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*Debate: "Should Libertarians Endorse Basic Income?"*

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## Classical Liberalism and the Basic Income

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**Abstract** – This article provides a brief overview of the relationship between libertarian political theory and the Basic Income (BI). It distinguishes between different forms of libertarianism and argues that at least one form, classical liberalism, is compatible with and provides some grounds of support for BI. A classical liberal BI, however, is likely to be much smaller than the sort of BI defended by those on the political left. And there are both contingent-empirical and principled-moral reasons for doubting that the classical liberal case for BI will be ultimately successful.

**Keywords** – classical liberalism, exploitation, immigration, libertarianism, basic income, universal welfare, welfare policy, welfare reform, welfare state

## 1. Introduction

The question posed in this issue is whether libertarians should support a basic income (BI). And it may seem that the simple, straightforward answer is “no, they should not.” The most well-known form of libertarianism among academic philosophers is the neo-Lockean natural rights theory of Robert Nozick (1974). This theory holds that individuals own themselves and their labor,<sup>1</sup> and that they may legitimately come to acquire property rights in external goods by mixing their labor with them.<sup>2</sup> Individuals are free to use, transfer, or destroy those objects in which they have a property right in any way that does not violate the self-ownership or property rights of others, even if the cumulative result of individuals' actions is a strongly inegalitarian resources distribution. Beyond respecting these *negative* rights of others, individuals have no *positive* obligations to provide others with aid.<sup>3</sup> The state's legitimate activities are thus severely limited. The state is charged with the enforcement of individuals' negative rights, and may tax individuals to finance this function. But the use of tax revenues or coercive power for any other purpose is illegitimate. Were the government to tax Peter in order to transfer money to Paul, this would be a violation of Peter's property rights – a kind of theft writ large. Since BI involves a massive tax-and-transfer system of precisely this kind, it would seem to be a nonstarter from the libertarian perspective.

But matters are not quite this simple. While Nozick's theory is, for a variety of reasons, the best-known version of libertarianism, it is far from the only version. The term “libertarianism” denotes a wide family of views related by their rough agreement on a cluster of empirical, moral, and political beliefs. To identify libertarianism with Nozick's theory is to conflate a substantive political position with one particular argument for it and, moreover, it is to blur the numerous divisions on substantive political questions that are to be found within the libertarian tradition.

In the remainder of this article, I first provide a brief overview of the variety of libertarian theories and how they differ in their foundational moral

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<sup>1</sup> The reliance of Nozickian libertarianism on the idea of self-ownership has been overstated in the academic literature. The real normative foundation of Nozick's position lies in the Kantian notion of respect for persons. See, for a discussion, Zwolinski (2008b, pp. 152, 154–158).

<sup>2</sup> This would be subject to some proviso, perhaps. The precise nature of this proviso (or whether initial appropriation is subject to any proviso at all) is the main origin of the distinction between various forms of right- or market-libertarianism and left-libertarianism.

<sup>3</sup> Or, at least, no positive obligations that can be enforced by the state. Certain libertarians do grant the existence of involuntarily assumed positive duties while denying the appropriateness of state enforcement of these duties. See, for example, Epstein (2003, p. 59); Narveson (1988, pp. 41–61); Spector (1992, pp. 3–4).

commitments and their substantive political proposals. I limit my discussion to what is known (somewhat misleadingly) as “right-libertarianism” or (more accurately) as “market” libertarianism.<sup>4</sup> The cluster of theories that philosophers have labeled as “left-libertarian” are sufficiently distinct to warrant separate treatment, and Peter Vallentyne, Brian Powell, and Daniel Moseley’s contributions to this journal debate issue provide excellent examples.<sup>5</sup> Second, I assess the general idea of BI from the perspective of market libertarianism. But I caution the reader against expecting too much in the way of firm conclusions from this assessment. As readers of this journal are no doubt aware, there is a tremendous diversity among BI proponents, both in terms of the rationale they provide for it and in the particular details of the policy they hope to see realized. Moreover, as we soon see, there is a surprising degree of diversity within libertarianism as well. In order to do justice to this diversity, my analysis will remain on a fairly general level. My hope is not to provide a knockdown argument either for or against BI, but to indicate the various considerations that would be relevant to such an argument for the market libertarian, and to make initial assessments of the plausibility and strength of these considerations and their direction.

## 2. Varieties of Libertarianism

It is helpful to think of libertarianism as a family of views related by rough agreement on a cluster of normative principles, empirical generalizations, and

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<sup>4</sup> “Right-libertarianism” is seriously misleading as a label for the kind of libertarianism endorsed by Nozick or other libertarians. Market libertarians hold many policy positions on social issues that are at odds with positions held by either the classic or contemporary conservatives: the legalization of drugs and prostitution, the strict separation of church and state, support for open immigration, opposition to militarism and the end to compulsory military service. And even libertarians’ economic proposals, the only element of their program which is even arguably conservative, are not right-wing in the sense of being unequivocally probusiness. Libertarians support an end to direct government subsidies to corporations and import tariffs that support domestic companies at the expense of consumers and foreign competitors, and they support the right of workers to collectively organize as an exercise of the right to free association. Given the size of current corporate welfare programs, it is arguable that a shift to a purely libertarian regime would profoundly affect businesses, especially large domestic corporations, for the worse. Precisely this kind of claim is at the core of another intellectual movement that is sometimes referred to as “left-libertarianism” (that is distinct from the left-libertarianism of Otsuka, Steiner, Vallentyne, etc.). What makes this movement “left” is not its denial of private property rights in external goods, but rather its claim that the consistent recognition of self-ownership and private property rights is incompatible with much of existing and historical capitalism. See, for an overview, Chartier (2009); Long (1998, 2010); Rothbard (1965).

<sup>5</sup> See Moseley (2011); Powell (2011); Vallentyne (2011). My exclusion of left-libertarianism is made clear in Section 2, where I more fully characterize libertarianism.

policy recommendations.<sup>6</sup> Libertarians generally believe in the ontological and normative primacy of individuals, the primacy of negative individual rights, the legitimacy of strong property rights both in one's person and in external goods, the general efficacy of free markets in promoting human welfare, and the illegitimacy of paternalistic government policies.<sup>7</sup> But, while libertarians agree on many issues, there are two main areas where they substantially disagree: the moral foundations of libertarianism, and the nature and scope of legitimate state activity.

We have already seen that the best-known form of libertarianism has its normative foundations in a form of deontological, natural rights theory. It holds that individuals – by virtue of their status as human beings and logically prior to establishing any government – have rights against others which, as a general matter, cannot be infringed on, even if it would be better for society or for that individual if they were.<sup>8</sup> Such rights are sometimes given a theological foundation, sometimes defended as articulating a kind of pretheoretical moral common sense, sometimes defended on contractarian grounds, and sometimes defended as a necessary bar against individuals treating others as mere means.

But while Nozickian libertarianism endorses private property and free markets *in spite* of their consequences, other forms of libertarianism defend them *precisely because* of their consequences. What we may call “consequentialist libertarianism” draws on certain stable regularities in the empirical world to support its claim that libertarian political institutions generally produce better

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<sup>6</sup> See, for an extended discussion, Mack and Gaus (2004); Zwolinski (2008a). See also (Widerquist, forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> I characterize libertarianism here largely in terms of “outputs” rather than “inputs.” What qualifies one as *libertarian*, as I use the term, are one's conclusions about a number of important social, moral and political issues, not the more foundational premises one employs in reaching those conclusions. I use the term in this way partly because *outputs* make libertarianism particularly interesting and distinctive as an intellectual and political movement, and attempts to define libertarianism in terms of *inputs* quickly run into counterexamples. To define libertarianism as Peter Vallentyne does in terms of a fundamental commitment to self-ownership, for instance, suggests that people like Friedrich Hayek, or Milton Friedman, or David Friedman are not libertarians. And maybe there is a legitimate usage of the term in which they aren't. If one's primary interest is to trace the implications of a certain kind of normative input wherever it may lead, then perhaps these simply aren't the people to which you want to refer when you use the word “libertarian.” According to my view, focused as it is on outputs, it is not clear that the left-libertarianism of Otsuka, Steiner, Vallentyne, etc. counts as genuinely libertarian, since the social and political implications of that view differ sharply from the implications of the kind of libertarianism on which I focus. My characterization of the term is not necessarily the best in a universal sense, but it is useful for what I focus on in this article.

<sup>8</sup> Most libertarian theories allow for certain exceptions to this principle. For instance, Nozick allows for the violation of libertarian side constraints when necessary to avoid what he calls “catastrophic moral horror.” See Nozick (1974, p. 130n). As he so often does, Nozick leaves it to the reader to imagine the implications of this concession.

results than do alternative political schemes.<sup>9</sup> For instance, rights of initial acquisition and private property are held to provide incentives for the discovery and care of scarce resources and to provide individuals with a kind of private jurisdiction through which they can exercise their autonomy and pursue the projects that give their lives meaning. See, for example, Gaus (2010b); Schmidtz (1994). Liberty of contract allows individuals to engage in mutually beneficial exchanges, creates a tendency for resources to move toward their highest valued use and, again, provides a mechanism for the exercise and development of individual autonomy. Of course, even if these institutions *tend* to produce good consequences, it is conceivable that carefully targeted government interventions – for instance, those necessary to correct cases of market failure – might do even better. But in response to this possibility, consequentialist libertarians often point to countervailing reasons to expect that government interventions will face serious problems of their own. There are a variety of theoretical and empirical reasons to suspect that government agents often lack the *knowledge* necessary to design and implement welfare-enhancing policies. And because the costs of bad governmental policies are externalized onto citizens while their benefits may be internalized through processes of rent seeking, they often lack the *incentive* to do so as well.<sup>10</sup>

Besides disagreements regarding their doctrine's moral foundation, libertarians also disagree regarding the precise content of the doctrine itself. While all market libertarians believe that a morally legitimate government would have a much smaller size and scope of activity than those of currently existing governments, there are significant differences regarding their beliefs in *how much smaller* government ought to be. The view articulated by Nozick is probably that most closely associated with libertarianism. This view, which we may call "minimal state libertarianism," holds that legitimate states will be restricted to the specification, interpretation, and enforcement of (negative) individual rights. A state monopoly on the use of force through a military and police system is thus legitimate, as is some form of court system and perhaps some form of environmental regulation agency (to prevent individuals from aggressing against

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<sup>9</sup> Libertarians have been less than clear about exactly what constitutes "better results." Some libertarians, such as Richard Epstein, are fairly straightforward utilitarians. See Epstein (1995, 1998, 2003, 2005). But Epstein's utilitarianism is the exception rather than the rule, even among those libertarians of a broadly consequentialist stripe. Far more common is the approach of Randy Barnett, who defends a libertarian theory on the grounds that libertarian rights help us "achieve the ends of happiness, peace, and prosperity," without specifying how these goods are to be weighted in cases of conflict, whether they are to be maximized or pursued in some other way, how they are to be distributed, and so forth. See Barnett (1998, p. 6).

<sup>10</sup> Libertarians have often drawn upon the public choice school of economics in making these arguments. For an excellent overview, see Mitchell and Simmons (1994).

the person or property of others by polluting). But the minimal state will not include a welfare system, a public school system, or even a system for the creation and maintenance of public roads.

Minimal state libertarians face challenges from two sides within the family of libertarian views. On one side is a group we may refer to as “classical liberals,” who favor a somewhat expanded role for government.<sup>11</sup> Beyond the functions of the minimal state, classical liberals are also sometimes willing to support tax-financed redistribution to provide a form of social safety net and may also support the state provision of public goods in the strict economic sense.<sup>12</sup> Often, classical liberals are consequentialists, and these appendages to the minimal state are endorsed on familiar consequentialist grounds.<sup>13</sup> However, sometimes the rationale for deviating from the minimal state takes a more principled moral form, especially with respect to the state provision of a social safety net. We discuss this aspect of classical liberalism more extensively in the next section. The other competitor to the minimal state view – anarcho-capitalism – will not be discussed in this article. This is not because the view is uninteresting or unworthy of consideration on its own. But since one of its core commitments is that *no* state is morally legitimate, it would thus seem to follow that no state provision of BI would be morally legitimate. It is possible, of course, that anarcho-capitalists will endorse something like the provision of BI by some nonstate agency, but such a proposal would differ so radically from those currently under consideration that including it here would hardly be fruitful.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Not every libertarian employs the distinction between *minimal-state* and *classical* liberalism as I set it forth – some use the terms interchangeably. But, while the distinction is not universally accepted, it has a great deal of support nevertheless in the contemporary academic literature on libertarianism. See, for example, Epstein (2003, pp. 1–2); Mack and Gaus (2004, pp. 119–126); Arnold (2009, p. ix).

<sup>12</sup> My classification here is largely in line with that provided by Moseley in his contribution to this *Basic Income Studies* journal debate issue (Moseley, 2011). However, Moseley appears to present the legitimacy of public goods provision as the sole feature distinguishing classical from minimal-state libertarianism, with redistribution being justified (if justified at all) as a necessary measure in the provision of a public good. In contrast, my reading of the classical liberal tradition views the legitimacy of public good provision and redistribution as separate and independent features. Redistribution is justified, for many classical liberals, not (merely) in order to achieve economic public goods, but often as a requirement of justice to the individuals on whom it is bestowed.

<sup>13</sup> Norman Barry goes further in *defining* classical liberalism in terms of its underlying consequentialism rather than its substantive political commitments. See Barry (1986, pp. 1–18). But this seems to me a mistake. The fact that many classical liberals are consequentialists is due to the fact that consequentialism, by its very nature, has a difficult time defending the kind of bright line, absolute principle upon which a defense of the libertarian minimal state must seem to rest.

<sup>14</sup> Such a proposal is defended by Moseley (2011).

### 3. The Classical Liberal Case for Basic Income

To the extent that there is a libertarian case for BI, it will be most at home within what I have identified as the classical liberal variant of libertarianism. This section briefly discusses those aspects of BI that make it attractive from this perspective. But, note that the basis of the classical liberal case for BI in many ways differs radically from the basis of more traditional arguments in defense of that policy. Furthermore, because classical liberals differ from traditional supporters of BI in the *moral justification* they provide for that policy, they will for that very reason differ from traditional supporters in the *substantive details* of the precise form of BI they endorse. Because classical liberals reject resource and welfare egalitarianism – the views that private property as such is illegitimate and that land or job rents are subject to legitimate redistribution – they will likewise reject any argument for BI based on these positions.<sup>15</sup> Rejecting these arguments entails rejecting the idea that many of the funds that those on the political left would like to use for BI are the object of legitimate redistribution, and rejecting the idea that many of those to whom those on the political left would like to redistribute have any legitimate claim on those funds. A classical liberal BI would thus likely be much, much smaller than would a left-liberal BI.<sup>16</sup>

The classical liberal case for BI proceeds in two steps. The first step is to establish that wealth redistribution by the state is morally permissible or obligatory in certain circumstances. This belief has an eminently respectable pedigree among both historical classical liberals, such as Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, and among contemporary classical liberals, such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Among those who have sought to provide a philosophical justification for such redistribution, one of the most promising routes has been an appeal to the principle that a society's legal rules and moral principles must be justified to each and every individual who is subject to them, and that such justification requires demonstrating that those rules or principles are ones that

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<sup>15</sup> They will reject the egalitarian argument in Baker (1992), the arguments based on the illegitimacy of private property in natural resources discussed in Van Parijs (1992, pp. 9–14) and Van Parijs' own arguments for a BI that draw on the notion of land and employment rents. However, while classical liberals reject the claim that private property is illegitimate as such, they should certainly accept the claim that private property as it is currently distributed is the result of a historical process rife with acts that are unjust even by the libertarian's own parsimonious standards. A BI might be a way of ensuring that we meet at least some of our obligation to provide compensation for historical injustice when deceit, complex social and financial interactions, and the long passage of time have made it impossible to know with any precision who owes what to whom. See, for a related discussion, Lomasky (2005).

<sup>16</sup> The classical liberal will certainly reject Van Parijs's idea that the BI should be set, as a matter of justice, at the highest sustainable level (Van Parijs, 1995).

each individual has reason to support.<sup>17</sup> For instance, Loren Lomasky holds that a classical liberal political system is justified insofar as it provides the institutional conditions that individuals require in order to successfully pursue the projects that give their lives meaning, but that this very same moral foundation justifies positive welfare rights in certain limited circumstances (see Lomasky 1987, p. 127). Gerald Gaus arrives at a roughly similar policy conclusion by way of a broadly Rawlsian public reason form of liberalism. For Gaus, the coercion involved in a socialist or heavily redistributive economy cannot be justified to “all rational and reflective persons seeking to live under impartial principles of justice,” but neither can an economy with *no* redistribution be justified, at least given modest assumptions about the nature, reasonableness, and intensity of people’s preferences (see discussion in Gaus 2010a). According to this classical liberal view, private property, free markets and limited government institutions do a great deal of moral good. But classical liberals are *liberals*, and one of the features that distinguishes liberalism as a political philosophy is its normative individualism. The great moral benefits that market institutions provide for the majority do not exempt us from looking at how they affect the minority. Thus, if the gains that markets produce for many come at others’ expense, then market institutions must be supplemented with extramarket mechanisms to right that wrong. Redistribution can have a place – even if it is a narrowly delimited one – in a society that aims at the ideal of constituting a “cooperative venture for *mutual* advantage” (Rawls, 1971, p. 4, emphasis added).

The second step in the classical liberal case for BI involves showing that the redistribution in which the liberal state engages should be universal rather than selective. In principle, classical liberals are inclined to draw distinctions between the deserving and the undeserving poor – between those who need aid from the state in order to make society a system of fair reciprocity and those who merely want to take advantage of state aid to make their lives easier. Still, there are at least two pragmatic reasons that BI might be preferable to selective redistribution. These reasons strike me as plausible enough, though I should stress that a thorough assessment of their justifiability and their implications

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<sup>17</sup> This approach is, of course, most commonly associated with left-liberal political conclusions rather than libertarian ones. So, to some extent, showing that this approach can justify *some* redistribution is easy. Showing that it does not justify *more* redistribution might be more challenging. The very different policy conclusions that libertarians develop out of this principle are partly based on empirical differences regarding the virtues of markets and pathologies of government and are partly due to moral differences regarding the significance of economic liberty, the justifiability of private property, and the wrongness of coercion. See, for discussions, Gaus (2007, 2010a); Tomasi (forthcoming).



exceeds both the scope of this article and my professional competence as a philosopher.

#### *Reducing State Intrusion Into Private Lives*

Discriminating between the deserving and the undeserving poor requires states to possess a tremendous amount of information about some of the most intimate aspects of people's lives. It might require knowing how much they earn from work, how much support they receive or could receive from relatives, how much effort they have expended on finding a job and doing well at it, whether they have spent their money on necessities or frivolous luxuries, etc. The answers to these questions – insofar as they are ascertainable at all, could only be uncovered by analyzing a massive amount of private information. Collecting and *verifying* that information would require a large, powerful, and expensive bureaucratic machinery. Discretionary redistribution thus threatens classical liberal values of freedom, privacy, and efficiency in ways that BI need not.

#### *Public Choice Considerations*

As Michael Munger notes in his contribution to this *BIS* journal's debate issue, in a democracy "stuff doesn't stay where you put it" (Munger, 2011). There might be more reason to suspect that BI will stay where we put it, however, than there is to suspect that a more selective redistribution form will do so. Things don't stay where they're put in a democracy because bureaucracies tend to expand, as public choice has taught us. But depending on how its precise level is determined, BI need not require a large bureaucracy. Furthermore, selective redistribution will nearly always require discretion – on the part of both policymakers and those who administer those policies. BI can be made almost entirely nondiscretionary – perhaps by making its amount a set percentage of GDP. In this way, a well-crafted BI can be at least partially inoculated against the rent seeking and rationalization that discretion inevitably invites.

## **4. The Classical Liberal Case Against Basic Income**

The previous section sketches a classical liberal argument for a BI. The considerations put forward there are far from decisive, however. Section 4 considers two classical liberal objections to BI – one that has received a lot of attention but does not seem too troubling, and another that has received little attention and seems much more worrisome. Again, I put these forward in the spirit of suggestive invitation to further inquiry, rather than that of definitive proclamation.

### *Exploitation*

The question of whether BI is, by allowing “lazy surfers” to live off the hard work of others, inherently exploitive has been extensively debated. Most classical liberals probably conclude that it is. To exploit someone is, in the most general sense, to take unfair advantage of them.<sup>18</sup> But in the classical liberal case for BI that I sketch in this article, the only reason BI provides money to individuals who are already wealthy or who are poor by virtue of their own moral fault is that *some* people have a legitimate moral claim to redistribution, and the moral costs of discretionary redistribution are just too high. To live off the work of others against whom one has no legitimate moral claim, simply because the system cannot be acceptably designed in a way that prevents you from doing so, would seem, indeed, to be exploitation.<sup>19</sup> Still, as scholars of exploitation often note, exploitation might be a moral wrong without being anything like the most serious of moral wrongs.<sup>20</sup> If the moral need to get money to those who have a legitimate claim on it is strong enough, the fact that the system allows those who lack a legitimate claim to exploit others might be tolerable.<sup>21</sup>

### *Anti-Immigration Pressure*

Perhaps more seriously, there is some reason to worry that BI might increase pressure to set further restrictions on immigration, at least when the BI is instituted on less than a global level.<sup>22</sup> In America and in much of Europe, populists are already prone to play on the public’s fear that immigrants are coming to their country to live on the dole.<sup>23</sup> Such arguments are almost certainly empirically dubious, but this does not make them irrelevant (Kerr and Kerr,

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<sup>18</sup> I discuss the concept of exploitation and its application to social and political questions at greater length in Zwolinski (forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> I certainly do not intend to give the impression that the lazy poor living off the work of the industrious rich is the only, or even the most common or significant, form of exploitation. Just as serious, if not more so, is the problem of the “rent-seeking rich.” To the extent that the wealthy have used their wealth and privileged social connections to obtain unjust favors from government in the form of monopoly privileges, protectionist policies, outright subsidies, and so forth, they are exploiting the working classes in a way that is often much more costly and otherwise troubling. See, for a discussion Carson (2007).

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Alan Wertheimer’s distinction between the “moral weight” and “moral force” of exploitation in Wertheimer (1996, pp. 158–202).

<sup>21</sup> This is, I take it, essentially the conclusion reached by Stuart White. See White (1997) and the interview in Lewis and White (2010).

<sup>22</sup> Moseley supports a global BI, which faces some implementation difficulties of its own but is superior from a libertarian perspective because it both avoids the problem outlined in Section 4 and does not make eligibility for receipt or contribution depend on one’s position vis-à-vis national borders, the moral significance of which libertarians tend to be highly skeptical.

<sup>23</sup> There is evidence that increased immigration diminishes support for welfare state spending. See Eger (2010).

2011). Predictable but irrational responses to prospective policies ought to be taken into account in deciding whether those policies are justifiable in an all-things-considered sense. Moreover, there is reason to expect that a BI would elicit these responses to an even greater degree than do standard welfare policies. This is especially true if the absolute value of BI payments is higher than standard welfare payments. But even if they are not, the noncontingent nature of a BI seems likely to increase populist resentment. The fact that immigrants would not even have to demonstrate desert or need to be eligible for payment seems likely to generate even more resentment than would a policy that requires such demonstration. Thus, there is good reason to fear that BI would lead to greater resentment against would-be immigrants and increased pressure to dramatically restrict legal immigration.<sup>24</sup> And such restrictions would be very, very bad from a libertarian perspective. Not only would they constitute unjustifiable coercive restrictions on freedom of movement; they would also impose serious harms against those for whom immigration, even without BI, would have been a way of lifting themselves and their family out of desperate poverty.<sup>25</sup> If morality commands us to give special consideration to the least well-off, then the needs of those who do *not* already live in one of the world's wealthiest countries should be especially pressing.

These are not necessarily the only objections to BI from the classical liberal perspective. Many other objections depend, however, on the precise nature of BI that is proposed. For instance, the classical liberal case for BI I have been considering depends on the assumption that BI would be a *substitute* for other welfare programs, not a *supplement* to them. If BI were proposed as an addition to our currently existing welfare programs or if the level of BI was set too high, classical liberals might worry about whether more coercive redistribution is being used than is morally warranted, as well as worrying about the negative effects of such extensive redistribution on long-term economic growth. Even if BI were *proposed* as a substitute for existing welfare programs, classical liberals might reasonably worry that creating new entitlements is far easier than

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<sup>24</sup> In principle, such restrictions could be overcome by modifying BI policy such that eligibility would be restricted to persons who had lived in a country for more than a certain number of years. This response, suggested to me by Karl Widerquist, strikes me as a far more humane way of dealing with concerns about immigrants' excessive welfare use than preventing immigration altogether. Others have expressed concern, however, about proposals that allow people to live and work in a country without claiming (full) rights of citizenship (Walzer, 1983, pp. 56–61). Concerns such as this might prevent this proposal, sensible though it may be, from being politically effective.

<sup>25</sup> See, for a discussion of the libertarian perspective on immigration, Huemer (2010); Kukathas (2005).

removing old ones and, thus, might withhold their support for reasons that have more to do with politics than principle.

## 5. Conclusion

Market libertarians are not known for their openness to redistributive government programs. Still, there is a libertarian argument to be made for BI. Not all libertarians will endorse such an argument. Specifically, minimal-state libertarians such as Robert Nozick and anarcho-capitalists such as Murray Rothbard will almost certainly reject it out of hand.<sup>26</sup> But classical-liberal libertarians are sometimes willing to grant that a certain amount of state redistribution is warranted to ensure that the institutions of limited government are justified to all persons who are subject to them. For classical liberals of this sort, there might be a pragmatic case for BI. It is, however, one that must be balanced against the moral costs of BI – especially its potentially negative effects on some of the world's worst-off individuals. I suspect that for a variety of pragmatic reasons as discussed in the previous section, those costs are likely to be too high to make BI attractive from a classical liberal perspective. Still, if the arguments I present here are correct, much of what will sway a classical liberal for or against BI will be the sort of empirical beliefs that can be altered with more and better data, not by a more rigid commitment to moral principle.

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<sup>26</sup> At least, they will reject it as an ideal to be aimed for *in principle*. They might concede that it is better (or less bad) than the redistributive system we currently have.

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