

Basic Income, Social Freedom and the Fabric of Justice

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Abstract

The paper examines the justice of Unconditional Basic Income (UBI) through the lens of the Hegel-inspired recognition-theory of justice. As explained in the first part of the paper, this theory takes everyday social roles to be the primary subject-matter of the theory of justice, and it takes justice in these roles to be a matter of the kind of freedom that is available through their performance, namely ‘social’ freedom. The paper then identifies the key criteria of social freedom. The extent to which the introduction of an UBI would meet these criteria is then examined, with a focus on the social role that stands to be most affected by an UBI, namely that of the worker-earner. It is argued that while an UBI is likely to be only partially effective as an instrument of specifically social freedom, its main justification lies not here, but in securing a basis for the subjective freedom that social freedom presupposes.

Keywords

Basic Income, recognition, social freedom, justice, Hegel, Axel Honneth

1. Introduction

The question of whether the institution of an Unconditional Basic Income (UBI) would be just or not is usually posed as a matter of distributive justice. If we are to sort out our often-conflicting intuitions about the legitimacy of an UBI, many political theorists believe, we should have recourse to a theory that provides clear criteria for distinguishing just and unjust distributions of ‘the benefits and burdens of social cooperation’ (Rawls 1971, p. 4). If we think that the benefits and burdens of social cooperation should be distributed fairly and equally, and we follow ‘procedural’ liberals in taking this to mean according to principles that parties to a fair and reasonable decision-making procedure would agree to, then the question of whether an UBI is just or not can be settled by considering whether the parties to such a procedure would give it their consent. Much of the philosophical literature on UBI has consisted of such considerations. The question at stake is whether everyone, including those who are not interested in doing paid work and do not make themselves available for employment, is entitled not just to basic liberal rights, but also to a cash share of the benefits of social cooperation, and if so at what level. The form of the answer is a distributive principle that would allocate resources fairly and equally. As is well known, van Parijs (1991, 1995) appeals to a variation of Rawls’s difference principle and Dworkin’s resource egalitarianism to explain why the institution of an UBI would be just, while others have argued that only a qualified basic income can be justified on such grounds (White 1997), and others still have used this type of argument to reject UBI altogether (van Donselaar 2009).¹

¹ For surveys of the various positions developed in the debate see Reeve and Williams 2003 and Birnbaum 2012. The literature on UBI is now vast, as the bibliography to van Parijs and Vandendorgh 2017 testifies. But it remains the case that most of the philosophical discussion of UBI has been shaped by the framing assumptions of procedural liberalism, shaped so as to provide an answer to the question of how to

It has become increasingly evident, however, that philosophical debate about the justice of UBI need not take this form. In part this is a result of dissatisfaction with the ‘distributive paradigm’ in political philosophy generally and the emergence of alternative theories that propose more inclusive or more differentiated models of justice and injustice. Republican theory, with its focus on justice as freedom from domination, and feminist theory, geared around the injustices entrenched in traditional conceptions of sexual difference and family life, are examples of theories that seek to overcome the general limitations of the distributive paradigm, and they have provided an alternative standpoint from which to assess the merits of UBI (Cassasas 2007, Robeyns 2001). Another theory of this type is the theory of recognition put forward by Axel Honneth (Honneth 2012, 2014). Honneth’s theory, which is modelled on the account of justice contained in Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, is formulated explicitly as a corrective to the narrowness of the distributive paradigm, where the chief means of correction is a conception of justice as the institutionalization of relations of mutual recognition. According to Honneth’s theory, justice depends on opportunities to participate in practices that embody ‘social’ freedom, practices that form what he calls the ‘fabric of justice’ (Honneth 2012). Is this theoretical framework also useful for thinking about the justice of an UBI? Would the introduction of an UBI promote social freedom or undermine it? To extend Honneth’s imagery, would the institution of an UBI *strengthen* the fabric of justice or *weaken* it? These are the questions I will be addressing in the remainder of the paper.

I begin by laying out what I take to be the central features of the idea of the fabric of justice. This will allow us to see, in general terms, the main points of

distribute resources fairly and equally, according to general principles that parties to a fair and reasonable decision-making procedure would accept.

contrast between the Hegel-inspired recognition theory advanced by Honneth and the approach to justice taken by the distributive paradigm. I then spell out in more detail the criteria to be used for judging gains and losses in social freedom, the kind of freedom at stake in the performance of social roles, roles that are crucial to the social fabric and hence to the fabric of justice in the Hegelian sense. With these criteria in place, I then consider how an UBI might meet them. I will concentrate my remarks on the role that stands to be most directly affected by an UBI, namely that of worker-earner, though I will also comment briefly on other roles and spheres of action likely to be affected. The conclusion I reach is that while an UBI would only be partially effective as an instrument of social freedom, its main justification lies not here, but in securing a basis for the subjective freedom that social freedom presupposes.

2. The material of justice and the fabric of justice

It will help to clarify what I mean by the expression ‘the fabric of justice’ if I first distinguish two ways in which Honneth uses the expression in his essay of that title.

Honneth typically uses the term ‘fabric’ of justice as a synonym for what he also calls the ‘material’ of justice. The ‘material of justice’ is Honneth’s term for the subject-matter of the theory of justice - that which a theory of justice is about. Much of Honneth’s essay is a critique of the way in which contemporary proceduralist theories of justice construe the material of justice in this sense. Such theories are mistaken, Honneth argues, in taking justice to be first and foremost about the apportioning of rights and the allocation of quantifiable ‘thing-like’ goods such as income and career opportunities across society, according to principles that parties to a fair decision-making procedure would agree to, as legislated and executed at the

level of the state. I will not pursue the validity of these criticisms here. The relevant point for now is that, according to this thread of Honneth's argument, such theories simply get the material of justice wrong. They ought to be replaced, the argument continues, by a theory that takes the subject-matter of justice to be something else: the relationships of recognition that permeate throughout society. Such relationships are not like possessions or goods that can be distributed and exchanged, they are rarely the product of explicit deliberation between free and equal parties, and in many cases have little to do with the actions of a state. In taking the material of justice to be historically contingent relationships of recognition, rather than procedures for generating or testing principles of distribution, the recognition theory of justice, Honneth argues, is better attuned to the variety of justice claims and to actual struggles against injustice than the proceduralist theories.

But if, by 'fabric' of justice, we just meant the 'material' of justice in the sense of the subject-matter of a theory of justice, it would make no sense to talk about this fabric being 'strengthened' or 'weakened'. In shifting from a proceduralist theory to a theory of recognition, we would simply be bringing different material to the table, re-focusing attention from the distribution of goods and resources to human relationships in which modes of recognition were at stake. If talk of the strengthening or weakening of the fabric of justice is to be apt, the fabric of justice must admit of differences in quality. But understood merely as the subject-matter of a theory of justice, as material to be theorized, that cannot be so. In supposing that the fabric of justice can be strong (when things are going well with it) or weak (when it is endangered), we must have a different image in mind of what the fabric of justice consists in than the material of justice in the sense of the subject-matter of the theory of justice.

The meaning we are looking for is implicit in ‘The Fabric of Justice’ essay but more evident in *Freedom’s Right*. In the latter work, Honneth spells out in more detail the assumptions that drive the Hegel-inspired alternative to proceduralist theories of justice. One of them is that the various action spheres that make up society rest on norms that serve at once to legitimate the structure of those spheres and to integrate individuals into society. Individuals are socialized from an early age into accepting these values, and a continued commitment to them in the course of most people’s lives is crucial for the effective functioning and reproduction of the action spheres themselves. So, for example, we soon learn the importance of mutual care and affection in our personal relationships, of cooperation and reciprocity in productive activities, of respect and tolerance in our dealings with strangers. An ongoing commitment to such values is in turn important for effective performance of social roles, such as being a parent, a worker and a citizen. And because the values are held in common, a shared commitment to the norms underlying the sphere of action helps bind it together. The norms that underpin the action spheres, which individuals are socialized into accepting prior to the development of their reflective and deliberative capacities, are thus crucial to the social bond. A society that is well-ordered, in the functional sense of possessing healthy social bonds, requires a shared commitment from its members to values that are expressed not just in reflectively shaped media such as laws, but also in everyday habits of action, customs and institutions - in what Hegel called the ‘ethical life’ of the society (Hegel 1991).

This idea of ethically shaped, pre-reflectively accepted customs, institutions and practices gives us the second sense in which Honneth invokes the idea of the ‘fabric’ of justice. The fabric of justice, in this second sense, is not something that procedural-distributive theories and recognition theories have *different* or *competing*

conceptions of, as they would if the fabric of justice were a synonym of the material of justice. Rather, the proceduralist theories of justice *lack* a conception of the fabric of justice in the second sense, or to use the familiar formulation for distinguishing Hegelian and Kantian theories, they lack a conception of ethical life. In Honneth's view, this seriously compromises proceduralist theories, and is at the root of the problematic focus on distribution, impartial decision-making mechanisms, and the state characteristic of such theories.

Whether or not Honneth is right in this judgement, the fabric of justice conceived in this way allows us to speak of variations in its quality. But we are not yet in a position to use this as a measure of justice: a society might have strong social bonds but be very unjust. Individuals can be socialized into roles that oppress them, whole groups of people can be excluded from participation in the main action spheres - to do with family life, productive activity and consumption, and governance - or be treated as second class participants in those spheres, and so on. That can happen without necessarily weakening social bonds to the extent of endangering social reproduction. A robust social fabric is not necessarily a just one. However, a *concretely existing* just society, and not just the idea of one, must have sufficiently robust social bonds to enable social reproduction; it must have a viable ethical life of its own. And if it is to do so, it makes sense to say that the norms of justice should, to a large extent, be embedded in the practices of ethical life, even if some elements of justice remain outside it. This, at any rate, is the Hegelian hunch behind Honneth's recognition theory of justice. The idea is that an ethical life patterned by the norms of justice is possible, which is to say that the social fabric can be strengthened *on account of* the norms of justice embedded in it, or conversely weakened by

encroachments on or distortions of those norms. Moreover, this is not just a possibility, on the Hegelian view, but the actual predicament of modern societies.

This is because in modern societies, in the Hegel-Honneth view, freedom has become the dominant norm in all the action spheres. Viewed negatively, this means that no one should be coerced into taking part in those spheres - by being forced into marriage or into an occupation, for example. Viewed positively, it means that individuals can expect to freely realize themselves through their participation in these spheres, through fulfilling one's obligations as a family member, a worker, a citizen and so forth. The universality of freedom as an ethical norm allows us to reconfigure the predicament just described in terms of the strengthening or weakening of the fabric of justice. For we can now say that the fabric of justice is affected above all by the extent to which participation in the action spheres expresses free action. Freedom, in other words, is the yardstick against which the strengthening or weakening of the fabric of *justice* is to be measured.

Of course, we are speaking now of freedom that expresses itself through immersion in ethical life - what Honneth, adopting Frederick Neuhouser's terminology, calls 'social' freedom. The question that concerns us - whether the institution of an UBI would strengthen or weaken the fabric of justice - can thus be reformulated as the question of whether an UBI would promote social freedom. But how are we to tell whether social freedom has been advanced? What are the criteria for judging gains and losses in social freedom?

3. Criteria of social freedom

Social freedom is freedom that is apt for expression in the performance of everyday social roles, such as being a parent, worker, consumer, or citizen. It is the freedom one exercises qua parent, worker, and so on, that is, the freedom one exercises qua participant in such ‘action spheres’ as parenting and working, when one is free in those activities. What it means to be more or less free in those activities, and hence the criteria for determining whether social freedom has been advanced or diminished in that sphere, depends on the sphere in question. On the Hegelian view, it also depends on the history of those spheres, and is better understood retrospectively than prospectively. Nonetheless freedom in the performance of social roles will generally have the following characteristics.²

First, the occupant of the role must be able to subjectively appropriate it. This means that the agent must be able to give herself over to the role, to feel ‘at home’ there, and in that sense identify with it. This capacity to identify with the role does not require that one likes everything about it, and it does not require that one values the role above all else. But it does require acknowledgement of the good served by the role and of the life in which the role plays a part. It also requires endorsement of the norms that generally determine what is acceptable by way of performance of the role and an acknowledgement of its attendant obligations. One cannot be socially free in a given role if one is not able to see its value, or if one cannot see its value as relevant for the realization of one’s own life ends. The activities an agent engages in qua occupant of the role must therefore mean something to the agent, in a sense that rules out deep subjective disengagement, withdrawal, or psychic disinvestment from the activity. When enjoying social freedom in the occupation of a role, an agent will

² The interpretation of the criteria of social freedom that follows draws broadly on Hegel 1991, Hardimon 1994, Neuhaus 2000, Jaeggi 2014 and Honneth 2014 and 2017.

typically find opportunities to express and develop capacities and talents that matter to her. The agent will not feel alienated in the performance of the role but will find some resonance between the performance of the activities required of the role and the conception the agent has of herself. Alienation in an activity required of a social role is the condition of not having any ground to subjectively appropriate the activity, and hence is the counter case to social freedom judged by this criterion.

Second, the agents with whom one interacts in performing the role must also be able to subjectively appropriate their part in it. The roles we are talking about are essentially relationships, and freedom in these relationships requires the shared endorsement of those involved in them. The subjective appropriation is thus not just 'mine' but 'ours', a collective and not just a singular appropriation. Furthermore, it is essential to the appropriation that is characteristic of social freedom that it be shared. To use Hegel's famous formulations, social freedom is a matter of finding oneself 'in another', in activity that is done not just 'with another' but 'for another'. Honneth also refers to this aspect of social freedom in terms of 'completing' the other (Honneth 2014, p. 48). In performing the roles in which social freedom is at stake the parties 'complete' each other in the sense that they contribute to each other's self-realization and enable themselves to realize themselves in ways that would have been impossible without the relationship. Social freedom is thus an essentially shared good. It is essentially shared in that it is possible, and only possible, in relationships where each party to the relationship enjoys it, and where the parties know themselves to be serving each other's good - to be 'completing' themselves - through their participation in the relationship.

The concept of mutual recognition serves to make this idea of agents who know themselves to be realizing each other's good in the performance of a social role

more precise. How is it that, in the modern world, we come to this knowledge and express it? One way is through the love that we show as family members, life-partners and friends. In loving relationships of this kind, we commit to each other's good and find our own good in the fulfilment of that commitment. Another way is through the esteem we show each other for our contributions and achievements. As members of a workplace, we depend on each other to provide a good or service, and as members of society at large, we depend on each other's work for the satisfaction of our needs. Esteem is the mode of recognition through which we acknowledge contributions to the 'system of need', as Hegel put it, or the sphere of production and consumption. A third context in which we know and express ourselves as mutually completing is as members of a political community. In our role as citizens of a democracy, we show each other mutual respect, and in displaying that attitude acknowledge our equal status and dependence on each other qua citizens.³

On this view, love, respect and esteem are not just forms of recognition that happen to attach to certain social roles. They provide norms that ought to be applied to those roles, norms that determine whether a given social role is to count as a source of social freedom or not. Like subjective appropriation, love, esteem and respect can thus be considered as criteria of social freedom, as providing standards by which to judge whether an institution represents a gain or loss in social freedom.

³ This is not to say that there must be a one to one correspondence between social spheres or institutions and forms of mutual recognition. It is not solely qua citizens, for example, that we owe each other respect, or solely qua producers that we owe each other esteem. Equally, it is not as if, as members of families, we owe each other solely love, or as producers solely esteem, and respect doesn't come into it. Honneth explicitly rejects the idea that institutions should be understood as embodiments of a single recognition principle, even if that idea is suggested in Hegel's schema (Honneth 2003, p. 146). At the same time, it is not implausible to suppose that different roles have different modes of mutual recognition predominantly attached to them, such that, to keep to one of the examples, citizens are bound by a norm of mutual respect in the performance of their roles, irrespective of any personal bonds they may have with each other.

A third criterion concerns the decision-making involved in the performance of a social role. Here a resemblance can be found with the notion of freedom as self-determination or autonomy -- what Honneth calls 'reflexive freedom'. According to this notion, one becomes free not just by acquiring the capacity to do as one pleases, but by learning how to act according to standards one can reflectively endorse. Individual freedom, understood as autonomy, depends on the capacity of the individual to stand back from prevailing norms and decide for herself what is appropriate for her. But in many decision-making contexts, the 'I' who makes this decision is part of a 'we' and has to think as a 'we' when making the decisions. This is typically the case when the performance of a social role is at stake. In acquitting one's responsibilities as family-member, worker and citizen, one typically does not detach oneself from the parties to the relevant relationships, or at least one will not typically do so in the process of making sound decisions or acquitting those responsibilities well. This is one reason why social freedom is distinct from reflexive freedom. It is only against a background of given roles and institutions that an individual can rise up in an act of autonomy and endorse or reject a principle according to individual conscience. But that background of roles and institutions does not just supply external or contingent material for individual autonomy or reflexive freedom. It also provides the *medium of expression* of social freedom; that *in and through* which social freedom exists. In the case of social freedom, self-determination is not so much a matter of individuals deciding for themselves about the legitimacy of a norm, as of the participants in a social role or institution deciding the terms of the role together. The availability of opportunities to take part in collective decision-making in the performance of a social role is thus a key criterion of the availability of social freedom there.

For an action sphere to count as a realm of social freedom then, it must be possible for the participants to subjectively appropriate the roles that make up that sphere, to mutually affirm and complete each other in the performance of the roles, and to decide for themselves how the performance of those roles should be regulated. Institutional changes that enable subjective appropriation, mutual affirmation, and collective self-determination can be said to promote social freedom, while changes that have the opposite effect can be said to undermine it. But before we can turn to the question of how social freedom, judged by these criteria, would fare under an UBI, there are two other key points to take into account regarding the conditions and purpose of social freedom.

It is crucial to the concept of social freedom that is realised in the *performance* of social roles. It is not realised in the *assumption* of those roles. We do not have social freedom in the open space of what we might call ‘rolelessness’. One has to be in a role in order to have a chance of enjoying social freedom. But social freedom in any role presupposes subjective freedom to move in or out of the role. The freedom to assume or decline a role does not *constitute* social freedom in that role, but it is a presupposition of whatever social freedom may be found there. In this sense, social freedom presupposes negative freedom. One cannot be socially free in a role without also being subjectively or negatively free to accept or reject that role in the first place. One cannot, so to speak, be forced to be socially free.⁴ Coerced participation in a given social role is thus incompatible with social freedom, irrespective of the

⁴ We are dealing here with a constitutive and not just normative feature of the relationship between negative and social freedom. That is, the point is not just that social freedom is better or preferable when supported by negative freedom, but that without negative freedom in the assumption of a role, social freedom in the performance of it is not possible.

opportunities for subjective appropriation, mutual recognition, or co-determination the role may admit of.

If there are conditions that precede participation in a given social role that are relevant for the realization of social freedom, there are also conditions beyond participation in particular roles that affect the quality of social freedom available. In particular, the different social roles need to be *integrated*, both at the level of the individual and society. No individual is just a family-member, worker, citizen and so on; each individual has to integrate these different roles in a manner suited to him or her. It is unlikely, given the multiplicity and fluidity of the roles that take up a life, that integration will be seamless, and perhaps some tension between them is inevitable. But the tension must not be such as to undermine the chances of a successful life. The value of social freedom is thus constrained, at one end, by the negative freedom to assume roles, and at the other end, by the need to integrate or unify the performance of different roles in a single life. It will be a sign of something having gone wrong with social freedom if individuals are unable to order their lives qua family-member, worker, citizen and so on in a satisfactory way. And we can say of society as a whole that the action spheres through which social reproduction takes place should be in some sort of ‘harmony’ (Honneth 2017, p. 90).

4. Social freedom and UBI

With these clarifications of the idea of social freedom in place, we can now ask whether an UBI would promote, or perhaps impede, social freedom. But how should we approach this question? One strategy would be to consider whether and how an UBI would give expression to the different forms of mutual recognition. The task at

hand would then be to determine how an UBI would institute relations of love, respect and esteem. This is a valid approach which has yielded interesting arguments I will consider below (section 4.3). But there are two potential drawbacks with this strategy. First, as we saw in the previous section, mutual recognition is not the only thing at stake in the promotion of social freedom; it is not the only criterion by which to identify gains or losses of social freedom. Second, if we focus just on love, respect and esteem, there is a danger of abstracting these attitudes from the performance of specific social roles. As I have been emphasising throughout, it is only by *doing* the things that a family-member, worker, citizen and so forth does that social freedom becomes available to us. ‘Rolelessness’, as I put it, is incompatible with social freedom. But it may not be incompatible with love, respect and esteem. There is thus a danger that by focusing solely on these forms of recognition we may miss our sought target: the gains or losses in social freedom brought about by an UBI.

In order to avoid these dangers, I will take a different approach. I will consider how the main social roles that, in the Hegelian theory, are the sites of social freedom, stand to be affected by an UBI. These roles correspond to the spheres of action in which one conducts personal relationships, acts as a producer and consumer in a market economy, and acts as a citizen in a political community. Each of these spheres of action stands to be affected in one way or another by an UBI. But some roles stand to be more affected than others and my discussion will be weighted accordingly. That the introduction of an UBI will have a particular impact on certain social roles and spheres of action should be clear from a brief consideration of the character of UBI itself.

4.1 The character of UBI

While the implementation of an UBI is a complex matter, the idea itself is quite intuitive. An UBI is an income - a sum of money. Under a basic income scheme, cash is transferred from one source to another; in most models, from state coffers to an individual's bank account. Individuals are then free to use this money as they choose. The income is 'basic' in being a certain amount. In most models, the 'base' amount is understood as the amount that will cover the cost of basic need provision, but it might also be understood as an amount that provides a 'platform' for covering whatever costs the individual has, or as an amount fixed by what the payer (in most models, the state) can afford. Clearly, the impact of an UBI will depend on the amount of income individuals receive. I will assume in the following that a basic income is an amount of money that is just sufficient for covering the costs of an average individual's basic needs.⁵ It is an unconditional payment in being paid to everyone, 'no strings attached' (van Parijs and Vandendorgh 2017, p. 21). This feature distinguishes UBI from all means-tested benefits, and indeed all payments that are made on the proviso that some requirement is met. In particular, it distinguishes UBI from unemployment benefit, insofar as the latter requires some willingness to work, demonstrated pursuit of employment, and satisfaction of other obligations. UBI, by contrast, is 'obligation free' (van Parijs and Vandendorgh 2017, p. 8).

⁵ As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, this assumption is common in the philosophical literature on UBI but plays less of a role in policy modelling and public debates. I take Brian Barry's point that the merits and demerits of UBI are conditional on the level at which it is set, and that the most significant merits claimed on its behalf are those that assume it to be set at a level sufficient for meeting average basic needs (Barry 2001). While it is true that van Parijs's *justification* for UBI does not turn on it being an amount sufficient for meeting basic needs, he does think that a UBI justified on the right grounds would be enough to meet those needs; it would have the advantages afforded by an income received at that level. In at least one formulation of the version of UBI he advocates, it is to be paid 'at a level *sufficient for subsistence*' (van Parijs 2001). In the discussion that follows I will be considering the gains and losses in social freedom of a UBI paid at this level, though I acknowledge that different considerations would be needed for an UBI at other levels.

In being ‘obligation free’, or having ‘no strings attached’, UBI has the character of an *entitlement*. The freedom from obligation characteristic of the UBI is not *just* a freedom from the obligation to find paid work, though this is its main practical difference from unemployment benefit. It is a freedom based on an entitlement to a basic share of society’s financial resources. I take this to be essential to the character of a strictly *unconditional* basic income: if one does not receive the income on account of satisfying some condition, if the satisfaction of some condition is simply irrelevant for the payment, then one must receive it because one is entitled to it, because one is due it, period. Access to a basic share of society’s resources in the form of an UBI is not *earned*, as it would be if some requirement or obligation had to be met. Put another way, the UBI is not a *return* for something; it does not *reciprocate* some act or attitude on the part of the recipient. This feature of UBI has important consequences for the impact it stands to have on practices of social freedom.

Another feature, no less fundamental but somewhat more obvious, is its character as a *cash payment*. For in having this character, the social role that stands to be primarily affected by an UBI it is that of a spender or earner of money. Likewise, the most directly affected sphere of action will be the sphere of the actions of spenders and earners: the market. The labour market (and, to a lesser extent, the market for consumer goods) is a key sphere in which social freedom is at stake. What effect can we expect an UBI to have on social freedom in this sphere? Put in terms of the roles in which social freedom is actualized, how will the social freedom available in the role of worker-earner be affected by an UBI?

4.2 Impact on the social freedom of the worker⁶

Let us look first at the subjective appropriation criterion. Recall that subjective appropriation of a role requires that an agent is able both to see some good served by performance of the role and to be ‘at home’ in the performance of that role herself. In order for an agent to be able to be at home in the role, she must be able to express and develop her own capacities in the performance, while endorsing the ends the exercise of those capacities serves. This means, first, that the activity one is engaged in qua worker must be such as to allow for the expression and development of a practical capacity, if it is to be apt for subjective appropriation and therefore social freedom. As a rule, we can say that only those activities that involve tasks with a certain level of complexity, requiring some degree of skill or judgment for their effective performance, have this feature.⁷ To be restricted in one’s working activity to simple, repetitive tasks, is to be deprived of the opportunity to express and develop one’s capacities in one’s activities qua worker, which one must have to be able to subjectively appropriate the role. But, second, the ends that the working activity serve, and not just the monotonous character of the work, can also stand in the way of subjective appropriation. This is the case when the worker is not able to endorse them because they strike her as trivial, as not worth very much in themselves, or even immoral, serving purposes she positively rejects. In such cases, the obligations attendant upon performing the role would also seem unworthy of endorsement.

⁶ Throughout this section I use the term ‘worker’ as shorthand for ‘worker-earner’. The role we are considering involves working activity that serves both to provide a service / product and to bring an income. Of course, much work does not serve the latter purpose – voluntary work, domestic work, and so on – and the people who perform these activities fulfil vital social roles that also stand to be impacted by an UBI. I will comment on these in the following section. But our focus here is on the social freedom available through the worker-earner role, as it is played out in the action sphere of the labour market.

⁷ A rule similar to the ‘Aristotelian Principle’ Rawls invokes (Rawls 1971, p. 424ff).

It will thus count in favour of UBI, from the point of view of social freedom, if it were shown to enable subjective appropriation of work by either raising the quality of the activity undertaken by the worker, or by reducing the amount of work that serves trivial or immoral ends. Now the argument is often made by advocates of UBI that its introduction would lower demand for the least desirable work, the ‘lousy jobs’ as they are sometimes called, and thereby help to get rid of them (van Parijs 1995, p.109; van Parijs and Vandenberght 2017, p. 22). The idea is that by increasing the bargaining power of those entering the labour market at the ‘bottom’, the UBI will push up the quality of the product on offer - the job - by the providers of work in that sector of the market. It could be argued that since this is the sector where the activity required of the worker is least complex and least capable of engaging the workers’ practical capacities in a way that admits of self-expression and development, it involves the kind of activity that is least apt for subjective appropriation. By raising the quality of work here, then, albeit indirectly through the market mechanism, an UBI could be said to enable subjective appropriation in such work, or at least to mitigate the alienation involved. If it were to have this consequence it would count as an instrument of social freedom. Furthermore, workers occupying the higher echelons of the labour market but who find themselves engaging in work activity whose ends they reject on ethical grounds would also be able to use their UBI as leverage to change their work so as to feel more ‘at home’ in it. Their UBI safety net might make them less fearful of demanding changes to their work practice that would make the work more congenial to them from an ethical point of view. If the UBI were to have this effect, it would promote social freedom in this respect too.

But the limitations of these arguments should also be noticed. While the UBI may (depending on its amount) increase the bargaining power of individuals in relation to

their potential or actual employers, especially at the lower end of the labour market, there is no constraint on how that extra bargaining power is to be deployed. It is possible that higher wages, rather than more engaging tasks or more ethical products, will result. Advocates of UBI typically acknowledge this and indeed embrace this outcome. They do so because the fundamental point of UBI, as they see it, is to increase the subjective freedom of the individual, especially those individuals who are least well-off. If they use that freedom to demand higher wages rather than more engaging or more ethical work, if that's their preference, good for them. But for the moment we are bracketing subjective freedom and we are asking how the social freedom of the worker, specifically with respect to the subjective appropriation of the role, stands to be affected by an UBI. And we have to concede that there is no direct link between the increased bargaining power of the individual in the labour market with the UBI and the opportunities for subjective appropriation in this sphere. While we can say with some confidence that UBI, by heightening the bargaining power of individuals in their relation to the labour market, would likely improve the outcomes of that bargaining for them, it is another matter whether these outcomes will include a marked improvement in the quality of activity available to them in their work, activity which is more amenable to subjective appropriation, and hence a gain in social freedom this aspect.

Turning now to the second criterion, it is important to bear in mind the range of recognition relationships at stake in the individual worker's everyday activity.⁸ In performing one's role qua worker, one is ineluctably drawn into relationships with others that bring into play not just expectations of esteem for contributions and achievements, which I will return to below, but also expectations of mutual respect

⁸ For a much fuller account of these see Dejours, Deranty, Renault and Smith 2018.

and solidarity. Workplaces that fail to institute relationships of mutual respect - say by permitting bullying, by imposing unmanageable workloads, or by discriminating on the basis of gender, race, age or able-bodiedness - are in virtue of that fact hostile to social freedom. Likewise, workplaces that lack all solidarity, such that no one covers for each other or helps out beyond the terms of the employment contract, are likely not just to be dysfunctional, but will also lack social freedom. Would an UBI help address such deficits in social freedom at work? It could be argued that the same mechanism that is responsible for raising the quality of work activity – the heightened bargaining power the UBI provides to the vulnerably placed individual worker – will also improve the quality of the recognition relationships at work. With their UBI in hand, workers have more power to say ‘no’ or ‘enough’ to employers (or for that matter colleagues and customers) who treat them with disrespect or show them no solidarity. And this, arguably, will force the hand of work organizations, putting pressure on them to show more respect to their workers and facilitate stronger relationships of solidarity. On the other hand, precisely this strengthening of the hand of the individual with respect to the ‘exit’ option available might weaken ties of solidarity in workplaces and make it less likely that individual workers see themselves as ‘in it together’ in their work role.⁹

This consideration has particular significance for the impact UBI stands to have on social freedom in work as given by our third criterion: opportunities for co-determination in the fulfilment of one’s role as a worker. It is worth noting the special place that this criterion has in Honneth’s own reconstruction of the fate of social freedom in the modern labour market (Honneth 2014, p. 246f, 2017, p. 73f).

⁹ The idea that UBI might promote a problematic individualism has been taken up in some of the philosophical literature on UBI. To mention just a couple of recent contributions, see Gourevitch 2016 and Birnbaum and de Wispelaere 2016.

According to this reconstruction, real gains in social freedom were achieved, especially in the decades following the second World War, through the introduction and consolidation of discursive mechanisms requiring employees and employers to negotiate together the terms of employment. Since then, however, opportunities for co-determination in the activity and remuneration of work have diminished, a development coinciding with a weakening of the unions and a move away from collective bargaining. This development is bad for the social freedom of the worker because, in encouraging individual workers to act alone in pursuit of their own private interest, the *collective* voice of the worker weakens. With this weakening of voice, opportunities for the co-determination of roles in this sphere of action shrink further, exacerbating the loss of social freedom there.

An UBI does not directly impinge on the discursive mechanisms that regulate work activity; it certainly does not rule them out. But an UBI might make them seem less important, both from the perspective of employee and employer: employees because of the greater negative freedom to refuse or exit given terms of employment the UBI provides; employers because the terms of employment on offer can now be justified by the market mechanism alone. If the legitimacy of the UBI is seen to rest on its freeing up of the labour market, which it would do by making it easier for people to act on their job preferences, the perceived need for a *further* source of justification, such as an agreement reached through deliberation within the work organization, may diminish. As we have seen already, a key argument in favour of UBI is that it will improve the terms of employment by forcing employers to up their game. It will do this, according to the argument, because poor quality jobs won't attract any customers. UBI makes it possible for *market* forces, forces of supply and demand in the provision of jobs, to deliver decent work, or terms of employment

everyone can accept (Taylor. Given that the UBI *already* serves this function, it becomes easier to hold that no further means are required, that other mechanisms for improving the quality of work, such as deliberative democratic ones, are superfluous.

There is a danger then that the very mechanism an UBI exploits to improve job quality, and thereby promote social freedom, may displace deliberative mechanisms of worker self-management that are crucial for social freedom in this role (Gourevitch 2016). Such an eventuality would continue the decline of social freedom in the labour market as measured by opportunities for co-determination. But an UBI might endanger co-determination in the sphere of work in another way. For while employers might want to overlook the norms of workplace democracy for the sake of their profits, employees might ignore them simply out of lack of interest. Participation in the mechanisms of co-determination in the sphere of work, like all forms of democratic activity, requires effort and commitment. It requires some minimal sense of being ‘in it (i.e. the self-ruling entity) together’. Unless there is such a commitment, the obligations that come with fulfilment of the role of worker in an institution even where norms of workplace democracy hold sway will seem weak and easily overridden. And it is arguable that the introduction of an UBI will have this commitment-weakening effect. By reducing the cost of exit from the role of worker/employee, it might lessen attachment to the role itself. And the less attached one is to the role, the less likely one will be to carry the burdens and obligations it carries, including the burdens and obligations of self-rule qua worker. If part of the general cultural effect of an UBI is to weaken the importance of work for self-identity - a consequence many advocates of UBI would welcome - one would expect this further to diminish the subjective investment in work that active participation in practices of co-determination at work requires.

We saw earlier that while social freedom was realized in the performance of social roles, it nevertheless presupposes negative freedom in the assumption of the roles. The relevance of UBI for social freedom through participation in the labour market in this sense, that is, as a pre-requisite of enjoying social freedom qua worker, should be clear. For UBI provides a mechanism to ensure that everyone who participates in the labour market does so on the basis of an actual choice or decision. If every wage-earner (or self-employer) can truly say of themselves that they consented to this role, then this condition for social freedom would be met. By taking the compulsion out of participation in the labour market, a compulsion that arises from the necessity of acquiring the means to cover the cost of meeting basic needs, UBI would seem to bestow the negative freedom that social freedom in this sphere presupposes. It would make a *choice* of being a worker-earner, leaving it to each individual to decide whether to assume the role not. An UBI is not the only mechanism that could meet this condition of social freedom in the sphere of work – alternative ways of providing for basic need satisfaction could be introduced – but as an instrument of negative freedom the basic income model clearly has advantages.

In the Hegelian view, social freedom is conditioned by the availability of negative freedom not just in the assumption of social roles, but in the possibility of *changing* them. To be free in the role requires that it be possible to stand back from the role and to reassess it. Legal freedoms generally have this purpose: they offer the opportunity for revision, adjustment or correction of the form of life expressed in the social freedoms (Honneth 2014, p. 83). The idea is that the law (the sphere of legal right), and to an extent morality (where norms of individual conscience hold sway), provide a kind of safe haven into which one is able to retreat when the role obligations one finds oneself with strike one as inappropriate or inadequate. The

‘rights of freedom’ expressed in legal relations and moral conscience enable individuals to review the possibilities available to them in the various social spheres. Without this ability to stand back from and reflexively appropriate or reject role obligations, fulfilment of those obligations would not be free. At the same time, it is only by returning to the social sphere, and assuming once more given role obligations, that concrete social freedom (as distinct from abstract legal and moral freedom) becomes available. Legal entitlements, the freedom to do whatever one wants within the law, and freedom of individual conscience are not a substitute for social freedom. They are not properly conceived as realms to be lived in, or as instruments for realizing the good life, but rather as transitional spaces in which the responsibilities and obligations of ethical life can be put on hold and assessed.

An UBI might look like a plausible candidate for a legal right in this sense. It promises temporarily to relieve individuals of the responsibilities attendant upon their involvement in the labour market, giving them the opportunity to review the contribution their participation in this action sphere makes towards their self-realization. By allowing for the revision, readjustment and renewal of life plans as they are lived out in this action sphere, the institutionalization of a UBI would enhance the potential for social freedom in that sphere. One could go further and argue that without such a space for reflecting on and revising the place that participation in the labour market has in an individual’s lived conception of the good, the labour market would have no claim on being a realm of social freedom at all. Again, UBI is not the only mechanism conceivable for creating such a space, but it is certainly one of the more commonly expressed attractions of an UBI that it promises

to liberate people from the experience of being stuck or trapped in their role qua worker, and to enable a reassessment of the place of work in their lives.¹⁰

The potential of an UBI to decentre the role of the worker, and thereby to enable a better integration of the different social roles, is the final way in which it stands to affect social freedom in this sphere. The argument is often made on behalf of UBI that it would enable people to have a better ‘work-life balance’. It would do this by freeing up time that would otherwise be spent fulfilling obligations attached to the work role for other things. These other things should themselves be expressions of social freedom, such as family-life or active citizenship, if relief from the work role is to yield a gain in social freedom and not just more negative freedom. But it is easy to see how a UBI might facilitate that. The argument is also sometimes put that society as a whole is out of balance on account of the emphasis it places on work, and that an UBI would help us move beyond a ‘work society’ to a more balanced and responsible ‘post-work’ one. However vague such notions are, they at least allude to gains in social freedom through a better integration of social roles.

4.3 Impact on social freedom in other roles

It is not just worker-earners, but also unpaid workers, family-members, carers and citizens who stand to be affected by an UBI. I do not have space to consider in any detail the impact a UBI might have on the social freedom available through these other roles. I must, however, comment on how an UBI may confer *esteem* in these roles and promote social freedom in that way.

¹⁰ The ‘sabbatical grant’ proposed by Claus Offe would also seem well-suited to this function (see Offe 2001).

It has been argued that the justice of UBI lies in the esteem-recognition it confers on contributions and achievements made outside the official economy, such as housework, domestic care work, volunteer work and active citizenship (Mulligan 2013, Laitinen 2015). According to one argument, an UBI would symbolize the esteem in which such contributions are held by society and correct the over-esteem of contributions through paid work (Mulligan 2013). But while unpaid contributions to society certainly ought to be held in esteem, and by no means considered second-rate, on the face of it UBI is ill-suited to the purpose of expressing such esteem. Receipt of an UBI is not earned; it does not function as a return for something or as a reciprocating mechanism. It is an entitlement with no strings or obligations attached. Given that, why should one take one's receipt of the UBI as evidence, material or symbolic, of the esteem in which one's unpaid work is held by society? It only takes a moment's reflection to see the emptiness of an esteem bestowed equally on everyone, no matter what they do. And it does not help to construe the putative esteem bestowed by UBI as aimed at the unpaid contributions an individual *would* make *if* she had access to the income. Esteem for possible rather than actual contribution is no less empty than equal esteem independent of contribution.

The problem can be put this way: how can esteem for performance of a role be expressed through an award that is granted unconditionally? Laitinen's solution is to distinguish different contexts of esteem (Laitinen 2015). The appearance of a paradox in conferring esteem through an unconditional award disappears, Laitinen argues, if we bear in mind that legitimate demands for esteem take different forms depending on context. In one context, the demands are directed against something negative, some stigma or 'unjustifiable disesteem' such as is attached to unemployment (Laitinen 2015, p. 63). In another, the esteem sought concerns general membership of society

considered as a system of cooperation and is granted through the positive but equal status that each contributor to the common good enjoys. In a third context, the object of esteem is one's personal achievements insofar as they contribute to individual projects of self-realization. Assuming that an UBI would take the stigma out of unemployment, it would indirectly confer esteem in the first context. Assuming that with an UBI 'everyone will in fact end up contributing to the common good', say by doing household work or community work, it will manifest esteem in the second context (Laitinen 2015, p. 77). And by providing more individuals with the means to pursue their own projects of self-realization (independently of paid work), it would provide esteem in the third context.

Does this solve the problem? If UBI were to reduce the 'disesteem' of unemployment, that would certainly count in its favour as an instrument of social freedom. But it is only by actualizing some role outside of employment that the unemployed person can make something positive, something esteem-worthy, from the negativity of unemployment. The mere possibility of doing so isn't enough. A similar point holds for the second context: it is only by doing the community work, the housework, and so on that the person without paid work shows herself as an esteem-worthy member of society. That the UBI makes it 'probable' that everyone, or most people, will end up doing such unpaid work does not make a relevant difference. Probability is no better than possibility: when it comes to esteem-worthiness, only actuality counts. This also applies to contexts of self-realization outside paid work.

There is a basic dilemma underlying these difficulties. If UBI is to be made an expression of esteem in the performance of a role, either one or both of the following qualifications would need to be made. Either the esteem conferred would need to be qualified so that it no longer had conditions, or the UBI would need to be qualified so

that it was no longer unconditional. The problem with first strategy, however, is that it inevitably abstracts from the content of the role, making it such that anyone can occupy it and occupy it equally well. Esteem thus morphs into the respect all owe each other *qua persons* and loses its distinctiveness both as a form of recognition and as a criterion of social freedom. The problem with the second strategy is that it inevitably takes the radicality out of the UBI idea and makes it indistinguishable from various conditional incomes. UBI thus morphs into the citizen's wage, or a carer's allowance or a householder's income, depending on the primary social role that the basic income is meant to enable and esteem.

If we don't conceive the impact an UBI stands to have on the social freedom available to the family-member, householder and citizen in terms of the esteem it would bestow, how else should we conceive it? One possibility is to think of the UBI as an expression of the mutual respect in which the citizens of a democratic community hold each other. The idea would be that citizens share a responsibility to ensure that each member of the community has sufficient income to meet basic material needs and therefore to participate effectively in democratic politics. Or the argument might be put in terms of time: by freeing up time that would otherwise be consumed in activity oriented to meeting basic material needs, an UBI would make it possible for individuals to spend more on time on activity oriented to the well-being of the political community. Neither extreme poverty nor extreme 'busyness' are good for citizens *qua citizens*, and since an UBI would help eliminate both, it would enable citizens to function better in that role. Similar arguments can be made for family membership and personal relationships. The less time family members and friends have to spend in gainful employment, the more they will have to acquit domestic obligations and enjoy the shared goods of participation in those relationships. It can

also be argued that the financial independence afforded by receipt of an UBI would help to offset the vulnerability to abuse that occurs in the domestic sphere. By enabling the vulnerable party to exit an abusive relationship without fear of financial hardship, an UBI would represent a gain in freedom in this sphere too.

5. Conclusion: UBI and the fabric of justice

But the gain in freedom delivered by the capacity to leave an abusive personal relationship without financial hardship, like that delivered by the capacity to quit a lousy job without falling into poverty, is not a gain in social freedom. In order for a gain in social freedom to be at stake, one or more of the criteria of social freedom would have to be satisfied: an opening up of opportunities for subjective appropriation, involvement in mutually completing relations of recognition, and co-determination in the performance of the respective role. The emancipatory potential of an UBI in regard to the family role is thus analogous to that which it has in regard to the worker role: in both cases it stands to have an impact not so much on performance of the role as its assumption, reflective endorsement, and integration with other roles in a life. While one needs to have the subjective freedoms that an UBI helps to deliver as a condition of enjoying social freedom in those roles, one is not *made* socially free by those freedoms.

Can we say that the more subjective freedom we have, the better it is for social freedom? Do gains in the subjective freedom individuals have to assume, change and reject roles seep into gains in the freedom to be obtained by performance of the roles? Not if they end up negating the criteria of social freedom themselves, as they would do if they made the role less apt for subjective appropriation, mutual recognition and

collective self-determination. Here we can return to imagery of the fabric of justice with which we began. Recall that, on the Hegelian view, justice is first and foremost a matter of the freedom available through everyday social relationships. The social bonds forged and reproduced in these relationships form the fabric of society, a fabric that is more or less just depending on the degree to which social freedom is available there. If, in the course of advancing the freedom of individuals in relation to the assumption and rejection of the roles, an UBI were to render them less apt for freedom in their performance, it would weaken rather than strengthen the fabric of justice. I have argued that there is a danger of this happening in the case of the worker-earner role, the role that stands to be most affected by the introduction of an UBI, mainly because of the threat it could pose to collective self-determination in the role. But whether the overall effect of an UBI would be a weakening or strengthening of the fabric of justice we are not yet in a position to judge.¹¹

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