

BASIC INCOME

GUEST EDITORS' PREFACE

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1. Precisely during the finalization of this monographic issue of *Etica & Politica* Benoit Hamon's¹ clear (and unexpected) victory at the Socialist Party primaries in France – with a platform centered on basic income (BI) – has newly posed such topic at the very core of the Italian theoretical and political debate. This was particularly true with regard to the communist broadsheet *Il manifesto*, which presented the two main positions which, so far, have proved irreducible to any kind of synthesis.

A first perspective was elaborated by Laura Pennacchi, whose opposition to BI is motivated by its putative compatibility with the neoliberal model as well as with the shattering of labor it actively pursued and (almost) accomplished². Basic income, she writes on January 29th, represents nothing more than the acceptance of reality as it is, thus a paradoxical ratification and even legitimation of the *status quo*. If such a measure were to be implemented, Leftist political advocacy “would be weakened and public institutions would be encouraged to bring to an even deeper level the process of deresponsabilization (since every administrator finds it easier to hand out a monetary provision than to fundamentally engage in maintaining,

¹ Cfr. http://www.lemonde.fr/primaire-de-la-gauche/article/2017/01/29/primaire-a-gauche-benoit-hamon-l-emporte-largement-face-a-manuel-valls_5071066_5008374.html.

² Cfr. <https://ilmanifesto.it/perche-al-reddito-di-cittadinanza-preferisco-il-lavoro/>.

reconstructing and feeding a vast, articulated and structured social fabric)”. According to Pennacchi BI constitutes a device which only intervenes *ex post* on social inequalities, from a merely redistributive perspective, bypassing the core issue, namely how to challenge the root-causes of such inequalities which derive from the structures of accumulation and production. The need for rethinking the model of development as based on “decent and full employment” relies on the recuperation of labor as fundamental process of man’s self-realization, a process through which it “not only metabolizes but symbolically mediates the link between themselves and nature, modifies itself assuming a self-transformative function, systematically explores intellectual dimensions of awareness and project-oriented intentionality”.

Marco Bascetta’s reply, on January 30th, starts from a twofold consideration³. First, “automation and technology will necessarily lead to a reduction of labor, namely a diminished need for energy expenditure on the part of humans within the realm of wealth production”. Second, such potential takes the forms of unemployment and misery only because of contemporary relations of production, in the context of which “most of the activities which make wealth and societies’ wellbeing are not recognized as labor and consequently do not constitute a right to income”. By referring to the notion of *extractive capitalism*, Bascetta points out that we already live in a situation of full employment, which in our current situation is shaped as precarious, flexible and unpaid labor. This is why “BI is nothing else than the transfer to a part of this wealth to those who actually produce it, not a mere social policy”.

On February 1st, Aldo Carra tried to bridge the two options by proposing two intermediate measures, such as “an active BI [*citizenship income*] to sustain working activities within the social sphere and a *citizenship labor* as institutional duty towards citizens and their rights”⁴. From this perspective, Carra proposes a new path for the Left as based on an extraordinary plan for investments on labor *and* income.

2. This vibrant context is the ground on which this monographic issue of *Etica & Politica* on basic income is rooted. We chose to structure it in two sections. The first is constituted by the answers given by ten scholars with remarkable expertise in BI to five questions we posed to them (we also sent them a brief contextualization of the recent debate on BI so that a common background for the answers could be provided).⁵ The second section is

³ Cfr. <https://ilmanifesto.it/reddito-universale-cosi-la-vittoria-di-hamon-parla-ai-non-garantiti/>.

⁴ Cfr. <https://ilmanifesto.it/reddito-e-lavoro-due-ipotesi-diverse-ma-non-alternative/>.

⁵ Cfr. *Materiali preparatori (infra)*.

composed by a series of articles which explore different problematic aspects of BI. Both sections, however, intend to discuss the theoretical matrix which determined the polarized character of the current BI debate. In particular, we aimed at focusing on its *constitutive heterogeneity*. Such heterogeneity is first of all *disciplinary*: the scholars we interviewed in section 1, in fact, belong to different fields of study (political economy, philosophy, critical theory, sociology). Secondly, we perceived the deployment of a *plurality of approaches* which transversally cuts the disciplinary boundaries – some contributions privileged a high level of generality while others opted for detailed empirical discussions; yet others chose to situate themselves in an intermediate space for the interaction of normative dynamics and long-run historical tendencies. Finally, we detected a heterogeneity of *tones* such that some texts are marked by the immediacy of a dialogical structure whereas others assume the reflexivity of academic essays. This unexpected polyphony shows with great clarity how both endorsement and rejection of BI reflect a multiplicity of internal points of view and analytic perspective which are rooted in very different ideas of society and justice.

To such a theoretical heterogeneity section 2 adds up a *geographic and linguistic* one: the four essays are in fact written in four different languages. The essays explore BI in the context of Spanish society (Carrizosa Prieto), of French society with particular regard for racialized subjectivities (Gallo Lassere), of the role BI may play to fight gender discrimination (Cavaliere) and slavery (Howard).

Our hope is that this collection of materials, in connecting very different approaches, can provide readers with an original and stimulating access to the BI debate.

3. After having underlined topicality, heterogeneity and originality of the materials collected in this monographic issue of *Etica & Politica*, we believe we should make explicit our role as editors. In fact, we were not interested in proposing an aseptic map of different positions; rather, we aimed at stimulating a debate starting from the manifest partiality of our perspective. As often noted by the scholars we interviewed, the five questions we addressed to them⁶ clearly betray their place of enunciation. Such a place is the theoretical tradition we are part of and from which we develop our research hypothesis, namely *neo-workerism* (neo-operaismo). It should be immediately added that if on the one hand such stream of thought is in no way internally monolithic, on the other our belonging to it is peculiar to our own theoretical

⁶ Cfr. *Materiali preparatori* (*infra*).

and political path. We hope that such peculiarity allows us to see *neo-operaismo* not only in its insights but also in its limits and, above all, that it does not prevent a fruitful dialogue with different interpretative strategies. As we will elaborate in detail in our own essay⁷, the theoretical background upon which we project our reflections is the analysis of contemporary capitalism as characterized by the co-presence of two fundamental logics, namely *subsumption* and *imprinting*⁸.

4. In concluding this Presentation, the editors wish to express their deep gratitude to the scholars who accepted to answer our questions: without their availability, generosity and willingness to discuss their views this monographic issue would have simply been impossible.

Special thanks also to the scholars who contributed with their essays to the second section of this issue.

Finally, many many thanks to Riccardo Fanciullacci for having involved us in this work, and to the editorial board of *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* for its patience and support.

⁷ Cfr. *Il reddito di base contro la nuova logica dello sfruttamento (infra)*.

⁸ Cfr. Federico Chicchi, Emanuele Leonardi e Stefano Lucarelli, *Logiche dello sfruttamento: oltre la dissoluzione del rapporto salariale*, ombre corte, Verona 2016.