why administration ought to be taken seriously by basic income advocates focuses not on implementation or comparative efficiency. The list of complexities and limitations outlined in previous sections implies hard choices and associated political dilemmas that policy makers face; yet these are obscured as long as discussion of institutional and administrative detail is avoided. Our analysis shows that the implementation of a basic income reveals important tensions among the arguments put forward in favour of basic income. Some of those tensions arise in the interpretation of the role of administration and administrative efficiency, while others are more closely tied in with different variants of basic income or various ways in which basic income is embedded in the broader policy context. These are real concerns, if basic income is to make it off the drawing board, and the hard choices they throw up are equally real. To recap just one example, the choice between a paradigmatic or cognate variant of basic income may depend on a host of ethical, economical or political constraints. But whatever variant we adopt, it would be a mistake to think that they perform equally well in terms of administrative efficiency (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007).

One implication is that *generalised* claims about the comparative administrative efficiency of basic income must be treated with caution. But a more important qualification is that we may have to make real choices in terms of what sort of administrative efficiency we want to prioritise when implementing a basic income: an emphasis on different senses of using bureaucracy sparingly may produce significantly different basic income schemes, and produce different outcomes at both the individual and societal levels.

Perhaps even more important still is the need to make hard choices about *how much we really care about administrative efficiency compared to other goals*. Paradoxically enough, in some circumstances basic income advocates who generally support the administrative efficiency thesis may come to think that, in practice, administrative efficiency may have to give way to other goals, such as achieving greater substantive universalism. Yet this response also has its limits. Suppose a welfare reform coalition unites around a variant of basic income, which in fact turns out exceedingly difficult or costly to administer. On the one hand, the policy may effectively end up performing poorly in terms of achieving normatively desirable outcomes. Imagine a basic income that is nominally universal but due to a lack of administrative capacity, or the poor administerability of the scheme, fails to ensure that certain specific vulnerable groups such as the homeless are effectively included. The failure to institute such a substantively truly universal basic income may violate a core prescription of the theory of social justice normatively underpinning its justification – say, a strong duty to protect the worst off (Van Parijs, 1995). On the other hand, the high administrative costs may in the longer run also erode political support (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007). In either case, administrative efficiency itself directly affects, and conceivably operates as a constraint upon, political feasibility.

The relationship between administrative efficiency and political feasibility is complex and multifaceted. Administrative efficiency is not necessarily pitched against political feasibility, as one might wrongly infer from this article. Instead, considerations of administerability mediate hard political choices associated with different income support programmes in complicated ways; and thus administrative efficiency itself is clearly political. In our view, the main reason for taking administration seriously is that it allows us to discern both the complex trade-offs that arise at the level of implementation as well as the fact that these are truly ‘hard’ tensions requiring genuine political decision making.¹⁸

Conclusion

In this article we carefully examined the administrative efficiency thesis implicit in much contemporary thinking about basic income policy. We discussed in some detail a number of concerns that caution against uncritically adopting the notion that a universal and unconditional basic income is *necessarily* more efficient than its leading competitors. While we are sympathetic to the idea that basic income policies can economise on administration in important respects, we are concerned with the lack of robust administrative analysis in the current literature. We believe that this blinds basic income proponents both to the many implementation challenges their preferred policy faces, but equally to the numerous ways in which they are passing up genuine opportunities to carefully consider how some particular designs of basic income could be made more administratively efficient through careful attention to policy design. The relevant design options represent hard choices, and require political decision making rather than mere technological innovation, as is often wrongly assumed by basic income advocates. Failure to appreciate the inherent ‘politics of administration efficiency’ again may come to constrain the political efficiency of implementing a basic income scheme. There is, in other words, a genuine opportunity cost to not taking administration seriously – a lesson basic income advocates ought to take to heart.

Notes

¹ Offe (2005: 71–2) points out that a substantial basic income dispenses with four of the five key tests of traditional welfare policy: the means test, the needs test, the family test and the employment or employability test, leaving only nationality or residence tests to be administered by welfare bureaucrats.

² To illustrate, Sandfort (2000: 735) notes that the mere list of standardised forms to be used in the processing and following up with United States (US) welfare recipients adds up to an astounding 33 pages.

³ Exceptions might include prisoners or people institutionalised in care facilities, children, expatriates and some immigrants. But the important administrative challenge here is not the exceptions but ensuring that all others are included.

⁴ Examples such as Belgium and Spain come to mind. Any accounting-based assessment of the costs of administering a basic income must include some proportion of the costs

of the identity card scheme. We are grateful to José Noguera for bringing this point to our attention.

⁵ However, the effectiveness of multi-channel payment systems may be undermined by so-called *common mode* failure: electronic payment of funds and postal cheques both require that the intended beneficiary has access to a bank account, and so both have the same disadvantage. See De Wispelaere and Stirton (2007) for a more detailed analysis of this sort of complication.

⁶ Paradoxically, universal schemes may thus require *more* administrative effort than selective ones. Consequently, Van Parijs (2004: 15) may be seriously mistaken when arguing that '[i]n an era of technological transfers and with a reasonably well-run tax administration ... the bulk of administrative cost associated with an effective guaranteed minimum income scheme is the cost of information and control: the expenditure needed to inform all potential beneficiaries about what their entitlements are and to check whether those applying meet the eligibility conditions. In this respect, a universal system is bound to perform better than a means-tested one'. This ignores the costs of cadasterability and conduitability entailed by basic income policies.

⁷ This sort of concern would put advocates such as Van Parijs (1995, 2004) diametrically opposed to those such as Murray (2006) who advocate basic income largely as a means to dismantling the welfare apparatus.

⁸ These transaction costs are here interpreted as social opportunity costs, that is, social resources that could have been (more usefully) spent elsewhere. But see Offe (2005) for a different conception of transaction costs related to basic income.

⁹ Offe (2005: 71) refers to these as external process disutilities, by which he means 'stigmatization, invasion of privacy, the time wasted while waiting in lines, and the sense of powerlessness experienced by the claimant'.

¹⁰ Atkinson (1996: 68–9) elaborates: 'I should stress at once that this is not limited to labour market participation. While the qualifying conditions would include people working as an employee or self-employed, absent from work on grounds of sickness or injury, unable to work on grounds of disability and unemployed but available for work, it would also include people engaging in approved forms of education or training, caring for young, elderly or disabled dependents [sic] or undertaking approved forms of voluntary work, etc. The condition involves neither *payment* nor *work*; it is a wider definition of social contribution'.

¹¹ Van Parijs (2001:125) agrees on the administrative nightmare scenario, but then insists that 'in the meanwhile the participation income will have politically bootstrapped a universal basic income into position' (Van Parijs, 2004: 26). De Wispelaere and Stirton (2007) cast doubt on this transitional argument.

¹² Piggy-backing on existing systems or practices assumes the continued 'complimentarity of purpose' for which those checks are performed. The public administration literature

cautions against the phenomenon of piling incompatible policy goals onto administrative activities (Bardach, 1978).

¹³Basic income advocates could counter by saying that they only focus on the *extra* costs of implementing a basic income compared with a more selective policy (Van Parijs, 2004). To the extent that such comparisons are meaningful – straightforward comparisons are complicated by the fact that basic income schemes may require quite different and even more extensive administrative mechanisms than existing selective programmes – they nevertheless may significantly decrease the differential between competing programmes when the largest cost is a share in the implementation system that remains in place.

¹⁴Van Parijs (2004: 18, emphasis in original) takes a relaxed view on this matter: ‘it is *not* part of the definition of a basic income that it should be sufficient to satisfy the beneficiaries’ basic needs: consistently with its definition, the level of the basic income could be more and it could be less. Nor is it part of the definition of a basic income that it should replace all other cash benefits: a universal benefit need not be a single benefit’. See also Van Parijs (1995).

¹⁵De Wispelaere and Stirton (2004) suggest that the devil really is in the detail of specific basic income proposals, and make a case for ‘fuzzy’ policy design in this regard.

¹⁶There may, however, be other reasons why a basic income really *should* be as efficient as possible, either because this way the goals of basic income are truly maximised (compare the case of hard-to-reach recipients, such as the homeless, who are also among the most vulnerable citizens in modern society) or because of the important value of administrative efficiency as such (as argued by some conservative advocates).

¹⁷Again, the importance of such a failure is that the use of administrative efficiency as an argument to prefer a basic income over a selective programme does require such robust comparative assessments. This is particularly the case in which there is considerable popular and political distrust about the outcomes of a basic income programme in terms of savings behaviour, work incentive, effect on poverty and social exclusion etc. If administrative efficiency is to count as a genuine argument in a hostile political context, a clear indication of what sort and size of administrative savings to expect seems crucial. Compare Hemerijck (2000: 150), who believes that ‘[b]asic income helps to reduce the costs of social policy administration and implementation’ but then immediately suggests that anticipated savings would never compensate for the ‘massive transformation costs of regime-change’ associated with a basic income.

¹⁸While we appreciate the many ways in which technology assists implementation, administrative tensions cannot always be patched up by a technological fix. In fact, even the choice of technocratic fix often amounts to a genuine political choice.

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A disarmingly simple idea? Practical bottlenecks in the implementation of a universal basic income

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Abstract This article considers the implementation of a universal basic income, a neglected area in basic income research. We identify and examine three important practical bottlenecks that may prevent a basic income scheme from attaining the universal reach desired and proclaimed by its advocates: i) maintaining a population-wide cadaster of eligible claimants ensuring full takeup; ii) instituting robust modalities of payment that reach all intended beneficiaries; and iii) designing an effective oversight mechanism in a policy context that actively opposes client monitoring. We argue that the implementation of universal basic income faces unique challenges that its proponents must consider carefully.

Keywords guaranteed income, universal benefit scheme, benefit administration, takeup, international

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Introduction

Give all citizens a modest, yet unconditional income, and let them top it up at will with income from other sources.

Philippe Van Parijs (2004, p. 7)

Much has been written in recent years about the “disarmingly simple” proposal to provide each (adult) citizen a small grant by right, irrespective of household composition, other sources of income, and participation in the labour market or a socially useful activity (Van Parijs, 1992, 2004). In the past two decades basic income has gained considerable support as an alternative to the active welfare state, with advocates claiming positive effects on income security, unemployment, social exclusion and flexibility across the life cycle among its virtues (Van Parijs, 1992; Standing, 1999, 2009; Offe, 2008). In advanced welfare states, basic income is said to resolve the dilemma between fighting unemployment and combating poverty (Van Parijs, 1996, 2004). In developing countries, too, we are witnessing a surge of interest in universal and unconditional cash transfers as instruments for securing minimum social protection (Standing, 2008). According to some commentators, basic income is even a necessary component of any policy package aimed at resolving the current economic crisis (Standing, 2011).

Discussion of basic income has concentrated largely on the ethics, economics and, more recently, the politics of universal and unconditional income maintenance schemes. By contrast, little effort has gone into considering implementation issues; an unfortunate state of affairs that we have previously challenged (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007, 2011a, 2011b). The reasons for this neglect of implementation issues can, in our view, be attributed to a combination of three factors: an overly restrictive conception of the nature and role of public administration as a “controlling bureaucracy” (Standing, 2002); a comparative focus in which basic income easily emerges as the natural winner in comparison with selective social assistance policies; and a conviction that basic income is administratively efficient because it does not suffer from the many deficiencies found in selective social assistance programmes.

What basic income advocates fail to see, however, is that a universal and unconditional scheme leads to a novel set of implementation challenges, or else presents familiar problems in new guises, precisely because of important differences compared to the selective policies commonly associated with the welfare state.¹ More specifically, this article argues that universal basic income schemes give rise to three practical “bottlenecks”:

1. The bottlenecks we examine below are concerns that arise particularly for the most radical form of a basic income as advocated by Philippe Van Parijs (1992, 1995, 1996, 2004). Elsewhere, we argue that the basic income ideal constitutes a family of cognate proposals (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2004), and that less radical cognates face their own set of problems (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007, 2011a).

- maintaining a population-wide list, or “cadaster”, of eligible claimants ensuring full takeup;
- instituting robust modalities of payment that reach all intended beneficiaries;
- designing an effective oversight mechanism in a policy context that explicitly opposes client monitoring.

The notion of a bottleneck suggests seriality — i.e. a set of problems that have knock-on effects on each other and which need to be resolved in mutually compatible ways. This certainly applies to the implementation of universal basic income. For instance, the absence of a population-wide cadaster (bottleneck 1) also prohibits payment modalities from reaching all eligible beneficiaries (bottleneck 2). And while the absence of effective oversight mechanisms (bottleneck 3) does not make universal cadasters or payment modalities impossible, it nevertheless makes it very difficult for administrators to have full information about the level of universality reached in either case, or to respond swiftly to rectify error (a likely occurrence in a scheme pitched at such a massive scale).

Bottlenecks amount to serious hurdles on the path to the effective implementation of a basic income scheme, but this does not mean that such difficulties are beyond resolution. Quite on the contrary, each bottleneck may well give rise to several practical solutions, but these are neither obvious nor without cost, and require careful examination before committing to any one of them (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011b). Moreover, the way we dispose of any one of these bottlenecks has implications in terms of the feasibility and desirability of potential solutions to the others. In short, we view the three bottlenecks examined in this article as implementation challenges that must be jointly fulfilled for basic income to become policy reality: they are necessary conditions, not to be dismissed lightly by basic income advocates.

In the remainder of this article we first discuss the relation between universalism and target efficiency in basic income, before examining in some detail the three bottlenecks mentioned above. The purpose of this article is not to argue against the practical feasibility of basic income. Our aim instead is to outline several key implementation challenges, and to urge that proponents of this disarmingly simple idea think more seriously about the “administrative factor” in basic income (Schaffer, 1973; De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011b). This article deliberately engages with these matters at a more general, theoretical level, leaving a more detailed, practical analysis of the surveyed problems to another occasion.

Universal basic income and target efficiency

Many welfare policies suffer from the problem of under-consumption, or non-takeup as it is often referred to in the literature (Craig, 1991). While easily dismissed as a matter of (rational) personal choice, from a policy perspective the widespread

non-takeup of entitlements to social assistance in fact amounts to a serious case of policy failure, reflecting ineffectiveness as well as injustice (van Oorschot, 1991, 1998, 2002). Poor takeup rates are typically associated with selective social assistance policies because of the complex interactions between clients and bureaucracies attempting to negotiate a labyrinthine set of rules. Key factors affecting takeup rates include knowledge, stigma, and perceptions of eligibility or need on the client side, but equally a number of crucial factors associated with a scheme's structure and its administration (van Oorschot, 1991, 1998). Reviewing the state of affairs, van Oorschot (1991, p. 20) concludes that non-takeup is more likely to occur when schemes

- have a “density” of rules and guidelines;
- contain complex rules;
- contain vague criteria of entitlement;
- contain a means test;
- are aimed at groups in society which are associated with negative prejudices;
- supplement other sources of income;
- leave the initiative to start the claiming process fully to the claimants themselves.

Selective social assistance schemes typically fit this description, with means-testing in particular having been identified as a dysfunctional policy mechanism (van Oorschot, 2002; Atkinson, 1996). But a certain threshold of non-takeup may be inherent to selective schemes for yet another reason: there are limits to how far (and how fast) bureaucratic processes and routines can accommodate constantly and rapidly changing personal and social circumstances (Goodin, 1992). For some commentators, the traditional pillars of the selective welfare state — market, state and community or family — are quite literally crumbling (Goodin, 2002; also Goodin and Rein, 2001; Offe, 2008).

Basic income claims to offer a “universal antidote” to the difficulties of selective income support, and thereby potentially offer governments a means of delivering on the evident yet hard-to-fulfil commitment to reducing the complexity of the benefits system (see Harris, 2008). There is no denying that basic income schemes, by virtue of being unconditional as well as universal, bypass many of the concerns raised above, and are able to outperform selective schemes in this regard. According to Robert Goodin (1992), this is largely so because basic income operates with fewer policy presumptions than selective social assistance schemes. Basic income proposals are “less presumptuous” in two relevant senses:

They are less presumptuous . . . [because they are] . . . less prying and intrusive, and in consequence less demeaning and debasing. They are also less presumptuous in the sense that they make fewer presumptions: they assume less about the people to whom they are aiding (Goodin, 1992, p. 195).

Basic income is said to be more universal, not merely in the sense of embracing a larger share of the total population (i.e. almost all citizens), but also in terms of

effectively capturing a larger share of the target population. Proponents thus proclaim the superior “target efficiency” of a universal basic income. The question remains, however, whether a basic income scheme indeed leads to full take-up, or whether there might be other obstacles impeding its target efficiency? Our view, in brief, is that basic income indeed faces a number of difficulties (the “bottlenecks” we refer to in the introduction) that may prevent it from achieving the universal reach both desired and proclaimed by its advocates. The purpose of this article is to survey a selective few and outline their role in basic income implementation.

At this point we should stress the importance of target efficiency for the basic income ideal.² Non-universal take-up constitutes a genuine problem for basic income, much more so than for selective schemes. We can illustrate this point by considering briefly how basic income is committed to safeguarding “substantive” (or “effective”) and not merely “nominal” universalism (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011a). Basic income is nominally universal when it does not impose any overt restrictions on eligibility, such that each citizen is in principle entitled to a grant. But this does not in itself ensure that every citizen ends up receiving a basic income, and in many cases those most at risk of falling through the proverbial cracks are the poor, the destitute and the socially excluded — precisely those who merit special attention in a progressive basic income (Van Parijs, 1992, 1995, 2004; Standing, 1999, 2002; Wright, 2004, 2006; Raventós, 2007; Offe, 2008). Ensuring that all citizens — particularly all the vulnerable and disadvantaged — effectively receive their entitlement to a basic income is what makes a scheme substantively universal. The philosophical justification of a progressive basic income scheme implies that take-up must be genuinely universal; from this perspective, nominal universalism risks becoming a mere “token policy”. Practically, substantive universalism constitutes a much more demanding requirement, since, as we have previously argued, “providing a universal basic income that robustly includes vulnerable and hard-to-reach social groups such as the homeless, disabled people, immigrants and many others requires positive administrative effort, not just the removal of barriers to eligibility” (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011a, p. 118).³ We return to this point below.

Two broad concerns now arise when contemplating the practical implementation of a substantively universal basic income. First, precisely because basic income is universal, it comprises a target population that in sheer size easily

2. Strictly speaking, this is only true for a progressive basic income. Conservative variants (see Murray, 2006) could relax this condition, but in this article we restrict ourselves to the more familiar progressive proposals.

3. De Wispelaere and Stirton (2011a, 2011b) argue that devoting considerable administrative resources to ensuring the worst-off obtain their basic income affects the administrative efficiency of basic income, at least when understood as saving on the use of bureaucratic resources (budget, time, effort, operational capabilities, etc.) typically in short supply.

surpasses familiar large-scale selective policies. Compared to most social assistance programmes, this places basic income in a unique position: even a very small relative non-takeup rate may affect a sizeable absolute number of entitled individuals. This size or scale effect implies that we should not stare ourselves blind at the relative takeup rates of universal programmes (in comparison with their selective counterparts), but instead appreciate the human cost involved in terms of sheer numbers of individuals affected by non-universal takeup. Second, being universal as well as unconditional means basic income, at best, partially overlaps with existing administrative systems or operational mechanisms that make up the traditional, selective welfare state. This may make it particularly difficult to piggyback on existing systems, the way selective policies are often able to. In each case the universal nature of basic income requires careful consideration of its “administrability” (its ability to be implemented congruent with stated or implied objectives), which in turn is highly dependent on the administrative capabilities of the policy environment. In our view, such an analysis requires close examination of several practical bottlenecks, discussed in the next sections.

Bottleneck 1: Listing all eligible claimants

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The first bottleneck facing the implementation of a basic income relates to one of the central tasks of welfare administration: to identify those within the population who meet eligibility criteria for a grant, and to distinguish them from those not so entitled. This administrative task consists of two components that are often wrongly assumed to produce identical outcomes. Looked at from one side, identifying beneficiaries is largely a matter of preventing those who are not eligible from entering a programme, often at great cost to those included as well as to those excluded (Danz, 2000; Herd, Mitchell and Lightman, 2005). In other words, so-called programmes of inclusion necessarily also exclude (Handler, 2003, 2004). Basic income advocates maintain that the establishment of a universal and unconditional scheme eliminates the task of excluding non-beneficiaries, and consequently basic income happily does away with the bureaucratic control apparatus geared at monitoring the compliance of beneficiaries.

By and large, this is correct.⁴ However, eliminating restrictions does not itself solve the problem of identifying all those eligible. It is perfectly possible for a policy not to formally exclude an individual from a programme, yet fail to identify him or

4. Two important qualifications are in order. First, even the most “universal” basic income scheme will still have to exclude some people: perhaps non-citizens or non-resident citizens, or institutionalized members of society such as felony prisoners (Van Parijs, 2004). Second, the extent to which basic income programmes can effectively do away with a controlling bureaucracy depends also on whether other policies still require such an apparatus, a point often overlooked by its proponents (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011a).

her as a beneficiary, with obvious negative consequences on takeup. It is a serious mistake, therefore, to think that all that is required to improve the reach of a programme is to eliminate restrictions on individual eligibility. What is additionally required is a list (or “cadaster”) of all those entitled; in the case of basic income, this amounts to a list of all citizens or long-term residents of adult age. As already noted, the creation and maintenance of an accurate and reliable cadaster is central to achieving substantive coverage under any social assistance scheme. However, the more universal a social assistance scheme, the more encompassing the relevant cadaster must be, and the greater the effort required to keep it up to date and reliable. Basic income is particularly demanding in this respect because the absence of restrictions and its universal scope implies that the relevant list must cover almost the whole population. The sheer scale at which basic income operates may result in the relatively low “cadasterability” of such schemes.⁵ Low cadasterability in turn negatively affects basic income’s target efficiency, since individuals who are not listed on the cadaster simply cannot claim their grant. While this point seems deceptively simple, the focus on removing bureaucratic barriers to access (i.e. rules and regulations determining eligibility) prevents basic income advocates from fully appreciating the administrative challenges inherent in something as “simple” as keeping an accurate list of all those entitled to receive a basic income.

Consider for a moment the practical challenges of instituting such a comprehensive list. Of course, some countries (e.g. Belgium or Spain) have robust cadasters covering the entire population in the form of a system of compulsory identity cards linked to a central database. In these cases, cadasterability poses comparatively few practical problems. However, many countries lack a suitable cadaster of beneficiaries. In such cases, a first solution would be to construct a cadaster from scratch. But this option faces two types of problems. First is the issue of cost: setting up a list from scratch will require an investment of significant proportions. The recent United Kingdom experience in attempting to set up a nationwide identity card system may give some indication of the financial costs involved. For example, a research project at the London School of Economics and Political Science gave “low”, “medium” and “high” estimates of the costs of the United Kingdom’s proposed identity card scheme at respectively GBP 10.6 billion, GBP 14.5 billion and GBP 19.2 billion over ten years, all of these estimates being much higher than the government’s own estimates of GBP 5.84 billion over ten years at 2005/2006 prices (Whitley et al., 2007). Of course, the bulk of the financial burden will arise in the start-up phase with subsequent costs of maintaining a

5. We rely here on the work of public administration scholar Christopher Hood. In his work on tax administration, Hood (1985, p. 24) defines “cadasterability” as “the property of being applicable to a readily identifiable group of taxable [in our case “creditable”] units”. The concept is equally applicable to the practical administration of benefits (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011b).

cadaster being significantly lower, although hardly negligible.⁶ But if such start-up costs prove excessive, and administrators are left without the capability to effectively handle the required task, this may have a very direct impact on the political will to roll out such a scheme. It may literally cause basic income implementation to fall at the very first hurdle. A second problem arises because of the likely resistance of citizens in many countries against anything that resembles a comprehensive identity database. Here again the vigorous debate surrounding the identity cards proposal in the United Kingdom can serve as an example (6, 2005; Beynon-Davies, 2006; Whitley and Hosein, 2010).⁷

An alternative to building a cadaster from scratch would be to rely on less encompassing (but typically less reliable) cadasters already in place, such as voting registers or social security databases. The problem with these is that they are not nearly as universal as often assumed. Voting registers, for instance, typically exclude whole categories of people who would otherwise meet eligibility requirements for a basic income. This is especially the case in those countries that require individuals to register themselves on the electoral roll. One might objectively argue that where for many people voting is a burden — albeit a modest one — basic income registration comes with a real benefit, and therefore we can reliably expect everyone to make some effort to self-register. But this may not resolve all problems as the social policy literature offers many examples of people failing to obtain services that require little effort; information problems on precisely how to register as well as well-documented behavioural traits such as procrastination may combine to effectively exclude certain people from securing their place on the basic income cadaster. Moreover, signalling that one is not on the register is only one step in the process of maintaining a robust cadaster, and things may go wrong elsewhere in the process as a result of bureaucratic error (van Oorschot, 1991). Other lists or registers, such as those covering social security or health insurance, may be incomplete or unreliable because they are tied to selective policies affected by the low take-up problems surveyed in the previous section. Heavy reliance on such cadasters means quite literally that we would be importing the deficiencies of selective policies into basic income administration. More generally, relying on a single existing cadaster is likely to produce too many false negatives to be compatible with basic income's commitment to substantive universalism.⁸

6. The cheap self-regulation option — asking individuals to register themselves, perhaps online — is only a partial solution in that the cadaster must also ensure that former beneficiaries who no longer qualify are taken off the register. In addition to expatriates or prisoners, we can think primarily of the recently deceased to whom basic income entitlements may still be allocated.

7. Following the 2010 United Kingdom general election, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government announced the ending of the national identity card scheme, apparently on civil liberties grounds, but citing also the costs of the scheme. The Identity Documents Act 2010 repealed the Identity Cards Act 2006.

8. Briefly, “false positives” refer to situations where an individual ends up in receipt of a grant, even though such a payment is not intended as part of the goals of a scheme; “false negatives” refer to the

A third possibility is to integrate multiple, overlapping cadasters: for instance, voting registers with social security or health insurance registers. But the use of overlapping cadasters implies extra bureaucratic costs (to safeguard against the possibility that citizens appearing on several lists obtain the basic income twice, for instance) and, in the end, little assurance that all eligible citizens are effectively covered. For without a single comprehensive cadaster, there is simply no way of knowing how much of the population is effectively covered by overlapping, incomplete cadasters. In other words, there is a risk of common mode failure, in which people who are not listed on one register have a high probability of not appearing on others. Here too we can plausibly assume that the most vulnerable citizens, such as the homeless, again disproportionately face the risk of falling through the cracks of the system. In so far as a progressive basic income is largely advocated with the interests of the most socially and economically vulnerable in mind, this solution would be unacceptable.

The lesson of this section is straightforward. To guarantee substantive universalism through full take-up, and in particular to ensure the most vulnerable are effectively included, basic income administration cannot rely merely on removing barriers to entitlement. Instead, basic income advocates must explicitly consider cadasterability and examine options to register all citizens in an appropriate and reliable manner. Let us end this section by emphasizing again that this bottleneck in no way invalidates the basic income proposal; it merely means the problem has to be taken seriously and solutions carefully examined with the administrative capabilities of the policy context in mind.

Bottleneck 2: Designing universal modalities of payment

Much of the discussion surrounding the inclusive nature of a universal basic income is devoted to the “claiming stage”, in particular the absence of any personal or bureaucratic barriers to claiming one’s entitlement. However, when looked at from the practical perspective of rolling out a policy, this covers only part of the implementation process. At least as important is to ensure that each eligible person effectively receives the grant to which she or he is entitled. Here, again, the implementation of a basic income faces an important bottleneck that merits explicit examination: the specific modalities through which basic income will be disbursed (see De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011b).

corresponding situation where an individual does not receive a grant, even though she or he falls within the class of persons a scheme is designed to benefit. These errors (also known as Type I and Type II errors in the literature) can arise with respect to each of the bottlenecks we have identified. Thus in the case of false negatives, a basic income may fail to reach an eligible individual due to the failure to include her or him in the relevant cadaster, through her or his inability to access the relevant payment mechanisms, or (in addition) through the failure of oversight mechanisms to correct either of these failures.

Let us begin by examining a number of practical options that have been proposed in the basic income literature. One is the use of the taxation system: several advocates propose distributing a basic income as tax deductions, refundable in cases of low tax liability. The main advantage, it is said, is ease of administration because basic income can be practically integrated into a tried-and-tested existing mechanism. Nevertheless, this option raises a number of important questions, the most obvious being how to deal with those who do not work in the formal economy, or who otherwise do not have payroll tax deductions made to their salaries. A tax-integrated reimbursement scheme may be a good option for those who are liable to pay income tax, but fails to cover those who for whatever reason fall outside of this arrangement. In other words, the intended reach of basic income typically exceeds that of the income tax system.

A second problem arises because basic income operates at the level of the individual as opposed to the household, and this again may complicate relying on the tax mechanism in any straightforward manner. Where existing tax arrangements are primarily set up to deal with households, subsuming individual household members under a single administrative category, ensuring that basic income is reimbursed to individuals specifically may require considerable operational adjustments. Pragmatically, we might imagine granting each household member an individual right to a basic income but nonetheless operationalize its disbursement through traditional household-based instruments. However, those who regard basic income as an important instrument in the fight against gender inequality are likely to object to an arrangement that, for all practical purposes, grants (male) household heads easy access to the basic income of their spouses (McKay, 2001; Zelleke, 2011). Of course, tax systems vary substantially across countries and different solutions may present themselves, but here again the universal (and individual) nature of basic income means this bottleneck requires particular attention.

The tax integration option poses a further problem that specifically affects the basic income ideal and its emphasis on protecting the vulnerable and socially disadvantaged. Most states deal with taxes, and tax reimbursements, only once a year. Thus, policy-makers must decide whether to provide the basic income on a yearly basis, after the tax calculations and relevant deductions have taken place, or whether to institute some advance payment mechanism with the basic income being (partially) clawed back through the tax system if the tax liability exceeds the grant (Van Parijs, 2004; Block, 2001, p. 87). The downside of the first option — an annual grant, disbursed after all tax liabilities are accounted for — is that it may impose significant burdens on those who have insufficient income to lead a decent life without their basic income.

Furthermore, in the annual grant format, the precise amount of net basic income one receives after tax may be uncertain. The net basic income one receives at the end of the year defies straightforward advance calculation because it must not only take

into account additional income from other sources, which could vary considerably from one year to another (particularly for those in flexible or precarious employment), but also one's overall tax liability, which again may remain uncertain until settled at the end of the tax year. It is precisely for this reason that Van Parijs (1992, 2004) argues that a basic income is practically distinct from the negative income tax proposal made famous by Milton Friedman (1962). Those living at or near the poverty line may respond to such uncertainty by deferring part of their consumption for fear of not being able to afford the expense. This not only undermines the goal of basic income security (see Standing, 2002), but also imposes constraints on the usage of one's basic income that most advocates would find intolerable: preventing use of the grant as security for a loan, for instance. While the more serious problem is that people with low incomes might defer spending on essential goods such as medicine, heat or nutrition, the opposite problem might also arise: instead of deferring consumption, some individuals might consume on credit in anticipation of receiving a substantial basic income at the end of the tax year, which then could initiate a spiralling debt problem when the expected grant does not materialize.

These arguments would strongly suggest that basic income be disbursed in small regular instalments (monthly, perhaps weekly) as opposed to larger grants once a year. As we argued elsewhere, for those living at or near the poverty line, equal monetary value simply does not imply equal practical value (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011b, p. 11). But the problem with this second option — a regular income stream clawed back through the tax system — is that of “churning”, the pointless shifting of resources between different accounts (Offe, 2008). Churning not only incurs high administrative costs but is also prone to error and thus contains a high potential to frustrate basic income recipients. At the margin, this may negatively impact on the target efficiency of basic income, notably with respect to those most in need of having the grant administered accurately.

A different sort of problem concerns the practicalities of receiving a grant. The case presented by advocates of basic income often relies on each person holding a bank account. Unfortunately, this cannot be taken for granted. In the United Kingdom, for example, it is estimated that in 2008/2009 some 1.14 million households, comprising 1.54 million individuals or three per cent of the overall population, had no access to a basic transactional bank account (Financial Inclusion Taskforce, 2010). Moreover, these were overwhelmingly concentrated at the lower end of the income distribution. Even where individuals and households have access to basic banking services, many — again, including many with low incomes — live in areas with no bank and have no access to a free automated teller machine (ATM). While in extreme cases this might prove an insurmountable barrier to hard-to-reach groups such as the homeless or those without adequate proof-of-address, in other cases it still amounts to a significant transaction cost (a bus fare to the nearest town

or the payment of a commission to use a local ATM). Alternative payment systems, such as the cashing of benefit cheques in a local post office, face similar limitations.⁹

An entirely different disbursement mechanism would be to provide every eligible individual with a basic income debit card, which would be periodically topped up by the state and which the individual can use like any normal debit card to pay for transactions or withdraw cash (Standing, 1999, p. 369). This innovative approach makes the delivery of a universal basic income to all publicly visible. In addition, it would appear to avoid at least some of the problems likely to occur with tax integration, by effectively setting up a delivery system from scratch. These are all good reasons for favouring this scheme over the tax-integrated option. However, the transaction costs mentioned above apply here too: providing a network of ATMs is costly, for instance, and service providers typically pass these costs onto customers. In the case of the basic income debit card, these costs would presumably be charged mainly to the programme's administration, but in some cases will fall directly on recipients. Setting up a separate basic income delivery system from scratch is a theoretical possibility, but is likely to be costly and inefficient, and vulnerable to such severe teething problems as could drain popular and political support from the basic income scheme.

What these insights reveal is that, with respect to this second bottleneck, basic income implementation again faces a number of controversial administrative choices. One obvious concern is that of complexity, which leads to a risk of decreased target efficiency because both administrators and claimants are more prone to make mistakes (National Audit Office, 2005), as well as rendering benefit schemes vulnerable to fraud and exploitation (Harris, 2008, p. 15). But an equally important principle is that of "redundancy", which allows for one system's failure to be "backed up" by another and thus preventing recipients from falling through the proverbial cracks.¹⁰ Where single systems score well in terms of low complexity, multiple mechanisms typically score better in terms of improved redundancy. As before, what makes this problem unique for basic income policy are the twin requirements of having to cover a large target population (and thus having to avoid more instances of error or non-coverage) while simultaneously having to ensure that those who are disadvantaged in society are fully covered by the practical mechanisms.

In sum, in our view, basic income administrators must carefully examine practical solutions to the concerns pertaining to payment modalities. As before,

9. Perhaps the most promising technological advances can be found in the use of cell phones and various types of smart cards as electronic delivery systems for cash transfers. For an overview of these modalities in Africa, see Vincent and Cull (2011).

10. "Redundancy" is used here to refer to duplication and overlap in administrative systems. While, linguistically, redundancy often has negative connotations, none are intended here. In a seminal essay, Martin Landau (1969) argued that rather than a sign of waste and inefficiency, a degree of redundancy is essential to the long-term survival and reliability of administrative systems, enhancing safety, flexibility and innovation.

these concerns do not tell against the basic income proposal as such, but merely offer a challenge that must be taken seriously for the basic income proposal to make it off the drawing board.

Bottleneck 3: Effective oversight without monitoring

Discussion of these two bottlenecks has shown how a radically universal scheme such as a basic income imposes increased pressure on existing implementation channels or systems. The concerns with building a robust cadaster of all eligible individuals and offering effective universal payment modalities both point at the operational difficulties of offering income security at the vast scale of a truly universal policy. The size or scale effect of basic income implies we need to rethink the operational or practical dimension of providing income support to the population at large. Equally, these bottlenecks offer a critical perspective on the argument that basic income easily bypasses situational specifics of diverse groups of claimants; pace Goodin's (1992) claims about the "less presumptuous" nature of basic income. Reflection about practicalities suggests that complexity returns at the level of implementation, a reality that basic income advocates must deal with head-on to retain their strong commitment to substantive universalism.

In this section we address a different type of bottleneck, one which arises from the common observation that the implementation of large-scale social programmes — including a basic income — is typically less-than-perfect. In both cases discussed above, imperfect implementation results in some level of non-takeup, particularly amongst the most vulnerable or disadvantaged in society.¹¹ This suggests the need for a robust oversight mechanism, an administrative process by which those who fail to receive their basic income are identified, the error is swiftly rectified, and a feedback mechanism prevents the same error from occurring again. However, as we show in this section, oversight constitutes a third bottleneck, one that is little appreciated by basic income advocates predominantly concerned with avoiding client monitoring (see Standing, 2002; also Handler, 2004; Handler and Hasenfeld, 2006).

As before, we believe the inclination of basic income advocates to rely on the mere removal of barriers as the main pathway to achieving substantive universalism is flawed: it fails to appreciate the extent of error that is part and parcel of implementation systems. There are two reasons to think basic income faces considerable difficulties regarding oversight. On the one hand, we again have the problem of scale: monitoring the effective disbursement of a grant scheme that

11. It might also result in "false positives", by paying a basic income to some who are not entitled or some entitled claimants more than once. We abstract from this concern here, although advocates should not underestimate the importance of avoiding false positives for the political resilience of basic income.

encompasses the whole population requires considerable administrative capacity and effort. Paradoxically, in this respect universal schemes may require more administrative effort than selective ones (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011a). On the other hand, because basic income does not imply repeated monitoring of eligibility conditions — the much-reviled client monitoring — it has lost an important instrument to cross-check whether payments are effectively received by beneficiaries (Hood, 1986, pp. 78-79; 1985, pp. 24-25).

Consider for a moment, by way of contrast, the oversight capability of a workfare programme (see De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007). First, workfare approaches, far from dispensing with oversight, rely on extensive intervention from caseworkers. This face-to-face oversight through a variety of “bureaucratic encounters” (see Hasenfeld, Rafferty and Zald, 1987) offers an immediate channel for cross-checking actual receipt of benefits, provided the caseworkers’ role is not restricted to that of a budgetary gatekeeper. Since basic income schemes purposefully restrict client interaction with caseworkers, they cannot avail themselves of this mechanism. A second potential advantage of workfare is that the focus on training and formal employment provides a host of institutionally embedded oversight mechanisms, such as payroll systems, that allow for effective cross-checking in so far as the necessary administrative resources are kept in place. Such mechanisms enable workfare administrators to monitor the delivery of payment systems; again, an option not readily available to basic income administration. The points above are not meant to argue the case for workfare, but merely to illustrate the particular oversight bottleneck that basic income implementation faces.

The public administration literature distinguishes usefully between “police patrol” and “fire alarm” oversight mechanisms (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984; Lupia and McCubbins, 1994). Where police patrol oversight is centralized and offers a direct approach to obtaining relevant information (e.g. through audits), fire alarm oversight establishes “a system of rules, procedures, and informal practices that enable [third parties] to examine administrative decisions [and] to seek remedies” (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984, p. 166). The lack of institutionally-embedded mechanisms discussed in the previous paragraph affects a police patrol type of oversight, making it more difficult for basic income administrators to identify false negatives (in either cadasters or payment conduits), and possibly even responding less efficiently in rectifying the situation once such failure is identified.

This of course leaves basic income implementation with the possibility of a fire alarm type of oversight. At first sight this seems a promising avenue. The fact that basic income does not require clients to submit to any intrusive type of bureaucratic evaluation, but merely to lodge a complaint that they have not received their entitlement, certainly bodes well for increased self-regulation on behalf of clients. Nevertheless here too we should perhaps give some thought to several considerations.

First, clients will only respond “efficiently” if they fully trust administrators not to use information for other purposes. However, it may be tempting for bureaucracies to use available client information to complement information deficits across separate policy areas, with little consideration of what clients want in this regard. Here we must appreciate the variability in experience and sensitivity of populations in different countries. Belgian citizens, accustomed to featuring in all sorts of official registers are likely to respond quite pragmatically to requests to self-register, while United Kingdom citizens’ more sceptical attitudes towards official information-gathering may lead them to respond differently, even where failure to register is penalized. The efficiency of a fire alarm oversight mechanism depends critically on background conditions — such as the level of public trust in politics or bureaucracy — which vary from one case to another, making it difficult to generalize its usefulness across countries.

Second, fire alarm oversight still requires claimants to obtain relevant information and to go through the process of lodging a complaint. Even supposedly user-friendly approaches may prove too much for many recipients who may be already socially disadvantaged, such as the homeless. The solution of using technology to facilitate administrative complaints, in which many basic income proponents place their faith, may again exclude precisely this target group. Hood and Margetts (2007) caution against the belief that modern information technology offers a “technological fix” to the perennial challenges of administration. “Such a change [to the digital era] does not mean that new policy problems have appeared or old ones disappeared. Rather, they present themselves in new ways” (Hood and Margetts, 2007, p. 14). Failure to appreciate novel forms of information exclusion easily leads to a variant of the “restrictions fallacy” according to which getting rid of explicit barriers in itself ensures full access.

Third, assessing and addressing complaints requires significant administrative processing that inevitably results in time lags and backlogs, triggering difficulties similar to those discussed in relation to payment modalities. To reiterate a point made earlier, to signal that one is not on a particular list or has not received one’s entitlement is only the start of a “processing chain” resulting in rectifying an error (and, ideally, preventing its future occurrence). Signalling by fire alarm is a necessary condition for efficient oversight, but it is not sufficient. Of course, similar processing problems occur in police patrol types of oversight, but the longer the chain the more points at which the process can break down. Where police patrol oversight proceeds internally, fire alarm oversight instead “externalizes” part of the process by requiring individual clients to interface effectively with administrators.

Finally, moving away from a police patrol to a fire alarm oversight mechanism means shifting part of the administration of a basic income scheme onto the recipient. In contrast with police patrol monitoring, recipients end up bearing all the relevant inconveniences — investments in time and effort, experience of

frustration, and even delay of payment — as well as some burdens of intrusion in so far as complaints require bureaucratic checking to confirm their veracity. Where police patrol oversight implicitly entails monitoring, a fire alarm type of oversight consists of two different processes: the signalling procedure initiated by the recipient and the explicit monitoring of the veracity of the complaint by administrators. The second step reintroduces the much vilified “controlling bureaucracy”. Furthermore, effective oversight depends in large part on the solutions adopted to remedy previous bottlenecks. For instance, the administrative burden of oversight will correlate with the existence of robust cadasters or limited numbers of payment modalities, as the latter affect both the expected size of error (i.e. number of complaints) and the available instruments to monitor and correct error. Somewhat paradoxically, this means fire alarm oversight functions most effectively in cases of low or moderate error, while the situations where oversight is most valuable (because error is more common) defy the easy administration of fire alarm monitoring and require the more costly and burdensome police patrol type of monitoring.

Solutions to this third bottleneck may well exist, but again a commitment to substantive universalism requires basic income advocates to carefully think through this aspect of its implementation.

Conclusion

Basic income advocates customarily assume that universal and unconditional income maintenance schemes such as basic income outperform selective social assistance schemes in terms of target efficiency. Where selective schemes fail to capture all those entitled to receive a particular programme or service, universal policies do much better in large part because they remove barriers or restrictions for claiming an entitlement. In this article we argued that this standard picture is incomplete, for a radically universal and unconditional scheme such as basic income may produce its own bottlenecks preventing full take-up, thus impeding target efficiency. We briefly outlined three such bottlenecks that are vitally important when considering basic income implementation, without wanting to be exhaustive.

The existence of such bottlenecks does not invalidate the general case for basic income, but they give basic income advocates reasons to consider issues of implementation and administration more carefully. In so far as basic income is committed to granting all citizens a basic income entitlement by right, it is also committed to ensuring all effectively receive their entitlement. This philosophical commitment to substantive universalism has obvious practical connotations that require taking the bottlenecks outlined above seriously.

There exists a further reason to take seriously “the administrative factor” (Schaffer, 1973). Appropriate consideration of basic income implementation may

suggest radically different solutions to each of the bottlenecks surveyed: we have briefly considered some above, but many more undoubtedly exist. Which solution to favour in each case will depend on contextual factors — e.g. the administrative capacities of a particular country — but also on broad political factors, such as the acceptability of intrusive forms of information gathering. When implementation choices produce different effects on distinct social groups, the administration of basic income becomes a genuinely political problem. A failure to appreciate how the politics of basic income is shaped by the practical challenges discussed in this article may affect the political prospects of introducing a robust basic income.¹²

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12. De Wispelaere and Stirton (2011a, 2011b, forthcoming) explore the political aspects of basic income administration in more detail. We refer the interested reader to these companion pieces to the present article.

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The Politics of Unconditional Basic Income: Bringing Bureaucracy Back In

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We challenge the view, typically assumed by advocates of unconditional basic income (UBI), that its administration is uncontroversial. We identify three essential tasks which, from the point of view of the administrative cybernetics literature, any income maintenance policy must accomplish: defining criteria of eligibility, determining who meets such criteria and disbursing payments to those found to be eligible. Building on the work of Christopher Hood, we contrast two alternative ways in which the design of a UBI might apply the principle of ‘using bureaucracy sparingly’ to the performance of each of these three tasks. Relating these alternative designs to the politics of basic income, we show a correspondence between contrasting senses of using bureaucracy sparingly and ‘redistributive’ and ‘aggregative’ UBI models.

Keywords: basic income; bureaucratic efficiency; cadasterability; unconditional welfare; welfare administration

In *Agrarian Justice* (1797), Thomas Paine advanced two radical proposals to mitigate the extreme poverty of his time:

To create a national fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property: And also, the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age ... It is proposed that the payments, as already stated, be made to every person, rich or poor (Paine, 1997 [1797], pp. 326–7).

Since Paine, many political thinkers have endorsed the idea of an unconditional basic income (UBI), as the proposal in its modern form has become known (Cunliffe and Erreygers, 2004). UBI, ‘an income unconditionally paid to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement’ (Van Parijs, 1992, p. 3), is a unique type of income maintenance programme in modern welfare societies: it is *universal* rather than targeted or categorical, paid to the *individual* as opposed to households, and above all *unconditional* in contrast to the vast majority of welfare programmes that require means and work testing as conditions for eligibility. In recent years, basic income has gained considerable traction among scholars who claim positive effects on income security, unemployment, social exclusion, ‘discretionary time’ and flexibility across the life cycle, and even gender equality among the scheme’s many virtues (Birnbbaum, 2012; Groot, 2004; Haagh, 2011; McKay, 2001; Offe, 2008; Standing, 1999; 2002; Van Parijs, 1992; 1995; 2004; Wright, 2004; 2006).

While the scholarly fascination with UBI has yet to translate into widespread policy development, advocates can point to the Alaska Permanent Fund, which has paid each resident an unconditional annual grant of around \$1,200 since 1982 (Widerquist and

Howard, 2012). Additionally, in January 2004 Brazilian President Lula da Silva signed Bill n. 10.835 into law, putting legislation in place to transform conditional cash grants schemes such as the *Bolsa Família* into an unconditional Citizens Basic Income (Suplicy, 2005). Similar proposals have been considered by governments in Ireland, the Netherlands, South Africa and the US, while UBI policies are today on the policy agenda in countries as diverse as Germany, Mongolia and Iran (Caputo, 2012). While there has been little explicit acceptance of the basic income principle in the UK, Bill Jordan argues that a first step towards the establishment of a UBI lies ‘concealed within a load of cuts, conditionality and means-testing’ of the current coalition government’s proposals for administrative simplification of the tax–benefit system (Jordan, 2012, p. 1).¹

In this article we focus on what Bernard Schaffer (1973) calls ‘the administrative factor’, typically (and regrettably) ignored in most discussion of basic income. Elsewhere we have addressed a number of ways in which administrative analysis sheds light on debates over UBI, including the administrative efficiency of basic income compared with selective welfare policies (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011) and the specific implementation challenges of UBI (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012). In this article, we instead focus on the close link between administrative analysis and the political feasibility of UBI. The politics of UBI is a complex matter that requires in-depth analysis of agenda setting, coalition building, legitimacy and popular support, and institutional design (De Wispelaere and Noguera, 2012). It is our view that administrative analysis is essential to all these and that the administrability of UBI itself constitutes a *first-order political problem*. To neglect administration is to ignore a core dimension of politics.

Basic Income Administration as Politics

While some justifications for UBI are of a more ‘principled’ nature and others distinctively ‘pragmatic’ (Barry, 1996b), all presuppose that certain substantive effects will materialise. For instance, universalism implies not merely that no-one is formally excluded from a programme, but demands that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that eligible recipients effectively receive their entitlement (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011). In this regard, Brian Barry’s (2001, p. 63) feline simile is spot on. When basic income advocates think of differences between varieties of UBI, they typically do so in terms of broad design features: for instance, whether the scheme is fully unconditional or instead resembles a participation income (Atkinson, 1996; De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007). While this is a central design choice, it can easily obscure two important features. On the one hand, the canonical definition of UBI as universal, individual and unconditional abstracts from a number of dimensions – such as uniformity, adequacy, frequency or modality of payment (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2004) – which must be developed in some detail to understand fully the design and real-world effects of particular proposals. On the other hand, the general definition of UBI tells us little about the broader policy context in which it is meant to operate, including the administrative context of implementation. Since the insights that can be gained from considering only the broad contours of a radical idea are quickly exhausted, we should focus instead on the detailed design choices that present themselves in implementation. According to Brian Barry, it is these that determine whether a UBI in practice turns out to be a ‘tabby’ or a ‘tiger’:

Asking about the pros or cons of basic income as such is rather like asking about the pros and cons of keeping a feline as a pet without distinguishing between a tiger and a tabby (Barry, 2001, p. 63).

A focus on administration and implementation is essential to the appreciation of one incontrovertibly political issue: the reality of basic income implementation forces policy makers to choose between specific UBI schemes that end up conferring benefits upon different sets of stakeholders. The resulting *hard choices* only become fully apparent once we think through the administrative challenges of basic income implementation. As we illustrate in detail below, a large part of instituting a particular UBI scheme is to decide between different solutions to implementation challenges, each of which will likely attract support from different factions within a UBI coalition. It is sometimes held as an advantage that UBI attracts support across the political divide (Barry, 1996a). But such agreement, based on a shared abstract ideal, may be illusory if implementation drives a wedge between different factions of any enacting coalition (De Wispelaere, forthcoming).

When proponents argue that instituting a UBI would solve many of the intricate problems faced by mature welfare states in developed countries, as well as emerging forms of social assistance in developing countries, such advantages are not expected to be restricted to small groups of 'net' recipients. On the contrary, UBI is assumed to offer direct and indirect benefits for many social groups, including the all-important middle classes. This would suggest that there is strong potential for building a robust political coalition around the UBI proposal through educating political entrepreneurs and citizens on the gains to be had from introducing basic income. But this line of reasoning fails to grasp how concrete UBI models, differentiated along design features and practical administration, benefit distinct groups. In other words, UBI is not necessarily a 'win-win': even where different factions in a UBI coalition share an interest in bringing about *a* basic income, they may not share an interest in instituting *the same* basic income. For instance, advocates who regard UBI as an explicitly *redistributive scheme* will aim to resolve hard choices in design and implementation consistently in favour of the worst off. We can contrast the former with those who favour an *aggregative scheme*, in which the priority is to keep overall costs to a minimum and distribute benefits widely across the population.² In the face of such divergent views on how to resolve implementation challenges, building a robust coalition against selective programmes may literally be hampered by a strong 'residual' disagreement about which precise universal scheme to promote. Our view of UBI administration as politics maintains that administrative solutions to unavoidable implementation challenges directly feed back into politics, affecting the robustness of an enduring UBI coalition by cementing coalitions or causing internal division. The next sections substantiate these general remarks through a detailed examination of the administrability of basic income and its implications for the politics of UBI.

Bringing Bureaucracy Back In

In this section, we present a conceptual framework that emphasises two dimensions: first, we identify three essential administrative tasks that *any* practical basic income scheme must perform; second, applying a distinction made by Christopher Hood (1983; see also Hood

and Margetts, 2007, pp. 152–66), we distinguish two opposing senses in which a UBI could be said to use bureaucracy sparingly. We believe that there is no first-best UBI design that simultaneously maximises both senses across all tasks. UBI advocates are thus confronted with a number of difficult choices concerning which type of basic income scheme they wish to endorse, taking into account several trade-offs at the level of implementation.

Three Essential Administrative Tasks

Building on De Wispelaere and Stirton (2007), we argue that *any* income maintenance scheme must perform three essential administrative tasks, corresponding to the essential features of a control system identified in the administrative cybernetics literature (Dunsire, 1978; Hood and Margetts, 2007):

- (1) Standards and rules must be enacted which establish the operational criteria that define the intended beneficiaries.
- (2) Information must be gathered so that those who satisfy eligibility conditions can be identified and properly distinguished from those who are not eligible.
- (3) Payments must be disbursed to those identified as proper beneficiaries of a grant – and only to those so identified.

The first task, standard setting, includes establishing the conditions under which an individual becomes eligible to receive a grant, how much they ought to receive, with what frequency the grant is to be paid, and so on. While political philosophers would naturally approach the evaluation of rules of eligibility from a strictly normative point of view (who ‘ought’ to receive a grant), the practical design of such rules is as much a technical challenge as a moral one. A considerable literature has been produced on the strategic rule choices administrators must make (e.g. Diver, 1983). For example, how far could or should a grant be based on ‘welfare entitlements’ and what role (if any) does this leave for the discretion of welfare bureaucrats (Brodkin, 1997; Brodkin and Majmundar, 2010; Titmuss, 1971)? Should payments be based on narrow, technical rules, or should legislators enact broad principles, leaving the details of their interpretation and application to bureaucrats, courts or even to citizens’ own assessment of their obligations and entitlements? Should standards defining entitlement be over-inclusive, ‘erring on the side of kindness’, as Robert Goodin (1985) puts it. Or should we instead prefer an under-inclusive formulation, even if this requires that alternative mechanisms remain in place to provide aid to those not caught by a primary means of support?³ Colin Diver (1983) shows how trade-offs between the different desiderata of administrative rules are inevitable and how the failure to make intelligent decisions about these often lies behind the failure of public policies to achieve their intended objectives.

The administration of income maintenance also faces a considerable task of gathering information on, and monitoring behaviour of, eligible beneficiaries. Efficiently accomplishing such information gathering and monitoring on a large scale requires that the relevant criteria are *cadasterable*. Cadasterability is defined by Hood (1985, p. 24) for the purposes of tax administration as ‘the property of being applicable to a readily identifiable population of taxable units’, and we can easily, for present purposes, extend the concept to ‘creditable units’. One of the key challenges in welfare administration is to obtain an

accurate and relatively stable list (or ‘cadaster’) of all those who satisfy whatever criteria we deem appropriate. This is necessary not only for the purposes of excluding ineligible applications, but also for ensuring that all those who *are* eligible for a grant are correctly identified. This second reason for the cadasterability requirement is particularly important when a programme is explicitly inclusive, requiring the ‘recruitment’ of applicants on to the register. Evidently, the more inclusive the coverage of a programme, the more demanding is the task of building an accurate, encompassing cadaster (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012).

A second aspect of this task is that of monitoring compliance with standards. In practice, not everyone listed in the relevant cadaster of recipients will be (or remain) compliant with eligibility criteria (such as family status or residence) or with relevant criteria relating to claimants’ behaviour. In an age when citizens rapidly move from one administrative category to another, monitoring formal criteria requires considerable administrative effort and capability (Goodin, 1992). The literature is replete with examples and explanations of why monitoring may have distortional effects. Canice Prendergast (2007) argues that bureaucrats take account of clients’ complaints, but that such ‘fire-alarm’ monitoring has systematically distorting effects, since only claimants who fail to receive their entitlements will complain, while those who erroneously receive benefits will tend to stay silent. Centralised ‘police patrol’-type monitoring avoids this source of bias, but is resource intensive and could be expected to rise linearly with the size of the programme (Lupia and McCubbins, 2004). Moreover, the sheer difficulty of compliance monitoring in welfare programmes may lead welfare bureaucrats to overemphasise this task, displacing concern for the overall programme goals (Ricciuti *et al.*, 2004).

Finally, without an effective payment mechanism, an income maintenance scheme cannot accomplish its stated objective, or will do so only with very poor target efficiency (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012). Hood’s work on tax administration again offers theoretical inspiration for our attempt to provide a framework for the administrative analysis of welfare schemes. Hood (1985, p. 24; 1986, p. 77) identifies the criterion of *conduitability* as ‘the property of being assessable and collectable through a relatively small number of surveillable channels or “bottlenecks” at which oversight can be economically applied’. Adapting this criterion to the payment of welfare benefits, we can say that an administrable income support grant is one whose payment channels are readily capable of reaching all intended beneficiaries.

Unfortunately, this cannot be taken for granted. In the UK, for example, it is estimated that in 2007/8 some 690,000 households, comprising 890,000 individuals, had no access to a basic transactional bank account (Financial Inclusion Taskforce, 2009). Moreover, these were overwhelmingly concentrated at the lower end of the income distribution. Even where individuals and households have access to basic banking services, many – again, including many of the poor – live in areas with no bank or building society, and no access to a free cash machine. While in extreme cases this might prove an insurmountable barrier to hard-to-reach groups such as the homeless or those without adequate proof of address, even in other cases it amounts to a significant transaction cost (a bus fare into town, or the payment of commission to a local fee-charging cash machine). Alternative payment systems, such as the cashing of benefit cheques in a local Post Office, face similar limitations (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012).

This would at first sight seem to pose a greater challenge to universal schemes, since by definition such schemes target a broader population of beneficiaries. It is, then, particularly regrettable that while Philippe Van Parijs admits that ‘there are administrative costs’, he peremptorily dismisses further administrative analysis, stating that ‘assuming a computerised and efficient tax-collection and transfer-payment technology, these are likely to be lower under a universal, *ex ante* scheme than under a means-tested, *ex post* one, at least for a given level of effectiveness at reaching the poor’ (Van Parijs, 2004, p. 20). Even if true, this misses the point, at least as far as the redistributive case for a basic income is concerned. The arguments for such a scheme typically appeal to UBI’s ambition to promote greater substantive (as opposed to nominal) universalism, rather than its ability to achieve outcomes as good as selective schemes at lower cost (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011).

Using Bureaucracy Sparingly

A belief in a politically neutral administrative design of a UBI would be tenable, provided it is possible to identify a first-best design with respect to each of the three tasks identified above. As it turns out, matters are a little more complicated, for the apparently simple canon of using bureaucracy sparingly can give rise to potentially conflicting interpretations (Hood, 1983). Adapting Hood’s approach to our specific context, we can distinguish two important ways in which UBI seeks to use bureaucracy sparingly.

In its first sense, using bureaucracy sparingly could be taken to imply administering an income support scheme using *minimal (governmental) resources*. On this interpretation, the best way of implementing an income maintenance policy is that which is least demanding of bureaucratic resources, for any acceptable level of performance. The concern here is specifically with the transaction costs faced by governments of defining, monitoring and disbursing a grant, not with the overall programme costs of a UBI (Offe, 2005).⁴ What makes administration costly is, on this view, the *collective* opportunity cost of government resources spent on implementing policy.

Turning to the three essential tasks, using bureaucracy sparingly in this sense might indicate a preference for a (nominally) unconditional scheme because it economises on the bureaucratic effort required to draft rules with adequate precision, and dispenses with the various tests identified by Claus Offe (2005). This, in turn, minimises deadweight loss and generally ensures that more of the resources earmarked for a programme end up with the recipients as opposed to being absorbed by the bureaucratic machinery. Using bureaucracy sparingly in the minimal resources sense is thus said to promote the *programme efficiency* of a policy. At the same time, however, applying this interpretation might put limits on the justifiable level of administrative effort in identifying or making payments to hard-to-reach beneficiaries, if the additional cost of doing so is judged to be excessive. When policy makers pragmatically trade off fulfilling policy objectives with the administrative and political costs of doing so, programme efficiency might conflict with *target efficiency* – the extent of coverage a particular programme achieves. What we deem justifiable depends, of course, on one’s normative perspective, and particularly on the priority one gives to administrative savings over the achievement of other policy goals, but this reality characterises the hard choices decision makers face when adopting the minimal resources approach to using bureaucracy sparingly.

A second sense of using bureaucracy sparingly requires that a basic income scheme is implemented with *minimal (personal) intrusion*. Hood (1983, p. 198) invokes Adam Smith's principle of public finance: taxes ought to be collected by imposing the least 'trouble, vexation and oppression' on the population. While much of the relevant debate focuses on intrusion in a strict sense, we adopt a more expansive notion that also includes the minimisation of inconvenience. Minimal intrusion thus not only captures the extent to which administration intrudes into the personal lives of claimants, but also the myriad of 'vexations' that often present themselves when individuals try to access a grant. These include navigating the complexity of the system, obtaining relevant information, and the effort at negotiating various stages of the application process (Van Oorschot, 1991; 1998). The minimal intrusion sense of using bureaucracy sparingly shares an affinity with Goodin's (1992) 'minimally presumptuous' approach to UBI. According to Goodin, simply allocating a grant without having actively to intrude or pry into claimants' lives and avoiding unnecessary complexities in the application process has a major impact on the target efficiency of basic income schemes. Like the minimal resources interpretation, this sense of using bureaucracy sparingly condemns highly selective schemes that require a high level of intrusion and are associated with a significant loss of privacy, which claimants consider demeaning and debasing (Handler, 2004; Van Oorschot, 2002).

Both senses of using bureaucracy sparingly are relevant for evaluating income support schemes. Each offers a clear perspective on why income maintenance policies ought to economise on administration, and provides an important criterion by which to evaluate the advantages of alternative UBI designs. However, as a guide to the design of income support schemes, the two senses frequently point in different directions, most obviously in cases in which removing barriers to access and take-up of a scheme can be accomplished only at the cost of expending considerable administrative effort or other resources. The *minimal governmental resources* approach to UBI would be satisfied with the removal of formal barriers and conditions for eligibility, even if beneficiaries found the application process intrusive and burdensome. The *minimal intrusion approach*, by contrast, would justify going to great bureaucratic lengths to achieve a truly universal scheme, provided such universalism could be accomplished by relatively unobtrusive means.

An Administrative Analysis of Basic Income

In this section, we undertake a systematic administrative analysis of UBI. Our discussion is arranged according to the three essential tasks outlined above, comparing the features of a UBI design that would most effectively satisfy each sense of using bureaucracy sparingly.

Setting Operational Standards

Offe (2005, pp. 71–2) expresses the prevailing belief that a UBI paid at the level of subsistence dispenses with four of the five key tests of conventional welfare policy – the means test, the needs test, the family test and the employment or employability test – leaving only nationality and residence tests. This, however, ignores the surrounding policy context, especially the need for such tests for the administration of other policies (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011). For example, means and family tests are customarily required to assess an

individual's tax liability. Furthermore, a UBI must be sufficient for recipients to lead a decent life without the need for additional income maintenance programmes that themselves require means or needs testing, for those tests to become redundant. Such a generous grant is hard to contemplate politically and most advocates insist on other income support programmes remaining in place (Haagh, 2011; Van Parijs, 2004). For most realistic proposals, therefore, *some* element of means and needs testing would have to remain.

Means, needs and work tests notwithstanding, the remaining nationality or residence tests still raise a number of issues. Nationality tests rely on the various mechanisms that determine and regulate citizenship in modern states, and would therefore seem to be preferable in terms of minimising governmental resources. For a residency test, on the other hand, 'the operational criteria may be, for non-citizens, a minimum length of past residency, or it may simply be provided by the conditions which currently define residence for tax purposes, or some combination of both' (Van Parijs, 2004, p. 7). Ironically, in an era of globalisation and regionalisation, the dismantling of the administrative apparatus for monitoring entry and exit from national territories (exemplified since 1985 by the Schengen Area of the European Union) may make a residency test increasingly difficult to administer. Just as the current move away from progressive income taxes is sometimes attributed to globalisation (Genschel, 2002; Hood, 1994, ch. 6), we might anticipate increased mobility to hinder the administration of universal benefits.

The latter point suggests that nationality outperforms residence in terms of practically defining eligibility for UBI. A nationality test would clearly economise on both the social costs of government resources and the private costs of personal inconvenience. But the question of congruence with underlying policy objectives also arises because different tests will typically produce different outcomes. Some countries have significant expatriate populations who, while satisfying the nationality requirement, may not be the intended beneficiaries of a national basic income scheme. Conversely, residency tests may lead to the sort of welfare migration discussed at length in comparative political economy (Borjas, 1999; Schram *et al.*, 1998). Such factors may impose prohibitive financial and political costs on the long-term feasibility of UBI proposals, and therefore selection of the 'correct' administrative measure is crucial.

Identifying Beneficiaries and Monitoring Compliance

In relation to the second task of welfare administration – gathering relevant information in order to identify beneficiaries and monitor compliance with the relevant standards and rules – again the accepted wisdom is that a UBI poses few administrative challenges because of its universal application across the population. However, UBI scholars often conflate a crucial administrative distinction: the fact that a universal grant does not require monitoring to *exclude* individuals from receiving the benefit does not solve the problem of producing a register of those to be *included* in the scheme.

Because it is intended to be universal, a UBI will typically require a cadaster of practically the whole population of the territory in which it applies. For countries that operate a national identity register or similar this will be relatively easy to accomplish (e.g. Belgium or Spain). But in many other countries the implementation of a UBI would have to rely on less encompassing, and typically less reliable, cadasters such as voter registers or social

security databases. These are often not nearly as universal as one might assume, and are therefore of only limited use for the task at hand. The voting register, for instance, typically excludes whole categories of people who would presumably be eligible for a UBI. Electoral rolls that depend on voters personally registering before an election would typically be inadequate for a substantively universal UBI.

In those circumstances it would appear that we have three available strategies. First, one could set up a cadaster from scratch, effectively registering every eligible individual in a population. This strategy faces immense implementation costs as well as high incidences of error. In particular, we may not easily be able to discover and correct false negatives. A second strategy would be to combine several extant cadasters in the hope that they will overlap sufficiently to achieve close to universal coverage. Besides familiar problems of joining up different administrative systems, the problem again is that there is no real way of knowing how much universal coverage is achieved. Furthermore, this approach suffers from a particular type of common-mode failure in that those most likely not to appear on any of the common cadasters are precisely those individuals or groups that UBI specifically targets – the homeless, for instance.

This last point also works against the third option, which is to use the most universal cadaster we have – say, a voting register – as a proxy, and accept that false negatives are inevitable. We could combine this approach with an option for individuals who find themselves not included to sign up actively to the register, a solution that externalises ‘cadasterability by proxy’. Of course, individuals who become eligible for a UBI have every incentive to inform the relevant authorities of their eligibility, and to provide the relevant evidence; but the reverse holds for those no longer eligible for a UBI (perhaps because they are no longer residents). Effective standard setting requires a means to remove such individuals from the relevant cadasters. More importantly, however, incentives as such do not guarantee that eligible individuals also have the relevant information to pursue their best option. Comparative policy research has demonstrated the negative effect on take-up rates of information barriers, particularly for vulnerable or marginalised social groups (Van Oorschot, 1991; 1998). To summarise, creating and maintaining a cadaster of all beneficiaries of a basic income scheme is a key challenge to UBI implementation (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012).

Disbursing Payments

The aim of a UBI disbursement mechanism is to ensure that *each* eligible person receives the grant to which he or she is entitled. Let us begin by examining a number of options for disbursing a UBI. One is the use of the tax–benefit system: UBIs are distributed as tax deductions with some reimbursement scheme for those with low tax liabilities (*a refundable tax credit*). This option raises a number of important questions, the most obvious being how we deal with those who do not work in the formal economy, or who otherwise may not have payroll tax deductions made to their salaries. More generally, given that most states assess taxes (and tax reimbursements) annually, policy makers must decide whether the UBI will be provided on a yearly basis (as is the case for Alaska’s Permanent Fund Dividend), after an assessment of tax liabilities, or whether to institute some advance payment mechanism with any overpayments clawed back through the tax system.⁵

The downside of the first option – an annual grant, disbursed after all tax liabilities are accounted for – is that it may impose significant burdens on those who most depend on a UBI. One very appealing argument in favour of UBI is precisely that it offers a secure floor throughout one's life, particularly for those at the bottom of the income distribution. This argument would strongly suggest that a UBI be disbursed in small regular instalments, rather than larger, less frequent payments. For those living at or near the poverty line, equal *monetary* value simply does not imply equal *practical* value.

A further problem with annual payments is that the precise amount of net UBI one receives after tax may be uncertain, as it depends on alternative sources of income (which could vary considerably for those in flexible or precarious employment) and one's overall tax liability, which is only settled at the end of the tax year. Those living at or near the poverty line may respond to such uncertainty by deferring part of their consumption for fear of not being able to afford it. This not only undermines the goal of income security, but also imposes constraints on the use of UBI that most advocates would find intolerable: preventing use of the grant as security for a loan, for instance.⁶ While the more serious problem is that poor people might defer spending on essential goods such as medicine, heat or nutrition, the opposite problem might also arise. Instead of deferring consumption, some individuals might consume on credit in anticipation of receiving a substantial UBI, which then could initiate a spiralling debt problem when the expected grant does not materialise.

The problem with the second solution – a regular income stream clawed back through the tax system – is that of 'churning', the pointless shifting of resources between different accounts (Offe, 2008). Churning not only incurs high administration costs but is also prone to error and frustration for UBI recipients. Of course one can conceive of compromise solutions. One example is Michael Opielka's proposal to grant every citizen a UBI entitlement, but one that only gets 'activated' after a person who thinks their income is insufficient to cover their needs puts in a formal application (cited in Offe, 2008). If at the end of the fiscal year it turns out that his or her income was higher than a previously agreed-upon threshold, part or all of the transfer must be paid back (see also Block, 2001, p. 87). But while the Opielka proposal prevents churning in a strict sense, it does not strike us as a good solution in so far as administrative costs are likely to remain excessive: the scheme requires close monitoring of those who have applied for the scheme to ensure that the terms of the scheme are complied with, which imputes considerable resource costs to both administrators and recipients as well as further intrusion costs on recipients. At the margin, this reduces the target efficiency of the UBI, notably with respect to those most in need of having the grant administered effectively.

An entirely different approach to disbursement is to provide every eligible individual with a 'basic income debit card', periodically topped up by the state and which the individual can use like any normal debit card to pay for transactions or withdraw cash (Standing, 1999, p. 369). This innovative scheme makes the delivery of a UBI to *all* publicly visible, and explicitly conforms to the ideal of nominal universalism outlined above. In addition, it would appear to avoid the sort of problems that might occur with tax-benefit integration. Although scoring high in terms of convenience, a basic income debit card would likely be very costly in terms of government resources, a fact conveniently ignored by those who advocate such a measure.⁷

Moreover, the lack of robust oversight mechanisms to ensure that all eligible beneficiaries *effectively* receive their UBI is a major concern from a public administration perspective: the inclination of UBI advocates to rely on the mere removal of barriers as the main pathway to achieving substantive universalism is seriously flawed as it fails to appreciate the extent of error that is part and parcel of implementation systems. There are two reasons to think the UBI faces considerable challenges (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012). On the one hand, monitoring the effective disbursement of a grant scheme that encompasses the whole population requires considerable administrative capacity and effort. Paradoxically, universal schemes may thus require *more* administrative effort than selective ones. On the other hand, because basic income does not imply repeated monitoring of eligibility conditions it has lost an important instrument to ‘cross-check’ whether payments are effectively received by beneficiaries (Hood, 1985, p. 25).

The choice between tax–benefit integration and a basic income debit card is instructive for illustrating the design choices surrounding the disbursement of a UBI. Consider further the choice between a single, universally accessible mechanism of disbursement, intended to cover all recipients, and employing a set of partially overlapping mechanisms each catering to different target groups. Which of these provides the most robust universal coverage is contingent on several aspects of the practical design, but some general considerations apply. One obvious concern is that of *complexity*, which always faces a risk of decreased target efficiency because error on both the supply and demand side is more likely: administrators and claimants alike are more prone to making mistakes (National Audit Office, 2005). But an equally important principle is that of *redundancy*, which allows for one system’s failure to be ‘backed up’ by another and thus prevents recipients from falling through the proverbial cracks. Where single systems perform well in terms of low complexity, multiple mechanisms benefit from improved redundancy and oversight, aiding disbursement to hard-to-reach groups. The evaluation of either scheme in terms of using bureaucracy sparingly is a complicated matter, but these insights reveal that when it comes to resolving this particular ‘bottleneck’, implementation of UBI again presents some hard administrative choices (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012).

The Limits of Administration and Basic Income Politics

The discussion of the previous section has shown that the well-known limits of administration familiar in existing programmes – including the control losses, diminishing returns and dilemmas discussed by Hood (2010) – also apply to the administration of UBI. At this juncture many would protest its relevance, since the limits of administration apply even more to selective welfare (or workfare) programmes. We do not generally dispute this assertion (but see De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011, for some important qualifications), but maintain that a failure to address these limits means that advocates cannot fully appreciate the constraints on implementing a UBI congruent with the reasons for instituting basic income in the first place. The way in which UBI design contends with these limits of administration fundamentally affects its overall political character. UBI administration is not simply a matter of addressing the residual technical questions in a politically neutral fashion, for the choice of a specific programme design impacts differentially on the set of winners and losers.

These distributive effects of UBI administration map closely on to the alternative senses of using bureaucracy sparingly discussed in the previous sections. On the one hand, the governmental resources expended in the administration of a UBI fall across the whole political community, in proportion to their contribution in taxes. On the other hand, the inconvenience and intrusion, *in extremis* the inability to secure a grant to which the claimant is in principle entitled, are likely to fall quite asymmetrically on the worst off. Not only are the barriers to accessing a grant typically more problematic for the worst off (the unbanked, the homeless, those in irregular employment or otherwise having difficulty demonstrating eligibility status), but the consequences of failure to receive a grant are far more severe. The design of a basic income scheme can often ameliorate or even remove such barriers, but at the cost of increasing bureaucratic resource demands. In these cases the design issues elaborated in the previous sections become *hard political choices* (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011).

It should come as no surprise that those who argue for UBI from different ideological positions end up supporting competing practical designs. Consider first the design of a UBI guided by a political principle that prioritises the position of the worst off in society. Such a design advances a clear *redistributive perspective* and garners support from many progressive UBI advocates, including Birnbaum (2012), Offe (2005; 2008), Standing (1999; 2002), Van Parijs (1992; 1995; 2004) and Wright (2004; 2006). Adopting such a position implies giving greater priority to using bureaucracy sparingly in its minimal intrusion sense since the relevant forms of intrusion and inconvenience fall disproportionately on the most disadvantaged claimants. This preference for minimal intrusion as the dominant design principle will be limited only by considerations about the sustainability of a scheme. The cost of adopting this position is that advocates of UBI need to give up on their ambition of achieving significant savings in the bureaucratic expense of a UBI (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011).⁸

We can contrast such a redistributivist UBI design with an approach that seeks the best possible balance of overall costs and benefits, with minimal direct consideration of distributive impact. This *aggregative model* is congenial to a broad range of non-distributivist UBI advocates, including utilitarians, libertarians and conservatives (Buchanan, 1997; Kliemt, 1993; Murray, 2006). While advocates of such a position might be expected to give *some* weight to the inconvenience or intrusion associated with a grant, individual difficulties or even outright failure by tolerably small groups to access their entitlements is easily outweighed by overall savings in the costs of bureaucracy benefiting the whole population. The aggregative model views diminishing returns from extra bureaucratic effort as one important limit of administration (Hood, 2010, pp. 530–1). We can illustrate the divergent political trajectories of the redistributive and aggregative basic income models in more detail by examining how they respond to administrative challenges in each of the three tasks analysed above.

First, concerning the choice of standards there is perhaps little real difference between schemes prioritising minimal resources over minimal intrusion: with some qualifications, we accept the force of Offe's (2005) argument that a UBI at subsistence level would require little in the way of governmental resources to administer and would also be minimally intrusive. It would appear that on pure administrability grounds, both senses of using

bureaucracy sparingly would favour the use of nationality over residency criteria, albeit for different reasons. But implementation must also take account of policy congruence, the extent to which the administration of a policy scheme matches its stated and implied goals (Diver, 1983). A commitment to an expansive basic income scheme that also covers long-standing permanent residents might justify more resources being spent on ensuring that eligible residents robustly benefit from the income security provided by the scheme, while equally accepting some level of inconvenience (perhaps even intrusion) as a necessary cost to achieve this goal. Inevitably, the conflict between both senses of using bureaucracy sparingly reappears as soon as we are faced with a choice between a more intrusive but cheaper process of determining appropriate residency: for instance, by requiring eligible non-national residents to carry all the costs of determining their entitlement status. Trade-offs between the minimising bureaucratic resources approach and the minimal intrusion perspective imply a political choice, with 'redistributive' and 'aggregative' UBI supporters seemingly committed to opposing positions.

In terms of information gathering and monitoring, our two senses of using bureaucracy sparingly start to push more clearly in different directions. The minimum resources approach would likely favour the use of existing cadasters, for this would incur few extra resource demands. The minimal intrusion approach would tend to argue for the establishment of new systems and databases where there is no adequate existing cadaster, provided this could be done with minimal intrusion. The choice implied by this position would be to adopt an approach whereby the state proactively registers all citizens, and ideally maintains a process of oversight to ensure that the resulting cadaster is accurate and reliable, or to opt for a mechanism of self-registration whereby citizens themselves are given the responsibility for ensuring they are listed on the relevant cadaster. Either system might work, but they might be expected to distribute the cost of administration, including the *reliability* of effectively receiving a UBI, in different directions. Considerations of cadasterability suggest that administrative choices are decidedly political, not merely technical, and here again 'redistributive' and 'aggregative' UBI supporters may part ways.

Similar considerations apply when we look at the third task of selecting robust disbursement mechanisms. For instance, while most people have a bank account, and can receive electronic payments, individuals who face financial exclusion are likely to be most in need of the income security that a UBI would provide. The two senses of using bureaucracy sparingly again point in different directions when it comes to how much effort a scheme should devote to make sure that all eligible individuals receive their entitlement. Advocates of the minimal governmental resources approach might be content as long as beneficiaries in principle have access to a grant, leaving individuals to negotiate for themselves the complexities of accessing a grant paid in the form most convenient to them. Those who argue for a UBI on the grounds of administrative savings to government presumably prefer payments to take the form of tax-benefit integration, even if this limits the practical value of the grant to individuals for the reasons of uncertainty discussed above. Supporters arguing for a UBI from the perspective of minimal intrusion are more likely to stomach the administrative costs of establishing a basic income debit card system, including additional efforts to ensure full and easy access to such a scheme.

Where the minimal resources approach attempts to save on administration by cutting redundant disbursement mechanisms, the minimal intrusion approach more likely favours a multiple-conduits approach, allowing individuals to choose between a bank transfer, a basic income debit card or a payment from the local Post Office or benefit office. On the other hand, when it comes to ensuring that eligible recipients have effectively received their grant we have argued above that a system of 'cross-checking' or 'reinforceability' (Hood, 1985, p. 25) may well be required along with retaining multiple conduits of payment disbursement. Here the minimal intrusion approach faces some particularly difficult decisions, as the most efficient system for cross-checking payments may resemble those already present in contemporary welfare states. Paradoxically, this would imply holding on to a sizeable part of the 'controlling bureaucracy', aversion to which attracts many advocates to a UBI. As with cadasterability, considerations of conduitability too necessitate political reflection to negotiate a number of hard choices.

As well as attracting support from differing ideological camps, the distribution of costs and benefits of alternative administrative design relates to the politics of UBI in one further important sense. Since Lowi (1964), an important line of thinking in public policy and administration has been concerned with elaborating how different constellations of support and opposition crystallise around different *types* of policy. Building on earlier work by Olson (1965) and Stigler (1971), James Q. Wilson (1980) argued that the level of concentration or diffusion of the costs and benefits of a policy is a key variable in determining the politics of different public policies. Applying this line of thinking, we can hypothesise that the success of an 'aggregative' UBI design is a matter of majoritarian politics, while the success of a 'redistributivist' UBI (entailing in comparison concentrated benefits and diffuse, but higher, costs) would depend to a far greater extent on policy entrepreneurship. While it is not possible to spell out the implications of this basic insight in detail here, our argument suggests a connection between the administrative design and the types of strategy best employed in advocating for a UBI. In this respect, again, UBI administration is inherently political.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, because of their reluctance to engage in administrative analysis, basic income advocates seem to end up implicitly adopting a 'Wilsonian' conception of administration, one that separates the realm of politics from the realm of administration, and which sees the role of the latter as one of neutral execution of policy established by the former (Wilson, 1887). This so-called 'transmission-belt' view of administration has long been regarded as untenable (Stewart, 1988). It is not merely that ignorance of the administrative factor leads UBI advocates to overestimate the administrative efficiencies of basic income (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011), or to ignore implementation challenges that may uniquely affect universal and unconditional income support schemes (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012), though these concerns are vital if UBI is ever to make it 'off the drawing board'. Our main argument here is to show that the administration of basic income is inherently political. Specifically, the political feasibility of basic income depends crucially on building a coalition of political support to overcome the almost visceral resistance among the general public and political entrepreneurs who are suspicious of a proposal that appears to give people something for nothing. To many sympathetic commentators, one key advantage has always

been UBI's apparent capacity to garner political support across the political divide (Barry, 1996a; Jordan, 2011; Van Parijs, 1992): by simultaneously speaking to many political constituencies in a way that addresses their respective core concern, UBI advocates apparently hope to advance to a point where its clear advantages overrule any lingering objections.

Administrative analysis of UBI sheds doubt on the likelihood that this political strategy would succeed. Such a strategy assumes shared agreement on the broad contours of the basic income proposal among the different political factions in a UBI coalition. Once we move to the implementation stage, however, broad agreement must be translated into numerous operational details. At this point, administrative challenges appear whose effective resolution often entails making the sort of 'hard political choices' that are part and parcel of policy making. These choices are *hard* because they emerge in a bureaucratic and institutional environment that invariably imposes constraints on the ability of a particular UBI design fully to satisfy all of its objectives. In other words, like any other policy, UBI must learn to live with (and within) the 'limits of administration' (Hood, 2010).

These choices are furthermore *political* for two important reasons. First, both the implementation constraints and the ways in which these can be negotiated imply not only that administrators prioritise which objectives to address, but more importantly that they trade off the interests of one group of beneficiaries against those of another. As we demonstrated in detail throughout this article, the apparently straightforward criterion of 'using bureaucracy sparingly' harbours two competing senses, in most cases forcing administrators either to impose costs on a selective minority (often the most disadvantaged members of society) or to spread (a larger amount) of implementation costs more broadly across the population. Evidently, UBI administrators are engaged in politics in the strict sense by determining who gets what, when and how. The fact that UBI administration entails these trade-offs brings us to the second reason why hard choices are political: depending on which set of objectives UBI bureaucracy prioritises (or which group of beneficiaries it favours), this will advantage one political faction in the UBI coalition over another. Once we adopt a perspective that takes the administrative factor in UBI implementation seriously, it becomes obvious that what looks like broad agreement on the contours of basic income among competing political factions rapidly disintegrates into competition over which *particular* UBI design (and associated implementation choices) to champion. In other words, administrative instability produces political instability. This is the key administrative challenge that UBI advocates must overcome.

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Notes

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- 1 As Jordan (2012) readily acknowledges, the 'low road' to UBI is fraught with many dangers. One goal of the present analysis is to emphasise the severity of these risks.
- 2 The latter group often features advocates who favour UBI because of its ability to harmonise and simplify the complex layers of social assistance that make up the bulk of modern welfare states. In this respect, we might regard the proposed reform of the tax-benefit system by the UK coalition government as a move in the direction of a UBI, although the emphasis on increased conditionality and getting people into work fits ill with the inclusive philosophy of UBI (Jordan, 2012).
- 3 One obvious implication of this strategy is to undermine the more exuberant claims for the administrative efficiency of UBI (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011).
- 4 Although many advocates of this perspective advocate budget restraint more generally, this is not a requirement of the minimal resources approach.
- 5 Although UBI itself is not liable for tax purposes, for high earners the grant is clawed back through tax liabilities on other sources of wealth or income. This makes UBI a redistributive scheme even when paired with a flat-rate tax (Van Parijs, 1992; 2004).
- 6 The possibility of such restrictions upon use undermines Van Parijs' (2004) argument that basic income and one-off basic capital grants are substantively equivalent.
- 7 In April 2003, as part of the UK government's efforts towards financial inclusion, the Department of Work and Pensions entered a contract (at the cost of more than £1 billion between 2003 and 2010) with the Post Office and J. P. Morgan Europe to provide the 'unbanked' with a Post Office Card Account (POCA). Payment of welfare benefits this way turned out to be one of the most expensive means of disbursements, with 80 per cent of the administration costs of paying benefits spent on less than a quarter of the recipients with POCA accounts (Allen, 2011). Despite the high costs, the services it provided were so limited that many felt access to POCA hardly amounted to 'financial inclusion'.
- 8 Even where administrative savings are not an explicit ambition of UBI advocates, the minimal resources sense operates as a practical constraint that cannot be ignored.

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The Struggle for Strategy: On the Politics of the Basic Income Proposal

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Policy interest in the basic income (BI) proposal is booming, but remarkably little attention is spent on systematically examining political strategies to build robust enabling coalitions in favour of BI. This article reviews two thorny problems that affect the coalition-building efforts of BI advocates: the *problem of cheap political support* suggests most BI support may be of little value to further its implementation, while the *problem of persistent political division* argues superficial agreement among committed BI advocates may mask persistent disagreement on which precise model to adopt. The article discusses the relevance of each of these problems for BI politics, employing both analytical arguments and brief illustrations taken from debates in various countries.

Keywords: basic income; coalition building; political disagreement; political strategy; political support

Introduction

The proposal to grant each individual citizen a right to a substantial income, without insisting on either a means test or a work requirement (Van Parijs, 1995 and 2004), has gained considerable momentum in the last decades. The basic income (BI) proposal has witnessed a remarkable surge in media and policy attention following the passing of a Citizen's Initiative in Switzerland in October 2013 proposing to give each adult citizen a monthly stipend of €2800.¹ Its passing commits the Swiss government to holding a referendum on BI, which has since become the subject of extensive political debate across Europe and beyond. A European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) ran from April 2012 to January 2014, and collected more than 285,000 signatures from EU citizens in 28 countries. While the ECI failed to meet its goal of one million votes, as required by the European Commission, the resulting mobilisation and media attention nevertheless raised the visibility of BI.² Outside of Europe, researchers associated with the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have just completed a large pilot project in Madhya Pradesh (India). Funded by UNICEF and with support from the regional government, this project is the first large-scale empirical examination of universal cash grants since the Negative Income Tax (NIT) experiments in the late 1970s (Davalala et al., 2014).

These three recent examples represent high-profile events, but political discussions about BI have taken place in the past decades in countries as diverse as Ireland, Spain, Brazil, Germany, South Africa, Iran, Finland and Japan (Caputo, 2012; Murray and Pateman, 2012). BI is enthusiastically embraced by social activists as a key component for emancipatory social change along 'real utopian' lines (Standing, 2014; Van Parijs, 2013; Wright, 2010). Its advocates claim positive effects on income security, unemployment, social inclusion, 'discretionary time' and flexibility across the life cycle, and even gender equality among the scheme's many

virtues (Birnbaum, 2012; Groot, 2004; Haagh, 2011; McKay, 2001; Offe, 2008; Standing, 1999 and 2002; Van Parijs, 1992, 1995 and 2004; Widerquist et al., 2013; Wright, 2004 and 2006). The current financial crisis has done little to dampen this enthusiasm; on the contrary, many social critics believe the BI model to be part of the solution in combating the devastating effects brought on by the collapse of financial institutions and the resulting economic depression (Standing, 2011a and 2011b).

This surge in academic and advocacy interest notwithstanding, BI thus far has not been implemented on a large scale. With the notable exception of Alaska, where since 1982 the Permanent Dividend Fund pays each resident around US\$1,000 per annum (Goldsmith, 2005; Widerquist and Howard, 2012), the international experience illustrates the widespread failure to build robust political coalitions capable of and willing to enact BI (Caputo, 2012).³ This mismatch between growing interest in the BI model and any real advancement on the ground raises deep questions about the politics of BI, and specifically about the political strategies required to build a robust enabling coalition. Unfortunately, BI political research has not kept up with the debate in the trenches. Descriptive case studies aside, our systematic political understanding of the various political constraints facing BI enactment and implementation, and the political strategies required to overcome these, remains seriously lacking (De Wispelaere and Noguera, 2012).

This article is an effort to contribute to our understanding of the politics of BI by reviewing two thorny problems that affect the coalition-building efforts of BI advocates. The *problem of cheap political support* argues many expressions of BI support may be of little real value in terms of moving basic income up on the policy agenda, and at times may even prove counterproductive. The *problem of persistent political division* insists superficial agreement among committed BI advocates masks considerable fundamental disagreement on which precise BI model to adopt, which hampers the process of building a lasting political coalition. The article briefly introduces each of these problems and discusses its relevance for the politics of BI. The goal is not to argue the merits (or lack thereof) of BI, but to draw attention to the political difficulties that even its staunchest supports must overcome.

The problem of cheap political support

When challenged about the political feasibility of BI, its advocates typically refer to numerous instances of individual politicians, political parties, social movements or interest groups (e.g. trade unions) who are on record as being supportive of BI. This response takes the form of a simple numbers game, in which the level of support for BI can be read off more-or-less directly from the instances of expressed support elicited from such individuals or organisations.

The idea that an increase in expressed support for a BI from a variety of social and political actors is directly conducive to building a sustained political coalition is flawed, however. The reason is that not all instances of expressed support for a policy imply a sustained commitment to promoting this policy.⁴ It is one thing for a social or political agent to express a sincere preference in favour of BI, but quite a different matter to actively canvass support among constituents, party members or like-minded associations and groups, build a shared platform across political factions, utilise scarce political resources (money, time and, above all, political capital) to further the cause, bargain and possibly compromise on other political goals, and so on. Expressed support without either the *commitment* or the

capacity to engage in the necessary political action to build a sustainable coalition around the policy of granting each citizen an unconditional BI is ‘cheap’ in the sense that it seems of little practical value to BI supporters.

Thus, we find much support for BI in individuals or associations that are often marginally positioned in terms of their ability to influence policy. For instance, Green politicians and parties across Europe typically support BI – it often features prominently in their election manifestos – but, leaving aside one or two exceptions, European Greens are small protest parties comfortably nestled on the political sidelines, opposing governing coalitions with little or no direct policy responsibility. Irrespective of the strong correspondence between BI and green values (Birnbaum, 2009; Van Parijs, 2009), political support from Green political parties offers BI advocates precious little as a genuine political platform to boost their cause. Occasional support for BI among certain trade unions (Vanderborght, 2006) faces similar obstacles. Here, too, it appears that those unions who support BI are either comparatively small in terms of membership (and thus political leverage) or else operate in a political system in which their policy influence is otherwise constrained; by contrast, larger unions who wield genuine power to engage in policy formation through a variety of corporatist mechanisms appear not to support BI. Trade union support for BI seems to bring BI advocates precious little bang for their proverbial buck. In short, counting instances of expressed support might boost the morale of those advocating BI, but it remains to be seen whether it produces any immediate effect beyond that.

One might object to this overly pessimistic analysis on the grounds that expressed support from currently marginalised individuals or groups should not be so lightly dismissed. For one thing, they keep the issue alive in the public imagination – a point I am happy to concede. In addition, those groups may one day be in a position to genuinely bring about policy influence, at which point BI support starts paying off in real terms. However, this argument hinges on the view that political support is ‘sticky’, whereby political factions that have once expressly supported BI would continue doing so when their power position improves. Unfortunately, there is little reason to think that groups who move up on the political ladder will necessarily sustain their support for BI. After all, in the absence of policy responsibility one’s support for BI is ‘cheap’ in a second critical sense: there are few political costs associated with supporting BI in an environment in which one is never put in the position of having to defend one’s support against a sceptical – at times even hostile – political base (Steenland, 2006). This is even more so when we consider that furthering the case for BI means precious political capital must be spent at the expense of other political objectives. The political opportunity cost of supporting BI once one has achieved a position of policy responsibility may simply prove too high to be politically sustainable.⁵

We can reasonably expect to find the very same parties or politicians who support BI while in opposition suddenly ditching their support when achieving office, whether as a majority government or as part of a governing coalition.⁶ We can find a poignant illustration of this dynamic in the recent controversy surrounding the newly minted radical Spanish party Podemos, which after only a year has surged in the opinion polls and is heading towards an electoral victory in the upcoming elections.⁷ Right from the very start, when the party burst onto the political scene, the leadership declared itself in favour of BI, but much to the consternation of its popular base, the economic policy document released late November 2014 downgraded BI to a long-term aspiration. A simple explanation is that the Podemos leadership, while being sincere in its appreciation of BI, is exceedingly aware of the need to reach

beyond its grassroots support to secure a firmer voting base. In this sense, dropping BI from its electoral manifesto constitutes a classic Downsian electoral move.⁸

We can see examples of cheap support also in the coalition politics of parties already in government. After persistent lobbying efforts from pro-BI groups such as CORI (Conference of the Religious in Ireland), the Irish government in 2002 committed itself to releasing a Green Paper on basic income, only to have it comprehensively sidelined soon afterwards (Healy and Reynolds, 2000). This strategy enabled the government, which at the height of the Celtic Tiger was constrained by social partnership agreements, to have its cake and eat it too by simultaneously assuaging some of its partners in favour of BI (if only temporarily), while nevertheless not having to face up to any of the costs associated with promoting the scheme in earnest. Another poignant example is the case of Brazil (Suplicy, 2005). Despite having enacted BI legislation a decade ago (Law 10.835 or *Lei de Renda Básica de Cidadania*, enacted in January 2004), a provision stipulating that implementation remains the budgetary prerogative of the federal executive branch effectively rendered the legislation moot (Lavinás, 2013). Here, too, the split between legislation and policy allows government to bypass any political costs associated with implementing BI, leading critics such as Lena Lavinás (2013) to aptly label it the 'lost road' to BI.

The fact that cheap political support for BI may not be sufficiently robust to survive a move by its supporters into a position of policy responsibility is not the only problem, however. Worse still, some instances of political support for BI may even be counterproductive as support from one particular faction may prevent others from endorsing the same policy. Because political factions often use identification with policy positions as an instrument to differentiate themselves from their (internal or external) political competitors (Cox and McCubbins, 2005), support for BI from Faction X may prevent Faction Y from endorsing a policy that would otherwise naturally fit their political profile. There may exist a 'first mover disadvantage' to BI that is associated with a political faction that is unable to move BI up on the policy agenda, when precisely this association prevents more powerful individuals or groups from offering valuable support. In this case, express support is 'noxious' to the case for BI. In some countries (e.g. Ireland, Namibia) BI is promoted by groups with a strong religious affiliation, which may well prevent non-confessional social movements or associations from expressing support. Similarly, BI advocates who adopt an entrepreneurial perspective may find it difficult to curry favour with factions endorsing strong socialist values. Both the entrepreneur Roland Duchâtelet, billionaire founder of the Belgian political party Vivant, and Götz Werner, the German owner of the DM-Drogerie Markt drugstore chain, are staunch promoters of BI (Liebermann, 2012; Vanderborght, 2000). However, advancing the cause from within a distinctive liberal economic perspective, both have faced repeated opposition from the progressive corners of the BI movement.⁹ Initial effects of the identification of BI with one specific faction, combined with the 'reactive reluctance' of other factions to support the policy because of such political identification, may produce a form of path dependency that causes BI to be *marginalised by association*.

The problem of cheap support, as outlined in this section, poses something of an impasse for BI advocates intent on building a robust political coalition. On the one hand, many (if not most) current instances of expressed support may be of little practical use, and in some circumstances could turn 'noxious' when support by some factions leads others to oppose BI. On the other hand, future support of any impact is unlikely in a political environment reluctant to spend political capital on a policy that remains highly divisive, both internally and

externally. This makes it difficult to ascertain whose support to seek, and – lest we forget – at what price. The underlying concern is that the very reason why political support is relatively easy to come by from ‘marginal’ political individuals or groups is also the reason why such support is of little value to BI advocates. For advocates intent on building a robust BI coalition, the main challenge is to find ways to get powerful political agents to express support and simultaneously ensure that such support is no longer cheap in either sense discussed above. This, in turn, implies political support should be accompanied by real political action to further BI, and for ‘reversals’ of BI support to incur political costs sufficiently high so as to make their political commitment to the cause more robust and reliable over time (Horn, 1995).¹⁰

The problem of persistent political division

A second challenge for BI advocates keen to establish a robust enabling coalition – an ‘ad hoc issue coalition’, in Mahoney’s (2007) words – follows from the deep and persistent moral and political tensions surrounding the BI proposal. Proponents make much of the fact that BI appears to gather support across the political divide (e.g. Barry, 1996; Torry, 2013), suggesting that progressives and conservatives may find substantial agreement on the basic idea of a BI despite their deep disagreement on general matters of principle and policy. In terms of building a stable coalition around the BI proposal, however, this apparent agreement across the divides is much less promising than BI advocates think.

The problem of persistent political division arises because the idea of a BI in its most abstract form, represented in the by-now classic definition of ‘an income granted by right without a means test or work requirement’ (Van Parijs, 1992), masks persistent disagreement by ignoring policy detail. The standard definition excludes many operational dimensions of the BI idea that need to be explicated and decided in full before moving from the general idea to an actual policy proposal. For instance, the choice of paying a BI on a monthly basis as part of a refundable tax credit, or once a year after the assessment of one’s tax liability has been conducted, is likely to impact differently on distinct groups of beneficiaries (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2011). And different political factions are likely to take contrasting positions on this matter, as argued in De Wispelaere and Stirton (2013). Or take the important question of the level of the BI grant, which Van Parijs (1995) emphatically insists *may* (but does not *have* to) match the poverty line. This is as straightforward a political issue as they come, in Harold Lasswell’s (1950) classic definition of politics as ‘who gets what, when and how’, and inevitably requires the political resolution of strongly opposing views.

These two considerations no doubt cause friction among the different political factions within a BI coalition, but even more serious opposition will arise when considering which programmes will have to be sacrificed in return for a broad commitment to support BI. Left-wing BI advocates (e.g. Raventós, 2007; Wright, 2006) will promote a larger level of BI as well as resist the rolling back of many support programmes, while supporters from the political right (e.g. Buchanan, 1997; Murray, 2006) are likely to insist on a smaller grant combined with a more extensive ‘recalibrating’ (i.e. abolition) of the existing welfare state. Turning our gaze away from the general idea of a BI and onto its policy detail shines a bright light on the deep ideological tensions inherent in different BI models. The resulting problem of persistent political division eats into the shared basis for building a stable and lasting coalition of progressive and conservative BI advocates.¹¹

Progressive BI advocates in particular seem attracted to this idea of a 'grand BI coalition' that includes both progressive and conservative supporters, in large part because they believe the progressive form would eventually emerge from the ensuing conflict over policy detail (Barry, 2001; Van Parijs, 2004). The strategy seems to rely on something like the 'veil of vagueness' (Gibson and Goodin, 1999), in which we deliberately hide policy detail to reach agreement at a higher level of generality – in this case, BI in its abstract form. Under a veil of vagueness we purposefully leave the detailed operational decisions to the next stage of political negotiation, possibly to be dealt with through administrative discretion (Huber and Shipan, 2002; Riccucci et al., 2004). The advantage of this strategy appears straightforward: by locking the idea of a BI in place, we have committed the different political factions of the grand coalition to a path that will likely deliver the full progressive version over time. This might be thought of as one form of the so-called 'backdoor strategy' to introducing BI, hailed by many advocates as the most realistic road to achieving a BI in the short or medium run (Jordan, 2012; Vanderborcht, 2005).

But what motivates such a strong faith in this strategy? After all, one can imagine many ways in which the process could be halted midway or even reversed in subtle ways (Jacobs and Weaver, 2014; Patashnik, 2008; Pierson, 2004). Consider the argument that a grand coalition in support of a participation income (Atkinson, 1996) will lead to a full BI over time as the complications of administering this close cousin of BI become apparent – a pathway explicitly considered by Brian Barry (2001) and Philippe Van Parijs (2004). Many BI advocates assume that, facing administrative complexity, policy makers will relax monitoring conditions surrounding the participation requirement such that over time a full BI comes into being. But an equally plausible scenario would be one in which participation requirements are restricted to those that fit existing bureaucratic capabilities, reducing the scope of the participation income to easily administered activities such as employment, full-time education or the formal care of a registered dependent (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2007). Instead of regarding what happens after initial agreement behind the veil of vagueness as something akin to the inevitable unfolding of history, we should remain aware that the operational detail of the BI proposal necessarily entails political negotiations in which the deep and persistent tensions between the different factions will re-emerge with a vengeance.

One further worry is that the policy that materialises after the general idea of a BI is agreed in principle may turn out to be even less desirable than the *status quo*. For instance, the institution of a BI at a level falling short of the poverty line, combined with the dismantling of assistance to the poor and vulnerable, is an outcome at odds with the progressive case for BI.¹² The proposal of Charles Murray (2006) would, for that reason, be entirely unacceptable to anyone supporting BI on progressive grounds. Progressives relying on conservative support for introducing a BI, while hoping to get away with any conservative 'by-products' by agreeing on the basic idea behind a veil of vagueness, are in fact buying into a high-risk strategy. For there exists an important asymmetry of power between progressives and conservatives that is highly relevant to the political strategy of starting a BI at a modest level and building up from there in a piecemeal fashion. In such cases, at each phase of the development towards a full BI, progressives must negotiate and possibly compromise on several aspects with their conservative partners. Conservatives, on the other hand, merely need to hold out, and at each point retain the power of vetoing the next step. The latter is an example of policy drift, a powerful mechanism by which deliberate non-decision allows political factions to exert policy change significantly over time (Hacker, 2004 and 2005; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

In sum, where political division is rife and persistent, building a grand coalition that combines the support of opposing ideological factions is a risky strategy with considerable political costs attached. Perhaps these costs are worth a fair chance of getting at the coveted price, but the risks should be carefully analysed.

The struggle for strategy – where next?

Policy advocates always face a struggle to pick the right political allies. In this article, two thorny problems have been reviewed that have a direct bearing on this ‘struggle for strategy’ for those working towards advancing BI. The first problem consists of the fact that much express support in favour of BI may end being cheap in at least two senses: on the one hand, it may be worthless (even counterproductive) in terms of its capacity to further the objective of instituting a BI; on the other hand, it may not amount to a genuine political commitment in the first place. It is suggested that these two senses are often related in a particularly problematic way: BI secures strong support from political agents that face few political costs in committing to a BI, but this lack of political cost is correlated to an ineffectiveness to deliver policy, and thus the support itself has little value.

The second problem arises when BI advocates are tempted to get into bed with those who are situated at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. That is to say, advocates of a particular BI model (be it progressive or conservative) may attempt to curry the favour of those who otherwise share only the flimsiest of views on matters of principle and policy, apart from a common perspective in favour of BI. However, it would be a serious mistake not to recognise the persistent political division underlying an apparent agreement behind a veil of vagueness, or not to appreciate the hard political negotiations required at each step of the development of a BI from idea to operational policy. There are good reasons to think the conservative factions in a grand BI coalition will resist the moves necessary to achieve a full progressive BI. Moreover, the structural constraints of the backdoor strategy for implementing BI appear to favour the bargaining position of the conservative factions, which means progressives would face an uphill battle to achieve anything like the BI model they are fighting for by adopting this strategy.

Where does this leave the political prospects for achieving a BI? Let me start by emphatically stating that none of what has been said here implies that BI is a radical utopia, a figment of the progressive imagination with zero chances of ever making it off the drawing board. True, BI is a proposal that radically challenges current orthodoxy in welfare policy and social security, and if implemented would reverse the direction taken in most welfare regimes in the last decennia. If only for these reasons, it is entirely to be expected that BI faces serious political hurdles (De Wispelaere and Noguera, 2012), but the existence of such challenges does not mean that they cannot be overcome. A key distinction between a radical utopia and what Erik Olin Wright (2010) calls a ‘realistic utopia’ is that the latter takes the practical conditions for its existence into account when formulating the ideal. In the context of BI, Philippe Van Parijs (2013, p. 173) has recently cautioned: ‘Utopian thinking is not to be confused with wishful thinking. It requires tough disciplining by a demanding, multidisciplinary scientific community in order to dissuade us from believing and asserting what we would like to be true but is not.’ This article argues in a similar vein that the eventual implementation of BI depends on its advocates taking politics more seriously and particularly on adopting a critical approach to discovering which strategies would be most effective in furthering their cause.

Within this broad real-utopian framework, BI research and advocacy ought to give considerable attention to the politics of coalition-building. In light of the two problems surveyed, this paper offers two important insights. To begin with, it urges caution against adopting a political strategy of indiscriminately embracing any individual or group who appears to support BI. The alternative strategy of carefully seeking out one's political allies may prove more beneficial in the long run, even if it appears to dampen the prospects of instituting a BI in the immediate future. In other words, instead of hopping on any political bandwagon that happens to cross their path, BI advocates need to develop a careful strategy that allows them to grasp real opportunities as they arise, while simultaneously shaping the policy and political environment to promote the emergence of such real opportunities. Furthermore, this article also cautions against indiscriminately endorsing the backdoor strategy to politically promoting BI. While there is a lot to be said for moving ahead in an incremental fashion (but see Goodin, 1982), a clear awareness of the political pitfalls along the road will certainly improve the prospects of arriving at the destination. Here, too, taking a realistic stance is a *condition sine qua non* for furthering the cause of a proposal that many scholars, activists, policy makers and political entrepreneurs regard as the leading alternative for recalibrating a world characterised by insecurity, inequality and exclusion.

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Notes

1 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/04/us-swiss-pay-idUSBRE99300620131004>.

2 <http://basicincome2013.eu/>

3 A second (by all accounts peculiar) variant of basic income is found in Iran, where the government in December 2010 embarked on a five-year programme of reforming its system of price subsidies combined with a universal compensatory cash transfer programme (Tabatabai, 2012).

4 For a sustained analysis of 'the commitment problem' between constituents, legislators and bureaucrats from a transaction-cost approach, see Horn (1995).

5 On the conditions making it advantageous for interest groups to join an alliance, see Salisbury et al. (1987), Hojnacki (1997) and Mahoney (2007).

6 And we may plausibly expect a similar scenario in relation to trade unions who become more powerful over time, particularly given their internal division about BI because of the strong labourist philosophy inherent to most unions. Despite a general decline in traditional labourist values and class-based solidarity, references to 'hard-working families' are rife in European politics and rapidly adopted by the political right (Deeming, 2014).

7 <http://blogs.ft.com/the-world/2014/11/spanish-polls-show-podemos-surge-is-no-aberration/>

8 Recent research in agenda-setting within political parties suggests a more sophisticated explanation. Rigby and Wright (2013) argue that even the policy platforms of parties that explicitly represent the 'have-nots' end up being more responsive to upper-class policy preferences. 'We suspect this differential responsiveness begins very early in the policymaking process – at the point in which political parties aggregate diverse constituent preferences and advance a policy platform on which to run for election' (Rigby and Wright, 2013, p. 552).

9 Progressive opposition takes issue, for instance, with the particular funding method proposed by both Duchâtelet and Werner: a value added tax.

- 10 Within the perspective pioneered by Mancur Olson (1965), one obvious solution would be to employ selective benefits to joining the basic income camp. The main question then becomes what sort of selective benefits a basic income movement could offer to political parties, organisations or movements. The work by Marie Hojnacki (1998) on reputation as a mechanism for countering freeriding within interest groups may point us in the right direction. I am grateful to Joe Soss for bringing Hojnacki's work to my attention.
- 11 The ideological division between conservative and progressive BI advocates is instructive, but of course internal difference or disagreement need not have an ideological basis (Bystydzienski and Schacht, 2001). I am grateful to a referee for this point.
- 12 This is one reason why BI advocates appear loathe to accept the recent reform of British income support through the Universal Credit as a genuine road towards a full basic income (as suggested, for instance, by Jordan, 2011 and 2012), despite sharing some design features.

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The stability of basic income: a constitutional solution for a political problem?

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Abstract: Although basic income has surged in policy interest in recent years, political research has not kept up with the debate in the trenches. In this article, we tackle a political problem any enacting coalition must face: how to ensure the political stability of a basic income over time. We first demonstrate how basic income schemes are particularly vulnerable to processes of policy change discussed in the recent policy feedback literature. We then analyse whether constitutionalising basic income in a Bill of Rights protected by strong judicial review would offer a valuable route for boosting basic income's stability. A careful examination of the decision-making process within judicial review suggests that, caught up in a dilemma between judicial restraint and judicial activism, an enacting coalition would do well not to rely on constitutional mechanisms as the sole avenue for ensuring the political stability of basic income.

Key words: basic income, constitutional rights, judicial review, policy feedback, political stability

Introduction

Basic income is typically defined as an individual's entitlement to receive a regular unconditional payment, independent of other sources of income (or wealth), employment or willingness to work, or living situation (Van Parijs 1992, 1995). Although detailed schemes for basic income show considerable variation (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2004), three core features set it apart from familiar income maintenance programmes such as social insurance or social assistance. First, rather than focussing on a household as the target unit (Atkinson 1998), a regular basic income is calculated

and paid out to each (adult) individual. Second, basic income is universal rather than targeted, resembling universal health coverage in some jurisdictions. Although discussion persists on whether to focus on citizens or also include long-term residents, and on whether to restrict access to children or prisoners, basic income's coverage exceeds that of any existing income support scheme (Van Parijs 2004). Third and most controversially, basic income eschews the eligibility conditions present in the vast majority of welfare programmes: it does not require a means or income test; it is independent from work or willingness-to-work conditions; and it refuses to impose restrictions on the use of the basic income grant (Dowding et al. 2003).

Basic income has witnessed a remarkable surge in media and policy attention following the passing of a Citizen's Initiative in Switzerland in October 2013 that proposes to give each adult citizen a monthly stipend of €2,800.¹ The Swiss Initiative is a uniquely high-profile event, but similar political discussions have taken place in countries as diverse as Ireland, Spain, Brazil, Germany, Namibia, South Africa, Iran, Finland, India and Japan in past decades (Caputo 2012). Proponents claim positive effects on income security, unemployment, social exclusion, "discretionary time" and flexibility across the life cycle, and even gender equality among the scheme's many virtues (see, for instance, Van Parijs 1992, 1995, 2004; Standing 1999, 2002; McKay 2001; Groot 2004; Wright 2004, 2006; Offe 2008; Haagh 2011; Birnbaum 2012). Unfortunately, political research has not kept up with the booming policy interest in basic income. Although we know a great deal about the ethics and economics of basic income (Van Parijs 1992; Widerquist 2005, 2013), scholars have only recently started to focus in earnest on the political constraints impeding this proposal or the political strategies required to get basic income moving up on the policy agenda (Van der Veen and Groot 2000; De Wispelaere and Noguera 2012).

This article contributes to the political analysis of basic income by examining the specific question of the *political stability* of basic income. Our interest is in the continued enactment of an unconditional basic income scheme, taking for granted the existence of an enacting coalition at present. It might be thought premature to worry about stability in the absence of a strong probability that basic income could be enacted in the near future. Our view is that, if we are to take the politics of basic income seriously, we also need to concern ourselves with its stability over time.²

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/04/us-swiss-pay-idUSBRE9930O620131004>. A similar European Citizens' Initiative ran from April 2012 to January 2014 and collected more than 300,000 signatures in the European Union (www.ubie.org).

² Scholarly discussion about stability in relation to basic income focusses almost entirely on the motivational question: how to ensure that basic income recipients do not withdraw *en masse* from

Stability-proofing basic income requires concessions and compromises that need to be mapped out well in advance of attempts at legislation. The lack of any awareness, let alone sustained analysis, of stability as a consideration in basic income policy development is a serious oversight. In addition, whereas political stability is a problem basic income shares with most policy schemes, its unique design offers an opportunity to further examine and refine existing research in policy stability and change.

This article has two aims. To begin with, we examine the susceptibility of basic income to processes of transformative or gradual change (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Political stability is conceptualised in terms of two desirable properties: *resilience* and *robustness*. Resilience refers to the ability of a policy to resist pressure for programme change, resulting either in radical abolishment/replacement or in gradual changes that significantly alter key characteristics of the policy.³ Robustness (“functional resilience”) concerns the ability of a policy to deliver on its intended goals. A policy that lacks robustness may never experience change in legislative rules and regulations, but, nevertheless, fail to deliver the desired outcome.⁴ The next section outlines four processes that may affect the political stability of basic income, thus conceived: *replacement*, *layering*, *conversion* and *drift*.

Secondly, we critically evaluate one strategy for boosting basic income’s stability: *constitutionalising basic income*. We start our analysis by outlining several reasons why a political coalition in favour of enacting basic income would want to constrain future policy change by enshrining the policy in a Bill of Rights protected by strong judicial review. Drawing on a large literature in jurisprudence and constitutional law, we argue that constitutionalising basic income is not as straightforward a solution as its advocates believe it to be. Judicial review crucially depends on judges interpreting key provisions entailed by a constitutional right to basic income in a manner that conforms to the intentions of the enacting coalition. In reality, as we outline below, constitutional judgements may depart considerably from those views, which in turn suggests that the judicial review process offers insufficiently robust protection of a constitutional right to basic income as envisaged by the enacting coalition.

the labour market (Pérez Muñoz 2014)? In our view, the stability problem has a broader remit than ensuring sufficient motivation to work (De Wispelaere and Noguera 2012).

³ This precludes any type of “adaptive changes” that do not fundamentally change the nature of the programme. Adaptive changes are both inevitable and serve an important purpose in a dynamic social environment. For this reason, the concept of stability as “constancy” is of no interest to policy design (Hansson and Helgesson 2003).

⁴ Insofar as robustness is a result of political decisions, or even “non-decisions”, it constitutes the hidden face of political stability (Hacker 2004, 2005).

The stability problem: robustness and resilience

Following the path-breaking work of Pierson (1993, 2004), the question of how, why and when policies undergo or resist major transformation has become a central topic of political research (Thelen and Steinmo 1992; Clemens and Cook 1999). Policy change can take the form of a radical transformation, a sudden policy shift that significantly alters the political landscape in a single legislative sweep by *abolishing* an extant programme or *replacing* it with a competitor. More often, however, policy change will take a gradualist or incrementalist approach, employing subterranean political processes such as *layering*, *conversion* or *policy drift* (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Although these processes affect all social policy, we believe basic income is particularly susceptible to each of these.

Basic income and resilience: replacement

The most obvious immediate threat to basic income's political resilience is when a current government faces new circumstances (e.g. a severe budgetary crisis) or a newly elected government decides to legislate against basic income in favour of more selective welfare programmes. According to Pierson (1993), wholesale policy replacement is difficult to realise because policies themselves produce positive feedback that make them resistant to change. Policies exhibit path dependence: "[o]nce actors have ventured far down a particular path, they may find it very difficult to reverse course" (Pierson 2004, 10–11).

We appear to find an example of such path dependence in the case of Alaska's Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD), where since 1982 each resident has received an equal share of the returns to a publicly owned investment portfolio funded by the state's oil revenue (Widerquist and Howard 2012). Once instituted, the PFD has proven remarkably popular and resilient. As Goldsmith pointedly relates, in Alaska today it amounts to "political suicide to suggest any policy change that could possibly have any adverse impact today, or in the future, on the size of the PFD" (2005, 558). The success of the Alaska Dividend may be due largely to local idiosyncrasies, however. Highly contingent factors such as a funding source that "fell from heaven", experience with excessive squandering of public resources in the recent past and even the geography of the State in the far North of the continent (curbing "welfare-magnet immigration") all may count towards its political stability. The interesting question is whether generalisable positive feedback mechanisms such as incentive effects, information effects

and learning effects (Pierson 1993) readily apply to the basic income proposal.

Formally basic income hands each citizen an equal entitlement, but this formal universality betrays the sense in which some are net beneficiaries and others are net contributors and, more importantly, that “the relation between winners and losers is clearly visible” (de Beus 2013, 332). In line with Baldwin’s (1990) influential account of complexity producing social solidarity, the increased transparency of a basic income celebrated by its staunch advocates is likely to reduce its political resilience, in particular when the critical support of the middle classes (Korpi and Palm 1998) cannot be taken for granted.⁵ Equally, although basic income is often lauded as not requiring a large bureaucracy for its implementation (Standing 1999; Offe 2005), this very fact may endanger its subsequent resilience by not being able to count on a powerful bureaucratic constituency to mobilise against future political pressures for change (Skocpol 1992; Béland 2010). An inability to build up a critical mass of beneficiaries with a strong interest in the continuation of the programme is arguably what allowed the UK Coalition Government to abolish the Child Trust Fund, a scheme with strong similarities to a basic income, within its first week in office.⁶ Similar problems may hamper information or learning effects, culminating in an insufficiently robust policy “lock-in”.

In addition to the absence of positive feedback, we also must consider the presence of negative or self-undermining feedback effects that play out over time as “initially bearable irritants may remain in place for a long time – and may grow in their impact until they do undermine the stability of a policy regime” (Weaver 2010, 139–140; also Jacobs and Weaver 2014). One way in which negative feedback can affect basic income’s resilience is when costs associated with basic income progressively become more *salient to*, or more *concentrated within*, the population. Costs may become more salient where supporters of basic income come to realise (or perhaps mistakenly believe) that they are no longer benefiting from a basic income. Early supporters may have initially accepted the basic income scheme under the assumption that it would protect them against particular social risks, but over time find themselves in a position where they appear no longer vulnerable to such risks. Alternatively, the basic income may turn out not to

⁵ This point is particularly relevant where basic income is said to benefit both those suffering economic disadvantage (low income) and economic insecurity (high social risk), and where both groups largely coincide with one another. Rehm et al. (2012) suggests this importantly narrows popular support for a welfare programme.

⁶ The Child Trust Fund each year covered more individuals, but failed to produce Pierson-type positive feedback effects because the time horizon between entitlement and actual consumption was too long.

protect against as broad a range of social risks as initially thought, perhaps because the level of the grant has considerably depreciated. The perceived concentration of the costs of a basic income scheme among “well-defined and tightly networked groups” (Jacobs and Weaver 2014, 10) will likewise increase political opposition.

The cultural framing of basic income receipt in terms of cultural categories of deservingness (van Oorschot 2000) represents a further source of negative feedback effects. Basic income is vulnerable to “symbolic contamination”. In cases where the public and elites retain a moral distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, the lack of “programmatic boundaries” separating these different categories means the “morally tainted status” of one class of recipients ends up polluting those regarded as more deserving (Steenland 2006, 1286), reducing the latter’s willingness to mobilise against abolishment or replacement of the programme even where material benefits are present. At that time, “deserving” net beneficiaries and net contributors would join in pressuring politicians to explore alternative options, expanding the menu of options and the possible coalitions, to replace the basic income policy (Jacobs and Weaver 2014).

Basic income and resilience: layering

Where multiple institutional veto players are at play, policy replacement is not a viable political option. However, political resilience can also be threatened through a gradualist process. Layering is a process whereby new rules are grafted onto an existing policy, leading to policy change over time through a process of differential growth (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Such additional layers may initially appear innocuous and only over time become threatening to the extant policy framework, by which time they too are institutionally embedded. Layering causes two types of problems. First, competing policy layers may interfere with the smooth running of the original scheme, reducing its effectiveness – strictly speaking, a robustness problem. Second, they may siphon off public and political support as they become more important or salient (Streeck and Thelen 2005). Layering gradually hollows out policy from the inside out by depleting its political oxygen.

At first sight, a universal and uniform basic income may appear immune to layering. In reality, layering may reduce the resilience of basic income policy in two ways. First, most proposals envisage basic income only partially replacing social support programmes. Basic income is customarily regarded as a floor upon which categorical or targeted benefits are built (Van Parijs 1992). The rate at which a basic income scheme is substituted for extant programmes depends primarily on the level of the grant, with generous proposals rendering a larger share of support programmes

redundant. In some cases, advocates consider a “partial” basic income pitched below the poverty line as a necessary first step, which would require keeping a large number of programmes in place. However, even when basic income reaches a generous level, targeted programmes such as unemployment insurance, pension supplements or disability assistance would still operate alongside it. Although this additional layer of support programmes has the advantage of offering a more robust level of protection to the disadvantaged, it also entails a constant source of political competition for budgetary and organisational resources. Political opponents of basic income, instead of pushing for radical transformation, may gradually redirect resources away from the unconditional and universal scheme towards the means-tested and categorical layers.

Second, instead of merely diverting resources from one layer to another, political opponents could proactively introduce a new layer of support programmes, which would be hard to resist politically. For instance, White (2003) has proposed a two-tier hybrid model comprising of a generous but conditional “development grant”, directed towards supporting socially useful activities such as education or a business start-up, combined with an unconditional but time-limited (and much less generous) basic income. Another hybrid version could pay out a lifetime basic income account on a regular basis with some conditions attached, while retaining a smaller part as a time-limited but unconditional grant to be withdrawn by the recipient at will. Although White (2003) regards these two tiers as largely complementary, in a fiscally constrained policy environment both tiers are equally likely to end up competing over the budget. Over time, this competition would again hollow out the support and resilience of the basic income policy while bypassing any political veto points. In short, because basic income in almost all proposals features as part of an income support package, layering represents a serious long-term stability challenge.

Basic income and robustness: conversion

Both replacement and layering directly affect the political resilience of a policy. Two further processes instead affect policy delivery (or robustness) leaving the policy framework essentially intact.

Conversion is a mechanism whereby existing policy is redirected towards new goals or purposes, or to fit the interests of new actors, by exploiting the gap between those who design policy and those who are in charge of enacting it on the ground (Streeck and Thelen 2005). Policies vary extensively in how much operational discretion they grant street-level bureaucrats, but some level of bureaucratic discretion is unavoidable

(Lipsky 1980; Riccuci et al. 2004). If street-level bureaucrats are given the power to interpret regulations in a strict or lax manner, to decide on enforcement or sanctioning, and even to shift budgetary or organisational resources between policy goals, the resulting policy outcome may look very different from what the legislator intended.

The basic income debate has failed to appreciate the importance of conversion, largely because administration has become a blind spot due to the assumption that instituting a basic income requires little or no administration. Although basic income implementation is far less cumbersome than the myriad of complex welfare schemes currently in place, recent research has, nevertheless, shown turning a blind eye to persistent administrative challenges is cause for concern (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2011, 2012, 2013). Not only does enacting basic income raise its own distinctive implementation problems, competing administrative solutions to resolving these problems are distinctively political by favouring different sets of winners and losers. For instance, whereas basic income is nominally universal – as all citizens are formally entitled to receive the basic income grant – ensuring that all also effectively receive the basic income they are entitled to requires considerable administrative effort, including maintaining a comprehensive, population-wide “cadaster” and instituting robust payment channels that reach all those eligible. Or, consider the administrative process for detecting and rectifying implementation errors, where the choice between “fire alarm” or “police patrol” types of oversight (Lupia and McCubbins 1994) implies shifting monitoring costs from administrators onto recipients. When implementing basic income, bureaucrats have a range of choices to consider that entail weighing different policy goals within the existing rules, potentially converting the resulting policy outcomes from what was originally intended. Over time, the culmination of relatively discrete implementation choices may seriously affect the robustness of the basic income policy as originally envisioned.

Basic income and robustness: policy drift

Policy drift is a mechanism whereby legislators deliberately fail to update a particular policy in line with changing circumstances, resulting in an inability over time to fulfil its initial goals or to cover new risks (Hacker 2004, 2005).⁷ Drift is different from the three processes discussed before in that it relies on *purposeful inaction*, or what Hacker refers to as “non-decisions”. Policies are dynamic and always require small adaptations to

⁷ Although policy drift can occur “naturally” through a failure to appreciate relevant background circumstances, Hacker (2004, 2005) insists the failure to respond appropriately is more often a political decision.

accommodate changing policy environments. Policy drift arises when an extant policy framework no longer matches up with the external environment, and fails to respond appropriately to the social risks it is meant to alleviate. The main advantage of drift as a mechanism of policy change is that, instead of having to overcome veto points, it either bypasses them altogether or deploys them to forestall policy amendment. Although superficially it looks like policy is left unchanged, in practice policy effectiveness and robustness have been compromised.

Thinking through the design of a basic income policy suggests the scheme is highly vulnerable to policy drift. The two overarching parameters that determine basic income's outcome are, on the one hand, the level of the grant and, on the other, the extent of coverage. Regarding coverage, as was already discussed in the previous section, universal implementation may require devoting considerable bureaucratic resources to ensuring those entitled effectively receive their grant. Drift in this respect may simply entail political opponents blocking the necessary expansion of administrative resources to secure universal coverage, without in any way altering basic income's nominally universal reach. Drift will play an equally important role in adapting the level of the grant to match evolving social circumstances. For starters, basic income needs to accommodate inflation. Unless an automatic indexing mechanism is included in its initial design (Weaver 1988), the updating of the budget will be easily blocked. In addition, the level of basic income may also require updating to compensate for changes elsewhere in the welfare state safety net: picking up the "slack" when other programmes are failing in terms of coverage or effectiveness, for instance. Resistance to updating the budget may not only run counter to the policy rationale underlying the basic income proposal, but furthermore negatively impact on its robustness.

Brazil provides a telling case of how failure to update from the very start renders basic income legislation void. Under the tireless impetus of São Paulo Senator Eduardo Suplicy Matarazzo, President Lula da Silva enacted Law 10.835 in January 2004. The *Lei de Renda Básica de Cidadania* grants each Brazilian citizen or foreigner with more than five years of residency a Citizen's Income sufficient to meet the minimum expenses of food, education and health regardless of socioeconomic condition.⁸ Brazil's Citizen's Income immediately became marred, however, by a provision stipulating that implementing Law 10.835 is subject to a budgetary constraint, which is the prerogative of the federal executive branch (Lavinias 2013, 30). This effectively rendered the legislation hostage to successive governments' refusal to provide the necessary budgetary resources, relegating Brazil's

⁸ http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2004-2006/2004/Lei/L10.835.htm.

basic income to little more than scrap paper (Lavinás 2013). Brazil's experience can be understood as an extreme case of policy drift, where the failure to follow-up on the next stage of policy development prevents a policy from leaving the starting blocks.

Why a constitutional right to basic income?

The processes of replacement, layering, conversion and drift described above all threaten the political stability of basic income over time. Political and institutional conditions constrain which of these processes will be readily available to basic income's political opponents (Hacker 2004, 2005; Streeck and Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010), but generally speaking political stability remains a serious concern. In this section, we briefly review several reasons a basic income coalition would want to consider employing constitutional mechanisms to secure policy stability. Note that these reasons apply to the constituent members of the enacting coalition, independent of the particular reasons why each faction favours a basic income.⁹

When policy consumers – voters as well as organised interest groups – value a policy objective, “they often care not just about winning a near-term gain but about creating an enduring stream of policy benefits” (Jacobs 2010, 99). This general policy precept arguably applies even more to a policy such as basic income, precisely because long-term security either is a stated goal (Standing 1999) or else constitutes a precondition for obtaining other goals, such as promoting autonomy, work-life balance or gender equality (Widerquist et al. 2013). In short, each cohort of basic income proponents has a strong reason to ensure they receive a basic income grant for the *duration of their lifetime*. Moreover, as generational cohorts overlap, this argument in principle extends the expected shelf life of a basic income scheme into perpetuity. In addition, many advocates argue for basic income as a matter of justice, which adds a reason to extend the policy across generations. Van Parijs, for instance, argues that our policy ought to be consistent with “everyone in the present generation getting the highest sustainable basic income, and [it] must benefit everyone in the next generation in the form of a basic income that is at least equal to the present one” (Van Parijs 1995, 40). Put together, these two arguments offer strong reasons to ensure basic income policy is not short-lived.

⁹ The level of generality implied here bears some similarities to Buchanan's (1997) views on “generality as a constitutional constraint”. Buchanan (1997, 171) maintains that a basic income (demogrant) constitutes a legitimate reconciliation between welfare transfers and the generality norm.

But why address the stability problem through the mechanism of constitutional protection? Why take the extra step of constitutionalising a right to basic income when we could institutionalise it “embedded in legislation and enforceable in ordinary public law before the courts and tribunals” (King 2012, 19)? One reason is that constitutional protection seems singularly apt to counter each of the four threats to political stability listed above. First, a constitutional right to basic income would constitute a strong veto point blocking any attempt at outright *replacing or abolishing* basic income legislation, requiring a supermajority to overrule its enactment – at least in jurisdictions comprising a so-called rigid constitutional model (Ferrerres 2000). Second, constitutional intervention would also counter *layering*: whereas courts may allow the legislation of additional policy layers, they can disrupt the subsequent shifting of resources from basic income to its competitors. Third, constitutional protection would also protect basic income against *conversion*, for example, by safeguarding against implementation practices falling below the level of universality guaranteed by the imputed right to basic income. Fourth, a constitutional right to basic income finally offers petitioners the means to challenge failures to updating policy in accordance with constitutional rights provisions, countering *drift*. The apparent ability of a single institution to robustly protect basic income against a range of processes that impede its stability counts in its favour.

A second reason for embracing the constitutional route is that an enacting coalition that strongly values basic income – whether on prudential or justice grounds – presumably by default also favours its *maximal* protection. Western liberal democracies have a long tradition of insulating its most cherished rights and freedoms (e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of movement, right to education) from the decisions of legislatures or the executive. The presumption is that courts are uniquely placed amongst the institutions of government to balance individual rights against the political pressures of the collective.

Constitutional protection comes in many forms and degrees. In some jurisdictions constitutional rights are not subject to judicial review at all.¹⁰ Other jurisdictions incorporate their constitutional rights in a process of judicial review, distinguishing between *weak* and *strong* models (Sinnott-Armstrong 2003; Tushnet 2004; Dixon 2007). Canada is an oft-discussed example of the former. The Canadian “notwithstanding clause” gives government the legal power to overrule the Canadian Charter

¹⁰ The Spanish Constitution, for instance, recognises the right to health and the enjoyment of adequate and decent housing, but these rights are nevertheless excluded from the protection of the Constitutional Court (Spanish Constitution Art. 39–52).

of Rights by legislating “notwithstanding” the constitutional court’s negative opinion (Kahana 2002). Although weaker forms of judicial review impose constraints on the legislator or the executive, critics often insist on a more robust approach. In such a scenario, an enacting coalition could enshrine a right to a basic income in a Bill of Rights, and subsequently have it protected by a constitutional tribunal or a Supreme Court that has the power to overrule legislative decisions, *with immediate and final effect* (Kramer 2001, 6). This strong judicial review model gives courts the power to hold government accountable but equally provides individual petitioners with a remedy in case the state breaches its constitutional mandate. In the remainder of this article, we focus on the strong model of constitutional protection and examine several problems that arise when thinking through the idea of a constitutional right to a basic income. The next section addresses the problem of how to specify the precise constitutional provision to be inserted into a Bill of Rights.

Constitutionalising basic income: type or token?

Three decades ago, the legal scholar John Hart Ely pointed out that “constitutional provisions exist on a spectrum ranging from the relatively specific to the extremely open-textured” (Ely 1980, 13). This observation applies directly to our case, for we can discern two distinct ways of conceiving of a constitutional right to basic income. On the one hand, we can think of basic income as a general framework consisting of a set of core principles – that is, *universality*, *individuality* and *unconditionality*. On the other hand, we can also describe basic income as a *family* of specific models, each of which comprises a detailed policy programme that fills out the “blanks” left open in the general framework approach (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2004). Where the former approach views basic income as a policy *type*, the latter regards it as a set of *tokens* instantiated within a given type. The key question is whether to constitutionally protect “type” or “token”?

Following Kelsen (1928), constitutional theorists appreciate the virtue of clear and accurately written constitutional provisions. Kelsen’s approach speaks in favour of inserting a basic income “token” into the constitution, with as many details as possible specified in precise clauses. An example of this approach is Provision 123 of the Mexican Constitution, which regulates the right to work in two long paragraphs totalling 3,726 words. The Mexican Constitution exhibits an extraordinary level of detail and is regarded as a historical exception rather than the norm in constitution building around the world. We can appreciate why an enacting coalition would want to consider this approach: specifying a basic income “token” in

considerable detail reduces the need for constitutional interpretation by government officials and the courts (“judicial discretion”).¹¹

Nevertheless, the Kelsenian approach has at least two disadvantages. First, a degree of indeterminacy appears a necessary condition for reaching political agreement over the adoption of constitutional provisions (Lipkin 1992; Kutz 1993; Waldron 1994). Detailed provisions exacerbate deep and persistent political disagreements, making it practically impossible to reach sufficient agreement amongst all the relevant factions to enshrine basic income in a Bill of Rights. This point applies even where there is a strong enacting coalition on the *general* idea of a basic income policy. By contrast, general constitutional provisions that leave the details to be decided at a later time operate under a “veil of vagueness” that focusses political attention on what is shared amongst the different factions (Gibson and Goodin 1995). Second, one of the characteristics of a constitution is that it aims for stability over time, typically well beyond the generation that passed the document. Embracing generality and abstraction allows a constitution to evolve over time, partially immunising it against becoming prematurely outdated and irrelevant (Ferrerres 2000). The possibility of reaching political agreement and the ability to maintain its relevance over time constitute important political and jurisprudential reasons to resist Kelsen’s approach; these reasons firmly recommend drafting the relevant constitutional provision along the lines of a general basic income “type” (Horowitz 2002). This is precisely the proposal of the Swiss Initiative, mentioned in the introduction, aimed at amending the constitution with a new Art. 110(a) that grants a constitutional right to an unconditional basic income but leaving legislation to determine the funding and level of the grant.¹²

However, the upside of an approach that eschews detailed provisions in the here-and-now in favour of a general outline carries with it the downside of *inevitably having to figure out those details at a later stage in the enactment process*. Gutmann and Thompson (1996, 35) write that “abstraction purchases agreement on principles at the price of disagreement about their interpretation”. In contrast to constitutional scholars who emphasise legal origins and the role of the text (Ben-Bassat and Dahan 2008), we take the view that *constitutional interpretation* is a central feature of the capacity of judicial review to protect constitutional rights.

Applied to our case, the problem is that any basic income “type” admits not just one but numerous “tokens”, many of whom imply a genuine trade-off along several dimensions. It would be an exemplary feat of wishful

¹¹ For a review of a wide range of difficulties in the context of environmental law, similar to the ones we outline, see Brandl and Bungert (1992).

¹² <http://www.admin.ch/ch/f/pore/vi/vis423t.html>.

thinking to assume that one can merely derive all the relevant properties of the basic income “token” from the core stipulations of the “type”. Instead, such derivation is a classic case of political choice, with different groups of beneficiaries competing for the largest share of the basic income cake (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2013).

To illustrate, political factions will compete over the level of the grant, which represents the relative share of social product spent on basic income as opposed to other social goods. Relatedly, political factions may hold different views on matters such as funding sources (income tax, consumption tax, environmental taxes and so on) or the rate of substitution between basic income and other support programmes. Political factions may disagree on whether the basic income grant is uniform or instead should display variation based on lifestyle or geographical location. Depending on the relative importance they accord to supporting the disadvantaged over social efficiency, political factions dispute how to implement basic income, including the resources spent on its administration. Political factions may oppose each other on how strict we ought to interpret the core properties of the scheme. Can we accept a grant being allocated to a household unit for ease of administration, or does this constitute an infringement of the individuality requirement? Should we regard a weakly conditional policy like participation income (Atkinson 2006) as falling within the boundaries of the constitutional right to basic income?

Constitutionalising basic income effectively relegates the interpretation of these and many related questions to the judiciary. Judicial review may intersect at two points: judges will respond to constitutional challenges of existing legislation but also, more controversially, may be able to affect legislative omission (Brewer-Carías 2014). In either scenario, the question now becomes: can judges be trusted to arrive at the “correct” decision when examining constitutional challenges?

Judicial interpretation and its pitfalls

For judicial review to robustly protect the political stability of basic income against replacement, layering, conversion or drift requires that judges systematically interpret a constitutional basic income “type” in a way that approximates the particular basic income “token” the enacting coalition favours. A failure to interpret the constitutional provisions of the right to basic income in the proper manner effectively means that the resilience or robustness of the basic income scheme is under threat. In this section, we outline reasons that caution against relying on judges for safeguarding the resilience and robustness of basic income.

The problem of judicial competence

Contemporary jurisprudence acknowledges important limitations on judges' abilities to arbitrate between conflicting views in contexts with a high degree of complexity and requiring specific expertise knowledge (Horowitz 1977; Cross 2000; Morales 2015). Many social and economic rights fit this description, and so would the constitutional right to a basic income. There are reasons to think judicial reasoning is particularly ill-suited to remedy the sort of implementation failures that are likely to mar the robust enactment of a basic income scheme.

For starters, we may deem it constitutionally inappropriate for the courts to decide whether a particular policy requirement violates the criterion of unconditionality, for example, or whether a certain restriction still satisfies universality. Such questions seem to fall into the category of "non-justiciable" matters, a label typically reserved for issues requiring the assignment of resources or priority setting and therefore not considered apt for judicial resolution (Cross 2000; Christiansen 2006). Judicial intervention on resource allocation involves control of the state budget, which arguably falls under the exclusive remit of the legislative and executive branches of government, and critics object that "there are no legal standards which make them capable of resolution by a court" (Gearty 2011, 58). In the absence of clear *legal* standards, courts would just be conducting *politics* by other means – but without being beholden to the appropriate political checks and balances (Horowitz 1977).

Furthermore, the judicial process requires judges to assess governmental policies on the basis of individual cases that are not necessarily connected to one another and to reflect on policy in a fragmented manner. The opposite problem exists as well. Judicial decisions may have consequences for citizens who are situated outside of – and thus not represented by – the judicial process. This is what Fuller (1978) calls the problem of "polycentricity", according to which the adversarial model that characterises much of the judicial process is incapable of resolving general matters (also King 2008). Courts simply may not be the most suitable venue for assessing the kind of complex empirical data and expert evidence that underlies evidence-based social policy. In short, judges that are competent at resolving legal disputes between specific parties nevertheless may not be apt at deciding policy (Fuller 1978; Sossin 1999). Disputes about the scope or content of a constitutional right to basic income would inevitably fall in this category.

Courts are themselves exceedingly aware of these limitations and the controversial tasks they are asked to carry out (Manfredi and Maioni 2002; Dorf 2010). In response, judges have become reluctant to intervene in disputes that go beyond mere arbitration and involve resource allocation,

customarily exercising *judicial restraint* or *deference* to the other government branches (King 2012). The opposite action, where judges find in favour of the claimant and order the state to provide resources or otherwise impose a financial burden on the state, is regularly denounced as “judicial activism” or “dictatorship of the judiciary” (Quirk and Bridwell 1995; Kmiec 2004). With pervasive pressure on courts to not intervene in social and economic issues, it is unsurprising to find that judges are reluctant to provide remedies for individual recipients in such cases.

This has been the stance courts have customarily adopted with respect to social welfare legislation (Griffith 1997; King 2008). For instance, in *R v Hillingdon LBC, ex p Puhlhofer*, [1986] 1 A.C. 485 (HL), the judges refused “to quash the decision of a local authority finding that a small room without facilities at a guest house constituted ‘accommodation’ for a family of four within the meaning of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977” (King 2008, 117). Similarly, in *R v Inner London Education Authority, ex p Ali* (1990) 2 Admin L.R. 822 (QB), the court decided that the council’s duty to ensure the availability of sufficient schools constituted a “target duty” not enforceable by individuals (King 2008, 117).

Where the existence or non-existence of a fact is left to the judgment and discretion of a public body and that fact involves a broad spectrum ranging from the obvious to the debatable to the just conceivable, it is the duty of the court to leave the decision of that fact to the public body to whom Parliament has entrusted the decision making power save in a case where it is obvious that the public body [is] acting perversely (Lord Brightman, *R. v Hillingdon LBC Ex p. Puhlhofer*, [1986] 1 A.C. 485, at 518, cited in King 2008, 117).

This strong judicial attitude of deference to legislative and bureaucratic institutions and processes is not restricted to common law jurisdictions, but is equally prevalent in civil law systems.

Our point is not to challenge the competence of courts to decide on complex social and economic matters (Morales 2015). Instead, *judges themselves have adopted the view that deference to the legislature or the executive is the appropriate default position when faced with polycentric social and economic rights challenges*. This trend towards judicial restraint directly affects the institution of a constitutional right to basic income, as a basic income coalition cannot assume that the mere inclusion of basic income in a constitutional provision guarantees its robust protection. For if courts systematically refer decisions back to the political institutions – as they are wont to do in this particular policy field – the judicial process may do little to protect basic income’s political stability.

The problem of judicial legitimacy

Judicial deference constitutes a problem for the political stability of basic income, but so, paradoxically, does an active judiciary. One of the most important objections addressed to constitutional rights is the “counter-majoritarian difficulty” (Bickel 1962; Graber 1993; Calabresi 1998; Kramer 2001). This objection suggests that strong judicial review lacks the required legitimacy to invalidate, *with immediate and final effect*, decisions adopted by a democratically elected legislature. Critics assert that allowing judges the final say over laws and administrative acts is tantamount to the polity being held hostage by decisionmakers who are neither representative of the will of, nor politically accountable to, the people (Waldron 1999, 2006). “What reason do we have for giving a court, which also disagrees on the issue and must decide by a vote, the power to overturn the decision of the legislature in this case?” (Bellamy 2007, 46). This objection is thought to be particularly pertinent when what is at issue are budgetary, resource-allocation or priority-setting challenges, commonly with a large distributive impact over which political contention persists.

Consider a case pertaining to the social right to housing in Canada. Although the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not cover the right to housing, it guarantees all citizens life, liberty and security of the person under Section 7. Defenders of social rights have argued that S.7 of the Charter includes the social right to adequate shelter (Jackman 1988; Porter 2003). However, although they all agree on the protection of this right in general, disagreement about the interpretation of its scope and content persists. In October 2005, the City of Victoria went to court to obtain an injunction against a number of homeless people who set up a tent city in Victoria’s Cridge Park. Responding in court, Natalie Adams and several other homeless petitioners argued that the Parks Regulation Bylaw and the Streets and Traffic Bylaw, prohibiting homeless people from erecting any form of temporary overhead protection (tents, tarps, even cardboard boxes), violated their Charter rights. In *Adams*, the Court confirmed that homeless people have the right to erect shelter to protect themselves from the elements when sleeping outside.¹³ Many celebrated *Adams* for its recognition that S.7 imposes constitutional limits on government’s powers to stop people from trying to shelter themselves (a negative right to shelter). However, the judicial decision does not recognise the provision of adequate housing as a positive fundamental right, leading critics to argue in this case that the Court failed to uphold the “proper” content of S.7 of the Charter (Brodsky 2010, 143).

¹³ *Victoria (City) versus Adams*, 2009 BCCA 563, 9 September 2008 BCSC 1363.

Contention is inherent in the determination of the scope and content of social and economic rights, and persists even after courts have decided on the matter. This point is relevant to the constitutional right to basic income, for judicial decisionmaking may bring with it two difficulties given that, as outlined above, the basic income “type” is compatible with multiple basic income “tokens”. Most obviously, narrowly conceived, the active intervention of courts may fail to robustly protect the stability of basic income if the constitutional judgement does not (entirely) match up with the intention of the enacting coalition. This leaves an important window of opportunity for political opponents to amend the extant basic income model. Although judges would presumably intervene in cases of outright replacement or abolishment, it is far less certain whether their ruling would adequately counter the hidden, gradual change associated with layering, conversion or drift. In this sense, even when avoiding judicial deference, the nature of the judicial process and judicial decisionmaking means that supporters of basic income cannot trust judges to deliver *their* particular outcome.

An active judiciary also presents a more general problem, which gets at the core of the democratic objection against judicial review. As the case of *Adams* above illustrates, constitutional provisions are compatible with multiple legitimate interpretations of the precise scope and content of a social right. Judges may end up agreeing with one faction within the basic income coalition, whereas at the same time opposing the views of the faction that prefers a different basic income “token”. Moreover, when the opposing faction constitutes the majority, we effectively have a case of an unelected, appointed judge overruling a democratically elected legislative body (Bellamy 2007). Reliance on the courts in those circumstances may be too high a price to pay for basic income.

Caught in a constitutional trap?

Bringing together the two difficulties outlined in the section above suggests that basic income advocates relying on the judicial process to ensure the resilience and robustness of the scheme may be caught up in a dilemma of sorts. On the one hand, taking into account the complexities of a right to basic income, judges are likely to resort to judicial deference, refusing to rule over a constitutional challenge on the grounds of competence and therefore throwing the final say in the matter back onto the legislature or executive. This effectively leaves the road wide open for political change, be it of a radical or gradual nature. If the purpose of constitutionalising basic income is to insulate policy from political pressure, judicial deference does little or nothing by way of robust protection. In this scenario, enshrining basic income in a Bill of Rights only affects subsequent political attempts at

altering the scheme when politicians have “internalised” the constitutional constraint.

On the other hand, an active judiciary “taking it upon themselves to flesh out the content of a generalized [...] right and then imposing it on executive agencies” (Gearty 2011, 56) would still not sufficiently guarantee the resilience or robustness of a particular basic income model. Judges may interpret the appropriate scope and content of a constitutional right to basic income in a way that remains at odds with what the enacting coalition had in mind. Recall that what is enshrined in a Bill of Rights is a constitutional “type” compatible with several legitimate “tokens”. This opens the road for judicial discretion, which may or may not align with the political intent of either the enacting coalition or, indeed, subsequent political majority views. Although courts always have an important role to play “in making sure that the legal rights for which the state has legislated are properly implemented”, the difficulties with the second horn of the dilemma emerge when “judicialisation” hands over “ultimate decision-making authority to the courts” (Gearty 2011, 55). In the second scenario, political stability is again not robustly protected, even when a right to basic income is enshrined in a Bill of Rights and protected through strong judicial review.

Conclusion

An enacting coalition intent on implementing a basic income scheme will have to negotiate many difficulties, chief amongst them the challenge of securing the political stability of basic income post-enactment. As we demonstrate in this article, upon reflection basic income may turn out to be quite vulnerable to several political processes that could erode the policy over time. Despite its universal ambitions, basic income may be unable to secure continued allegiances amongst different interest groups, and consequently fail to produce the positive feedback effects that would allow it to counter attempts at abolishing or replacing the scheme. The presence of negative feedback effects – notably related to persistent cultural categories of deservingness – may further weaken the political stability of basic income. Combined, the absence of positive feedback and the presence of negative feedback effects may result in basic income rapidly being taken off the books, turning it into a short-lived social experiment.

Basic income schemes are also vulnerable to a range of subterranean or hidden political processes of gradual transformation. The interaction between basic income and residual layers of traditional welfare programmes implies continuous competition over tight budgets and scarce organisational resources. At the level of implementation, basic income faces a number of challenges whose resolution opens a window of opportunity

for opposing factions to pursue their goals, gradually converting the existing scheme from the ground up into something that only formally resembles what the enacting coalition set out to achieve. Finally, we have suggested basic income is also highly susceptible to policy drift: its simple design partially obscures the need to continuously update the programme in response to changing social circumstances – primarily the level of the grant.

Against this background, it would appear an enacting coalition would do well to anticipate these stability problems, and carefully consider how to ensure that, over time, basic income remains robust and resilient. In this article, we set out to examine one possible route: the constitutionalisation of basic income in a Bill of Rights protected by strong judicial review. Although there are a number of reasons to think constitutional protection offers a particularly interesting avenue for securing the stability of basic income, reflecting carefully on the judicial process and judicial decision-making in constitutional tribunals casts serious doubt on this option. Specifically, the ability of a constitutional right to basic income to guarantee its stability over time would depend crucially on how the constitutional court interprets the relevant provisions. Insights from constitutional law as well as real-world social rights cases suggest basic income could easily become trapped in a dilemma that leaves judges either opting for judicial restraint or taking decisions that may well run counter to what the enacting coalition had in mind. In short, constitutional protection fails to offer robust protection against political challenges to the resilience or robustness of a basic income scheme.

Where does this leave the basic income project? The first step is for basic income advocates to acknowledge the problem of political stability. The second step is to realise that constitutional protection is merely one of several ways to protect social rights over time. Basic income advocates should carefully examine political and institutional options to address the stability problem that do not rely (solely) on judicial review. Several avenues for future research present themselves. A first option might be to search for institutional mechanisms to entrench key features of basic income policy. One example would be to secure an earmarked funding source as in the case of the Alaska Permanent Fund (Widerquist and Howard 2012), which many argue would make it harder for politicians to tap into for other purposes.¹⁴ Other avenues include examining in more

¹⁴ The recent budget crisis in Alaska has put considerable pressure on the Alaska Permanent Fund, leading Senator Bill Wielechowski (D-Anchorage) to propose a constitutional amendment to protect the Fund from political interference. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jan/9/first-wave-of-prefiled-legislation-introduced/>.

detail how receipt of a sizeable basic income grant might come to harness some Pierson-like feedback effects, building a strong constituency over time. Framing the basic income grant as an *entitlement* (similar to social security in the United States or the child benefit in Europe), as opposed to social assistance targeted to the poor, will no doubt play a crucial role here (Soss 1999, 2000) – but we still do not know nearly enough about how recipients (and the general population) would regard such grants (Liebig and Mau 2005). In addition, we need to analyse what design features could be manipulated to boost stability, either by firmly embedding basic income into durable institutions or by entrenching it in a powerful constituency. Stability-proofing basic income is a key challenge for those promoting the idea—one that its advocates must turn to sooner rather than later.

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