

Feminist political theory and the argument for an unconditional basic income

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Although many thoughtful critiques of political theory and the concept of justice have been offered from a feminist perspective, a comprehensive feminist theory of justice has not yet been articulated. This article proposes that not only does a feminist account of justice require an unconditional basic income, but also that is the *only* basis on which to defend the principle of unconditionality against the gender-biased claims of universal work or participation duties. It surveys feminist critiques of political theory, theories of justice and the androcentric models of citizenship. Together, these critiques suggest a more gender-inclusive model of citizenship and the broad outlines of a feminist theory of justice, in which an unconditional basic income plays a crucial role.

Introduction

Contemporary debates on the merits of a basic income take place in the literatures of distributive justice, citizenship, equality and public policy. Liberal egalitarian theories of justice, including those of Rawls (1971), Dworkin (2000) and White (2003), defend the legitimacy of some redistribution of income and wealth, but differ about how much is justified, and under what conditions. An unconditional basic income is thought by some liberal egalitarians to represent exploitation of ‘crazies’ – those who have high earnings to which they are morally entitled – by ‘lazies’ – those who prefer not to work, or decline the jobs that are available to them (Elster, 1986). Related to this *exploitation objection*, but grounded in an ideal of citizenship rather than of distributive justice, is the claim that the *reciprocity principle* requires, if not a strictly proportional relationship between effort and income, at least a relatively proportional ‘productive’ contribution to be eligible for the benefits of redistribution (White, 2003). The concept of *independence* is used both by basic income advocates, who see the universal grant as providing all citizens with the independence akin to that bestowed by an inheritance (Meade, 1993) or by inalienable voting rights (Pateman, 2005), and by its opponents, who argue that those *dependent* on income benefits can never achieve the independence necessary for full citizenship (Mead, 1986).

Full consideration of the arguments for basic income is beyond the scope of this article. Here I focus on examining the premises on which the most salient objections to an unconditional basic income are constructed. I argue that traditional theories of justice and citizenship posit an ostensibly gender-neutral but clearly *androcentric* subject – the autonomous, ‘independent’ and dependant-free adult faced with a choice between employment and leisure. Dominant theories of justice and citizenship make this problematic presumption without fully understanding how that subject embodies a gender bias that is inimical to women’s equality. The effect

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of this gender bias in the realm of distributive justice in general, and in the basic income debate in particular, is the reinforcement of economic inequalities between those with disproportionate responsibility for care work and those without, through the undervaluing of care work as a social contribution, and through misconceptions about the extent to which care work can be commodified and those who now provide it unburdened of it.

Training a feminist lens on justice and citizenship, through which androcentric theories are tempered by recognition of these dependencies and of the importance of care work, suggests the broad outlines of a feminist theory of justice and citizenship that promotes the fullest conception of distributive justice – one that embodies a substantive equality of the genders. Despite the existence of many thoughtful critiques of male-centric political theory and theories of justice, as well as numerous policies and policy proposals meant to address specific instances of gender inequality, a comprehensive feminist theory of justice has yet to be articulated. In relation to the basic income debate, I argue that not only does a feminist perspective on justice require an unconditional basic income, but also that is the *only* basis on which to defend the principle of unconditionality against the gender-biased claims of universal work or participation duties. Therefore, the debates around an unconditional basic income constitute a fruitful arena for the development of a feminist theory of justice. I begin this article with a brief survey of the feminist critiques of political theory and theories of justice, and of androcentric models of citizenship. Together these critiques suggest a more gender-inclusive model of citizenship and the broad outlines of a feminist theory of justice, in which an unconditional basic income plays a crucial role.

The feminist critique of political theory

The contemporary feminist critique of traditional political theory in general, and theories of justice in particular, has taken place in two stages (Barrett and Phillips, 1992; Tong, 2009). It began with a critique of the idea of ‘separate spheres’ for men and women, and the demand for gender neutrality in employment and before the law as the means to the elimination of gender inequality. The second stage began from the recognition that gender neutrality was insufficient on its own to eliminate gender inequality, and called for a recognition of gender ‘difference’. Traditional theories of justice have been challenged to incorporate gender differences into their assumptions about the subject of justice, and to recognise principles of responsibility and care in addition to rights and obligations.

Separate spheres

The separation of social life into public and private, or domestic, spheres¹ is a construct that has enabled philosophers to limit their theories to the former and virtually to ignore the latter. Justice, rights and the rule of law are meant to govern the public sphere, while love, altruism and privacy are thought to govern the domestic sphere. Feminists have critiqued the separate spheres model for several reasons (Elshtain, 1981; Okin, 1989; Young, 1995; Kymlicka, 2002). First, the idea of a private domestic sphere allows injustice to flourish within the family – including family violence

and the unequal and gendered distribution of power, labour and income. Second, the gendered inequality of the domestic sphere necessarily spills over into the public sphere, where women's disproportionate domestic responsibilities prevent them from competing fairly with men for jobs, income, political power and other forms of influence, and often relegates women to providing most of society's low-*paid* care as well. But the third reason is one that would hold no matter who was primarily responsible for care work in the domestic sphere: the primacy in our moral imaginations and our social institutions of the model of competent, 'independent' adults responsible for their ends and actions fails to recognise the enormous amount of work that goes on in the domestic sphere to make the public sphere possible, and ignores the constraints that those who are primarily responsible for unpaid care confront when they enter the public sphere and are unable to leave the domestic sphere fully behind (Fraser, 1997).

Thus, the question of what *paid* work responsibilities adult citizens have – one of the questions at issue in theories of justice and citizenship – can only take place upon the foundation of the enormous amount of *unpaid* work that transforms dependent infants into 'independent' adults (Okin, 1989; Tronto, 1993; Kittay, 1999). Furthermore, the 'independence' of these now-adults is only maintained to the extent that chance – or more likely, gender – preserves them from being providers of unpaid care. In addition, some number of adults will never achieve independence or will lose it for a time because of physical or learning disabilities or age-related disability. In light of these widespread and quite natural limitations on competence and independence, the presumption of a competent, independent adult subject strongly limits the legitimacy of traditional theories of justice (Tronto, 1993; Clement, 1996; Kymlicka, 2002).

The feminist challenge to the model of separate spheres requires not necessarily the rejection of the idea of two spheres, but a rejection of their rigid separation and of the implicit or explicit relegation of men to one sphere and women to the other. Gender equality depends on the recognition of their interdependence and the restructuring of social institutions to allow fluidity between both spheres for both men and women.

The limits of gender neutrality

'Gender neutrality' in the legal, educational and political spheres removes formal barriers to women's access to education, occupations, suffrage and political office, and grants women standing before the law independent from fathers, brothers or husbands. Despite the vast opportunities opened to women by gender neutrality, three significant problems nevertheless remain after its widespread institutionalisation.

The first problem can be characterised as the 'stacked deck'. When gender neutrality is institutionalised after generations of gender exclusivity, even seemingly neutral and ostensibly relevant requirements or constraints can have unnecessarily discriminatory effects. Greater rewards in the workplace for full-time and continuous employment, for example, is on its face neutral between genders, but necessarily works against the interests of those – primarily women – who are less able to commit to full-time, continuous work due to care responsibilities (Kymlicka, 2002). Similarly, union-negotiated rewards for seniority, and 'up or out' policies in professional fields

such as academia or law, work against the advancement of women of childbearing age who take leaves to bear children and to care for them, or of any adult whose care responsibilities place inescapable limits on the intensity of their work commitments (Bergmann, 2005).

A second problem with gender neutrality is that it does little to promote pay equity between traditionally male and female occupations. Gender neutrality may mandate that the occupations of sanitation worker and daycare worker both be open to men and women without bias, for example, but does nothing to rectify the large imbalance in pay and benefits between the largely male occupation of sanitation worker and the largely female occupation of daycare worker, despite the similar educational and training level requirements for both positions, and the similarly low-skilled, somewhat physical and dirty nature of the jobs performed by both.²

Third, the doctrine of gender neutrality cannot address the problem of how to recognise and accommodate the gender differences that remain as a result of biology, socialisation and the gendered distribution of care work. If employers or the state offered equivalent, gender-neutral *parental leave* to mothers and fathers, it might contribute to gender equality, if it inclined fathers to perform more of the care work required by a newborn than they traditionally have; but such even-handed neutrality fails to account for the fact that it is the *mother's* body that has gone through the extra burden of pregnancy and childbirth, and that only mothers can breastfeed their babies. On the other hand, if fathers received parental leave and did not increase their care work, gender neutrality would in this case strike a blow against gender equality. Pregnancy and childbirth are *sui generis*, and require both gender-specific and gender-neutral accommodations in the workplace, along with changes to the distribution of care work in the family, to promote gender equality.

True gender neutrality in employer recognition and accommodation of care responsibilities would be a major advance in redressing the gender imbalance in the division of care work in the family if it induced men as well as women to take time away from work without penalty. But the doctrine of gender neutrality itself derives from the more general neutrality among life choices integral to liberalism. Liberal egalitarianism, as opposed to socialism and the European social-democratic tradition, sets basic ground rules and then gets out of the way of individual choices about how to live, with whom to associate and so on. Social institutions are to be arranged so as not to privilege or unduly hamper the life choices of any individual or group. In this context, especially in light of the widespread availability of contraception, the accessibility of higher education and a wide range of occupations for women, having care responsibilities, for children or anyone else, is deemed to be a choice like any other (see, for example, White, 2003). In fact, recent data in the United States (US) indicate a significant increase since the 1970s in the percentage of women at the end of their childbearing years who have not borne a child, reinforcing the view of childbearing as a choice.³ This has two important implications. First, if having care responsibilities is considered a choice, society may require that the costs of that choice be borne privately rather than collectively, as with any other costly preference, such as a taste for expensive wine. Second, if devoting oneself to fulfilling care responsibilities is seen as a personal choice, unconstrained by external institutions or limitations, the decision is removed from the realm of public debate over its terms and public recognition of its contribution.

The recognition of 'difference'

Disappointment with the effects on gender equality of the doctrine of gender neutrality led feminists in the liberal egalitarian tradition to argue that the idea of neutrality masked a persistently masculine subject, at the level of both theory and practice. Not only was the subject of theories of justice an autonomous, 'independent' adult, free of both dependants and dependencies, the practical effects of androcentric norms of contributory citizenship served to exclude women from taking advantage of opportunities in the public sphere while further devaluing their work in the domestic sphere. Recognition of difference was demanded in two ways: recognition of the irreducible sexual differences between men and women that could not be attributed to socially constructed gender, and recognition of the lingering gendered distribution of labour in the domestic sphere that remained untouched by gender neutrality in the public sphere.

Despite widespread acknowledgement of these problems, feminists have yet to come to a consensus on how to address them. Partly this is because the ideology of neutrality readily suggests a framework of 'choice' as the solution to the conundrum of how to recognise difference: women – and men, of course – can 'choose' which sphere to devote themselves to, and the debate can shift to the merits of various policy proposals to enable those 'choices', without any critical analysis of why anyone has to choose between them. But mainly the lack of consensus reflects the fact that achieving gender equality requires a radical rethinking of the subject of justice, and a more radical restructuring of important social institutions than even many feminists are prepared to endorse.

Recognising care: feminist models of citizenship

Currently, some feminist critiques of the status quo accept the androcentric norm of productive citizenship (see, for example, Bergmann, 1998; Hirschman, 2006) and seek to enhance gender equality by providing women who work full time with affordable dependant care services (Bergmann, 2000, 2006), or by arguing that care work should be recognised and compensated as work with a *caregiver income* (Kittay, 1999; Abelda et al, 2004).⁴ As noted by Fraser (1997), this leads to the dominance in policy debates of two models of citizenship, which she terms the *universal breadwinner* and *caregiver parity* models. These models reflect more gender-inclusive theories of citizenship, in which universal work expectations are supported by extensive public care services, or in which unpaid caregiving is seen as a social contribution equivalent to paid employment.

The *universal breadwinner model* 'aims to achieve gender equity principally by promoting women's employment' (Fraser, 1997: 51) and requires support services designed to free women from caregiving responsibilities that hinder their full-time work. It accepts uncritically not only the notion of 'separate spheres', but also the primacy of the public sphere for individual empowerment and flourishing, and as the primary site of gender equality. It views caregiving and other domestic work as problems to be solved through commodification – through increased availability of child and elder care, housecleaning and meal preparation services, and through

egalitarian parental leave policies for men and women. This model is exemplified by the social-democratic institutions of the Scandinavian countries.

The *caregiver parity model* 'aims to promote gender equity principally by supporting informal care work' (Fraser, 1997: 55) and requires that care work be regarded and remunerated on a par with other paid employment. This model does not view the gendered distribution of labour as problematic, only the income inequality and lack of respect for care work it fosters. Compensation for caregiving is thought to be enough to raise its social and material status, allowing men and women to achieve equality despite the choice of different ends.

Fraser critiques both these models against seven principles she claims are essential to a comprehensive vision of gender equity: anti-poverty, anti-exploitation, income equality, leisure time equality, equality of respect, anti-marginalisation and anti-androcentrism. The first two principles, which relate to sufficient income guarantees independent of 'exploitable dependencies' (on spouses or abusive employers, for example), can be satisfied by either model with a sufficiently generous social insurance programme – although significantly both would require a residual means-tested safety net for those unable to participate in paid employment (under the universal breadwinner model), or paid employment or care work (under the caregiver parity model).

However, the remaining five principles are difficult for either model to achieve, because they depend on a fairly radical restructuring of work, caregiving and gender relations, none of which is significantly challenged by either model. It is Fraser's last principle – *anti-androcentrism* – that holds the key to the other four. Androcentrism holds when men's dominant life patterns are taken to represent the norm for all, and women's recognition and income security depend on their conformity to those norms. Neither the universal breadwinner model nor the caregiver parity model fundamentally challenges the assumption of an autonomous, independent worker as the model citizen. The universal breadwinner model attempts to provide sufficient supports for women to participate in paid employment in equal numbers to men; the caregiver parity model seeks to recast unpaid caregiving in the mould of autonomous, independent work. Neither model recognises that caregiving and household responsibilities cannot be fully commodified or restricted to the confines of employment-comparable hours and tasks (Mink, 1995); as a result, both models are only marginal improvements on the status quo in terms of valuing care work, and continue to deny women true equality with men. Both models concern themselves only with the redistribution of what is primarily *men's* work – paid employment or other activities that can be moulded to resemble paid employment. True gender equality, according to Fraser, requires the redistribution of what is primarily *women's* work – care work – as well, along with the restructuring of social institutions including but not limited to the employment and dependent care sectors. Fraser calls this model of citizenship the *universal caregiver* model. 'The key to achieving gender equity in a postindustrial welfare state ... is to make women's current life-patterns the norm for everyone' (Fraser, 1997: 61). Rather than paid employment and care work being divided between workers and caregivers, all citizens would be assumed to participate in both kinds of work, and social institutions, including the workplace and the social welfare system, would be structured so as to support this dual responsibility. The universal caregiver model, unlike the universal breadwinner

and caregiver parity models, requires a radical reformulation of the subject of justice, and a re-examination of theories of justice with this new subject in mind.

Universalising care: principles of a feminist theory of justice

The universal caregiver model of citizenship suggests that simply increasing opportunities for women in the public sphere, or increasing the availability of childcare options and parental leave, without critiquing the pervasive assumptions of 'independence' and autonomy is inadequate. Gender equality is impossible to achieve as long as the domestic sphere is viewed as a secondary sphere of life whose problems can be taken care of and then forgotten. Attention to the domestic sphere demonstrates the pervasiveness of interdependence and dependence in human society, rather than independence. Acknowledging the pervasiveness of dependence can be seen as threatening to androcentric ideals of autonomy, but rather than being at odds with traditional theories of justice, this perspective can help to enlarge them and make them truly and fairly applicable to both men and women on equal terms (Kittay, 1999; Clement, 1996).

Expanding our focus to include the responsibilities we have in the domestic sphere makes it clear that the framework of justice that we apply to the public sphere is inadequate on its own. The framework of justice, concerned as it is with rights and responsibilities, can describe at best a part of the domestic sphere, and yet is essential precisely in ensuring that those who need care receive it. On the other hand, the virtues of love and altruism seem to describe a larger part of the domestic sphere, but they are limited in their ability to help us understand how the responsibilities of care ought to be distributed. When viewed through a feminist perspective, with the needs and dependencies of the domestic sphere brought to view rather than hidden behind a wall of 'privacy', the fundamental principles of justice take on different meanings than they do in traditional theories of justice.

Equality

The fundamental principle of justice is that of equality. When the realities of interdependence and responsibility for caregiving are prioritised over the ideal of independence, it is clear that equality for women cannot mean only the absence of overt discrimination promised by gender neutrality. Equality requires that the burdens and rewards of caregiving, as well as the burdens and rewards of other occupations and social responsibilities, not be disproportionately distributed by gender or any other suspect category, including class and race (Okin, 1979; Pateman, 1987; Glenn, 1992; Fraser, 1997).

Autonomy

The institutional structure of society must ensure that everyone has at least some opportunity to step away from the responsibilities of care, to choose and pursue their own ends. This realm of autonomy can never be fully shielded from the realm of care, as the ideology of the separate spheres implies; a just society will be ordered in a way that facilitates movement between the two for all its members (Clement, 1996).

The ideal of autonomy does not imply the equalisation of resources, opportunities or capabilities, but rather the guarantee of the minimal resources necessary for individuals to pursue their own ends consistent with their innate abilities and with a similar degree of autonomy from others over their own lives.

Anti-exploitation

Viewed from a feminist perspective, the concept of exploitation shifts from a focus on preventing the exploitation of ‘crazies’ by ‘lazies’, to redressing the exploitation of unpaid and low-paid caregivers by those who are able to avoid a fair share of care work (Fraser, 1997; Pateman, 2006). The implication of this understanding of exploitation for theories of justice and citizenship is that theories that prioritise one form of exploitation to the exclusion of the other violate gender equality. If the principle of reciprocity, for example, imposes duties on citizens to reciprocate for the benefits of social cooperation in the sphere of paid employment, it must impose similar duties to reciprocate for the benefits of social cooperation in the sphere of care as well.

Reciprocity

Once the sphere of care is included in our understanding of social cooperation, the principle of reciprocity loses the punitive character it has in much of the basic income debate. The first care we all receive, as infants and children, is given unconditionally out of love, not according to any distributional principle, and not in the expectation that it will be repaid. There is no way to reciprocate directly for this care, because it is a gift our parents or caregivers have already received from others. But it can be reciprocated socially – to our own children, or to others in need of care. Rather than implying a *selective* duty for the poor to work in return for subsistence benefits, the feminist principle of reciprocity suggests that we all reciprocate for the care we all receive, and do so unconditionally, in the manner in which the care we received was given. The feminist principle of reciprocity suggests that support of children and others who cannot support themselves ought to be a social, rather than a private, responsibility.

Pluralism

Most importantly, a feminist perspective suggests the importance of giving material substance to the ideal of pluralism, the ability of individuals to have a voice in the development of social norms and the ability to contest those norms. What we take to be ‘normal’ cannot be the result of one group’s dominance over another, as is currently the case with prevailing androcentric norms of what it means to be a contributing member of society (McKay, 2007). The just society will ensure that all its members have an effective voice in the allocation of social resources to different ends and in the valuation of different ways of life. To achieve this, individuals must have the means to make different life choices and to contribute by their example to our collective understanding of the ‘normal’ balance of paid work, caregiving and leisure (Gross, 1986; Young, 1995).

Solidarity

The principle of solidarity suggests that gender equality cannot be achieved for one class of women at the expense of another, as is often implicit in the universal breadwinner model. Greater opportunities for women and men to combine care work with paid employment must not be predicated upon the availability of low-paid care services provided by the most vulnerable members of society, who must in turn depend on the unpaid work of other women to provide them with care services (Glenn, 1992).

A feminist theory of justice: equality of what?

Theories of distributive justice that limit or prioritise the distribution of resources according to androcentric forms of contribution, work or responsibility, fail to treat women with equal respect. A feminist theory of distributive justice would recognise and reward what is traditionally ‘women’s work’ in parity with what is traditionally men’s work. It further suggests that the responsibility to reciprocate cannot be conceived solely in terms of reciprocating with ‘men’s work’ for the benefits bestowed by men’s work, but also in terms of reciprocating for ‘women’s work’ – particularly, but not only, for the intensive time and effort required by childrearing. If men are thought to ‘own’ themselves at adulthood, and therefore the fruits of their labour, it can only be, as Okin (1989) points out, by wilfully ignoring the mother’s entitlement to the fruits of *her* labour. Children have no entitlement to the care they receive that can be explained by either the libertarian theory of justice or any egalitarian theory of justice that depends heavily on a notion of responsibility for one’s choices. What adults are capable of achieving depends enormously on the nurturing they receive by way of gift in their childhood years; if there is a duty to reciprocate for anything, surely it is for these wholly unearned gifts, without which human life and flourishing are impossible. The entitlement of children to the care they receive can, however, be accounted for in an egalitarian theory of justice based on a substantive equality of resources.

A substantive equality of resources

Liberal theories of justice seek to maximise liberty for individuals, as long as the exercise of liberty does not infringe on the liberty of others, because respect for equality means each individual’s liberty is as important as any other’s. In the context of property rights, the liberty to acquire property is always constrained to some degree, in order that the entitlement of one does not infringe on the entitlements of others. Individuals closely situated can agree on a variety of rules to regulate property acquisition and accumulation, and even on a variety of procedures to determine how to decide on the rules; this variety is reflected in the range of theories in the liberal tradition. Different rules for property acquisition and accumulation can differentially affect the legal character of individual holdings, but not their fundamental moral character: if liberty and equality are to have any substantive meaning, all individuals are entitled to use natural resources to meet the necessities of life.

Thus far, theories in the liberal tradition are in agreement. The consensus ends when we move beyond ideal theory to the dynamic reality of society through time. In the socialist tradition, the initial recognition of collective entitlement is formalised into communal ownership, with the advantage that the vast economic inequalities engendered by private property rights never come into being. But if communal ownership gives enduring substance to the ideal of equality, it does so in ways that unduly infringe on our liberty and prosperity; the former, by subjecting individual activity to collective authority, and the latter, by substituting the imperfect wisdom of deliberate planning for the undirected exchange of information about individual preferences through the market mechanism. In the liberal tradition, strong private property rights even in natural resources and inherited resources give greater scope to individual liberty, for the benefit of both the individual and the group: differential returns to investments give greater power to act and invest to those who generate more of what individuals want, and the pool of assets potentially available to all increases.

Libertarian theories of justice justify strong property rights regimes on the grounds of both entitlement and efficiency: a limited entitlement to use resources to provide for the necessities of life, followed by a more expansive entitlement to acquire and accumulate resources to produce more, as long as the prior, limited entitlement of others is respected in some way, if not enhanced. Liberal egalitarian theories endorse entitlement but, more cognisant of the detrimental effects to equal liberty of unconstrained accumulation, endorse it in a more limited way than libertarian theories. Liberal egalitarians restrict our absolute entitlement to that we can be said to deserve in a moral sense, according to some criteria, and not to that which is the result of luck, variously defined.

The logic to which this liberal egalitarian perspective should lead is the preservation, in some way, of our natural entitlement to the resources necessary for life – at the very least, to what ‘un-assisted Nature offered to [our] necessities’, in Locke’s (1988: 299) words. This suggests a guaranteed minimum of some sort – of income, or access to common land, at the very least. But rather than a principle to safeguard our entitlement to a guaranteed minimum – a floor to emulate our natural entitlement to resources necessary for life – the liberal egalitarian tradition so often gives us ceilings, or formulas of allowable inequality, as if what is objectionable about unfettered property accumulation is the degree of inequality it allows, rather than the liberty it constrains for those who no longer have free access to common resources.

A feminist theory of justice prioritises the preservation of our natural entitlement to the resources necessary for life over reducing inequality. Caregivers, most often women, are not only constrained in the race to accumulate assets by their responsibility for care work, but often care for those who have no entitlement to anything under the terms of traditional liberal theory – children and the infirm – because they are unable to labour at all, and thus lack standing as full citizens. Liberal egalitarian theory ignores the resources and labour required to nurture infants into the adults who can compete for assets in any private property regime, relegating such matters to the privacy of the domestic sphere. But if liberal theory is to fully extend the principle of equality to women, its principles and protections must extend to the domestic sphere as well. The principle of reciprocity must apply to the unpaid

care we all receive as children and throughout our lives, and the entitlement to the resources necessary for life must begin with life, at birth, if not before.⁵

The universality of the entitlement to resources necessary for life suggests its unconditionality as well; after all, what conditions could reasonably be imposed on children and the infirm? But an unconditional entitlement for those unable to work could be paired with conditional entitlement for those who are able, and is the inevitable conclusion of androcentric theories of justice posited on the illusory independence of its adult (male) citizens. This is also, of course, the general principle of the modern welfare state (despite its perennial discomfort with even limited unconditional benefits in practice), but it is also the general principle of the social-democratic state, and in this context, the Scandinavian model in particular. Does a feminist theory of justice lead to an endorsement of the Scandinavian model, especially one constructed specifically to lead to gender-symmetrical patterns of paid employment and caregiving (see, for example, Gornick and Meyers, 2008)?

A feminist theory of justice and basic income

The ideal of a gender-symmetrical society – one in which men and women are no more or less likely to engage in paid employment or caregiving – is at first glance an appealing one, and suggests the achievement of a comprehensive gender egalitarianism. According to advocates, policies required to achieve a gender-symmetrical society include free or subsidised provision of early childhood education and care; limits on the number of hours in the working week; availability of part-time employment; and family leave policies that provide incentives for equal use by fathers and mothers (Gornick and Meyers, 2008). But gender symmetry as an ideal is nothing more than the universal breadwinner model in a new form. Its attempted enforcement of egalitarian caregiving merely emphasises the extent to which caregiving is seen as secondary to the primary sphere of flourishing – the sphere of paid employment. In pursuit of the gender-egalitarian ideal, advocates of gender symmetry impose uniform life patterns on men and women alike.

The gender-symmetry approach shows promise in fulfilling the first four principles of a feminist theory of justice identified above: equality, autonomy, anti-exploitation and reciprocity. But it does less well on the principles of pluralism and solidarity: pluralism, because it posits a paid employment-centric ideal for all citizens, and solidarity, because it does little to address the gendered distribution of labour in the realm of paid employment.

The liberal egalitarian tradition suggests a different foundation for a gender-egalitarian society: an unconditional basic income, which, I argue, supports care work in accordance with the principles of a feminist theory of distributive justice and the universal caregiver model of citizenship. First, a basic income derived from a feminist theory of justice would provide every child and adult a guaranteed minimum income sufficient for basic needs, fulfilling the feminist reciprocity principle; this is in contrast to basic income proposals justified on other grounds, which often limit the basic income to adults, or tie the amount of the benefit to reductions in inequality rather than provision of basic needs. Second, basic income provides caregivers with resources to use as they prefer: as a personal caregiving stipend, to pay for care provided by others, or indeed, for any other purpose, thereby supporting care and

supporting the autonomy of caregivers. Third, by redistributing income to those with the least, basic income redistributes *power* to society's most vulnerable members. For those in need of care, it reduces the power imbalance between care recipients and caregivers by guaranteeing recipients of care at least minimal resources, thereby fostering equality of respect. It reduces power imbalances within the family, where it provides a caregiver financial resources and a citizenship status independent of paid employment, and it provides a wage supplement and some bargaining power to low-paid workers. Finally, an unconditional and universal basic income triggered by no condition other than low income, and recouped through the tax system from recipients with higher incomes, has the potential to eliminate poverty more effectively than any other scheme of redistribution.

Most importantly, basic income indirectly compensates care and society's other unpaid work without reinforcing the existing gendered distribution of labour or the primacy of the public sphere by equating care with work. Although basic income is often characterised as allowing people not to work, its most radical feature in comparison to current forms of welfare state redistribution is that it allows people to work without losing benefits immediately at a punitively high effective rate of taxation, which they do in the 'poverty trap' effect of conditional or means-tested benefits. Because of its universality and its unconditionality, basic income preserves work incentives; at low levels of income it is not a substitute for earned income, but a complement, and operates as a wage subsidy (Van Parijs, 2001). This means that low-wage jobs, or the volunteer work that can provide some of the non-financial benefits of paid employment, for both the individual and society, can become feasible in a way they are not under conditional or means-tested forms of redistribution. Together with other strategies to increase the flexibility of paid employment, basic income promotes the ability of individuals to choose the mix of paid work, care and leisure that best meets their needs at any given time (Roebyns, 2000). Because no one – man or woman – has to choose between being a 'worker' or a 'caregiver' to receive income, basic income has the most potential of any redistributive scheme to transform over time the relation of both men and women to the provision of care and to the world of paid employment.

Basic income is by no means enough on its own to achieve true gender equality, but the feminist justification of a basic income, unlike justifications based on the traditional androcentric subject of justice and citizenship, implies other institutional and policy changes as well to make sharing caregiving responsibilities easier and more attractive for women and men. Some steps along the path to gender equality follow directly from the universal caregiver model of citizenship, and include:

- the wider availability of part-time work and job sharing;
- job security during periodic leaves for full-time caregiving;
- the decoupling of access to benefits such as health insurance and pensions from paid employment (a continuing problem in the US);
- the widespread availability of care centres, both publicly supported and privately run, for children, older people and adults unable to care for themselves;
- the reconfiguring of children's schooling away from an anachronistic schedule designed to conform to the requirements of an agricultural society and towards

a schedule that recognises the realities of paid employment demands on many parents.⁶

Other steps require extending the norm of gender neutrality now prevalent in higher education and professional workplaces, for example to the still androcentric institutions of vocational education and skilled blue-collar workplaces (Bergmann, 2005; Estévez-Abe, 2006). Still other steps require a more radical restructuring of the employment sector including, for example, reductions in rewards for seniority or continuity of service in promotions or advancement to protected status in both blue-collar and professional jobs.

None of these changes would guarantee on their own that men would scale back time spent in paid employment, or that if they did they would increase their time spent in care work. But they would decrease the costs to men of doing so, and would increase their opportunities to break out of the gendered distribution that confines men to paid employment-centric models of contributory citizenship just as women are constrained in other ways (Roebyns, 2000, 2001). An unconditional basic income and the reduction of the dependency of the caregiving partner on the employed partner for income, benefits and status should encourage both men and women to combine both roles either simultaneously or in turn.

Finally, while an unconditional basic income and the associated institutional changes a feminist theory of distributive justice implies would increase the bargaining power of women vis-à-vis men over determining the distribution of labour within any particular family, the gains for women in traditional male-female partnerships are not accomplished at the expense of the exclusion of single parents from any benefits or the exploitation of the low-income women who carry the burden of care work when more affluent women work in paid employment.

Conclusion

Feminist political theory has in many ways moved on from critiques of theories of justice, by moving beyond the focus on questions of economic inequality to questioning the value or legitimacy of such comprehensive theories altogether. While much recent work has indeed extended feminism's critical project into important new areas, it is crucial that our attention not shift entirely before the insights gained in the realm of economic inequality are institutionalised in policy. The Scandinavian version of the universal breadwinner model of citizenship – a generous welfare state with policies designed to induce men to take caregiving leaves from paid employment – offers one model of a gender-egalitarian society, but one that continues the prioritisation of the male-dominated public sphere of paid employment over the sphere of care.

The feminist version of the liberal egalitarian tradition that has as its foundation a universal, unconditional basic income at a level to meet basic needs, on the other hand prioritises the emerging norm of combined care work and paid employment throughout adulthood. The latter attempts not so much to mould individual behaviour to a socially dominant norm, but to allow for the emergence of alternative norms of behaviour beyond the dominant universal breadwinner norm. By socialising the cost of supporting care – not only among fathers, but also among all those

whose high earnings suggest protection from the burdens of care – a basic income promotes reciprocity not only within families but also between those with care responsibilities and those without. Finally, by providing an unconditional floor of income to low-skilled workers, basic income provides bargaining power for those who might prefer to stay home and take care of their own children or parents over working as low-paid caregivers for higher-paid women and men, or for women and men of all classes to demand workplaces more accommodating of universal care responsibilities.

A universal, unconditional basic income does not promise a gender-symmetrical society – an unreachable goal anyway, until men can bear and breastfeed babies. But it may lead to a society in which remaining, and perhaps essential gender differences do not penalise women (or men) who choose not to pursue androcentric ideals of citizenship by relegating them to poverty, dependence on their spouses or employers, and second-class citizenship.

Notes

¹ Following Kymlicka (2002), I prefer the term ‘domestic sphere’ to denote the sphere of family and care responsibilities.

² The average hourly wage for a ‘refuse and recyclable materials collector’ employed by a local government is 45% higher than for a ‘childcare worker’ employed by a local government in the US (\$16/hour vs \$11/hour) (US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational employment statistics*, May 2008, available at www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4_999300.htm).

³ The percentage of women aged 40–44 in the US who have never had children increased from 10% in 1976 to 18% in 2010 (Livingston and Cohn, 2010).

⁴ See also the Caregiver Credit Campaign, at www.caregivercredit.org

⁵ Van Parijs’s ‘real libertarianism,’ with its advocacy of an unconditional basic income for all, comes closest to this interpretation of liberal egalitarianism, but Van Parijs (1995: 35) explicitly rejects an identification of basic income with basic needs, saying that it ‘can fall short of or exceed what is regarded as necessary to a decent existence’, and restricts it to ‘full members of society’, meaning adults.

⁶ While the other reforms necessary to support universal caregiving are cited by many feminists, the significant problem posed by children’s school schedules for working parents receives less attention (see Graff, 2007).

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