Better Outcomes  
Affirmative Case by "Coach Vance" Trefethen



Here's a profound thought: People are poor because they don't have enough money. The best way to solve that is to just give them some money.

Given that reducing poverty is an established goal of the US federal government, and that the resolution does not call on us to change this goal, the only value we need consider is whether the Universal Basic Income is the best way to achieve that goal. Voting Negative will not eliminate existing federal programs like food stamps, Medicaid, HUD housing subsidies, etc. It will only leave us with multiple inefficient programs with various bad incentives for poor behavior. Voting Affirmative will replace an inefficient system with an ethically better one.

Better Outcomes

The United States federal government spends many billions of dollars every year on reducing or alleviating poverty. Poverty can be caused by many different factors, or combinations of factors, that make it hard to judge individual cases or tailor programs to specific needs. People fall through the cracks and the government implements many inefficient policies and programs trying to solve all the symptoms, rather than simply dealing with the root cause: People are poor because they don't have enough money. It's time to affirm that the United States ought to provide a universal basic income.

# Definitions

Universal Basic Income, or UBI – according to the Washington Post in 2015:

“Enter universal basic income. Also referred to as “guaranteed income” or the “basic income guarantee,” the concept is simple: in order to ensure that all citizens can afford to meet their basic needs, the government provides every citizen with a set amount of money on a regular basis, enough to lift them above the poverty line. This cash income would be universal and unconditional, meaning that every citizen would receive it no matter what — no work requirements, no means-testing and no restrictions on how the money is used.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

# Value: Plain Consequentialism

Victoria Tse in 2016 explains the value of Plain Consequentialism and how it applies to UBI:

"Plain Consequentialism is a theory dictating only one action of all the possible actions an individual can take is right or is better insofar as its consequences yield more pleasure or happiness than the other consequences. If action A’s consequences are better than consequences of action B, then action A is of higher moral value than B. So if your action does vastly more good than what most other people would do in similar circumstances, but you could have chosen an action that would have done even a little more, Plain Consequentialism says that what you did was morally wrong (IEP). In applying this proposition to our previous premise that UBI is the best way to eliminate poverty, this claim can only be justified insofar as our current welfare systems yield less pleasure than a guaranteed basic income. With plain consequentialism, we may conclude that not choosing to implement a UBI, assuming it’s consequences would maximize a greater amount of happiness than other welfare systems, is morally wrong."[[2]](#footnote-2)

## Value Link: Universal Basic Income is the best way to reduce or eliminate poverty

The goal of current federal programs is to reduce or eliminate poverty and the resolution does not call on us to question that goal. So the choice of whether to implement UBI should be made based on whether it would be more effective at reducing poverty than current methods. If it would be more effective, and would not cause other moral violation that would outweigh, then it is morally imperative we adopt it instead of the current system. I contend that is, indeed, more effective and I prove it in my 2 Contentions…

# Contention 1: Current welfare state fails

First, while trying hard to alleviate poverty, the current welfare state has created a permanent, dependent underclass. This happens because it degrades incentives for work and savings, ultimately creating more problems than it solves. Dr. Charles Murray explains in 2006 QUOTE:

That the apparently straightforward tasks of the welfare state have become complex and underclasses are growing throughout the Western world are neither coincidences nor inevitable by-products of modernity. Over a process that takes decades to play out, the welfare state self-destructs. First, it degrades the traditions of work, thrift, and neighbourliness that enabled the system to work at the outset; then it spawns social and economic problems that it is powerless to solve. Devising an effective replacement for the welfare state is not only a budgetary necessity but also a social imperative.[[3]](#footnote-3)

END QUOTE. So, replacement of the current welfare state is a moral imperative we should be pursuing. Happily that leads to my second subpoint, which is…

Second, the UBI must be seen as a replacement for the current welfare state, not an add-on. Referring to UBI as "GI" or "guaranteed income," Dr. Charles Murray explains why this is essential when he says QUOTE:

"From a practical standpoint, Professor Etzioni’s arguments for a GI in addition to the existing benefit system are moot. No matter how theoretically persuasive those arguments might be, no Western nation can afford to add a significant GI [guaranteed income] to its existing commitments. On the contrary, all Western nations need to restructure their existing benefit systems to avoid bankruptcy. If a GI is to be financially feasible, it must replace existing programmes rather than augment them."[[4]](#footnote-4)

END QUOTE. It is this replacement process that gives UBI its moral imperative because it solves poverty better than current programs, as we see in…

# Contention 2: UBI is the best solution to poverty

First, UBI is the single most efficient and effective social policy for solving poverty. It allows markets to function without distortion and intervention of government favoritism for certain sectors or population classes. And it eliminates all the waste and inefficiency of layers of government bureaucracy trying to regulate and micromanage who receives what and what they do with what they receive. Just cut everyone a check and be done with it. Prof. Thomas Straubhaar explains in 2017 QUOTE:

"A free market economy based on the principle of free allocation of production factors and prices that reflect supply and demand in competitive markets creates the greatest possible value added. Generating the highest value added possible is the most powerful precondition for the socially oriented redistribution from the economically strong to the economically weak. While the extent of redistribution requires a (normative) political discussion, the (positive) economic analysis can convincingly demonstrate that a "blind" social policy is the most effective, most efficient and thus the most equitable social policy. An efficient social policy should support people, and not specific factors of production or regional or sectoral industries. Furthermore, it should refrain from paternalistic behaviour and simply flow unconditionally. The fundamental aim should be to redistribute some degree of purchasing power from people with higher incomes to those with lower incomes. Direct individual payments to economically weaker people are more targeted, less expensive and more effective than indirect measures which require the fulfilment of specific criteria, particular preconditions or certain behaviours, for example, the requirement of being employed or at least searching for employment, or the attainment of a specified age."[[5]](#footnote-5)

Second, UBI is better because it avoids the perverse incentives of current welfare policies. Giving a fixed basic income to everyone is the way to ensure subsistence without destroying the incentive to work. With current welfare benefits, you lose the free money if your income goes up after you try to better yourself. But with UBI, going to work and earning more will not take away from anyone's subsidized income. Bloomberg News in 2018 confirms this empirically when they reported QUOTE:

"A closer UBI analog is the income that certain Native American groups receive from operating casinos. Economists Randall K. Q. Akee, William Copeland, Gordon Keeler, Adrian Angold and E. Jane Costello found in 2010 that these payments didn’t cause recipients to reduce the amount they worked."[[6]](#footnote-6)

# Conclusion

UBI is the most effective and efficient response to poverty, meaning it fulfills the value goal of Plain Consequentialism, and deserves your ballot in today's debate.

Negative Analysis

Negatives will argue that the math doesn't work. If you add up the amount of money currently spent on the means-tested welfare system for the poor today, divide that by the "universal" number of people in the country who would get a check (i.e. everyone), the UBI would be a pittance that wouldn't help the poor.

And "Just give them money" sounds simple but like many simple answers, it's wrong. The root causes of poverty are myriad and many are not alleviated by just handing someone free money and canceling all other means-tested federal welfare programs (e.g. drug addiction and mental illness).

1. Washington Post 2015 (journalist Christine Emba) "Universal basic income – a primer" 28 Sept 2015 [*https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/28/universal-basic-income-a-primer/*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/28/universal-basic-income-a-primer/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Victoria Tse 2016 (research associate at Seven Pillars Institute, an independent think tank for research, education, and promotion of financial ethics) 18 Oct 2016 "Ethics of Universal Basic Income"* [*https://sevenpillarsinstitute.org/ethics-of-universal-basic-income/*](https://sevenpillarsinstitute.org/ethics-of-universal-basic-income/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Charles Murray 2006 (PhD political science) (ethical disclosure about the date: The article is undated but references other materials published in 2006 and none later) Guaranteed Income as a Replacement for the Welfare State <http://www.fljs.org/sites/www.fljs.org/files/publications/Murray.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Charles Murray 2006 (PhD political science) (ethical disclosure about the date: The article is undated but references other materials published in 2006 and none later) Guaranteed Income as a Replacement for the Welfare State <http://www.fljs.org/sites/www.fljs.org/files/publications/Murray.pdf> (brackets added) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dr. Thomas Straubhaar 2017 (professor at Univ. of Hamburg, Germany) "On the Economics of a Universal Basic Income" INTERECONOMICS, Mar/Apr 2017 Vol. 52 No. 2 https://archive.intereconomics.eu/year/2017/2/on-the-economics-of-a-universal-basic-income/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Noah Smith 2018 (journalist) Bloomberg News 23 Jan 2018 "A Basic Income for Everyone? It's Not a Crazy Idea" *https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-01-23/a-basic-income-for-everyone-it-s-not-a-crazy-idea*  [↑](#footnote-ref-6)