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# The Big Casino

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# **The Big Casino**

An Introduction Summary of *Independence, Propertylessness, and Basic Income: A*

*Theory of Freedom as the Power to Say No*

Karl Widerquist

## **Abstract**

This paper uses an analogy to illustrate two things: (1) the economy is and will always be a casino, and (2) in existing societies and most libertarian, liberal, and socialist visions of society individuals are effectively forced to participate in the casino economy. It argues justice requires that individuals must be free from forced participation in such an economy and that the best way to free people from forced participation is the provision of a Basic Income Guarantee.

Suppose you're driving down a desolate highway through the semiarid plateau of eastern Oregon on the way home to your birthplace in Winnemucca, Nevada, at the end of your first year studying political philosophy at the University of Northern British Columbia. You daydream about the time when you finish your studies, homestead some land near your hometown, raise sheep, eat mutton, and write papers that no one will ever read.

Just over the Nevada State Line, you see a sign on the side of the road reading "Welcome to the Small Casino." The casino stands alone in the middle of an otherwise empty landscape. While you were gone, your home state legalized gambling, and someone built the Small Casino here to serve gamblers who drive

down from population centers such as Bend, Oregon and Walla Walla, Washington. You stop in for a free shrimp cocktail. You observe the people at the casino.

Except for the fact that everyone chose to be here, nearly every principle of distributive justice you learned in your studies is violated inside the Small Casino. At every table the odds are stacked in favor of the House, and otherwise, the games do a poor job of rewarding desert, merit, productivity, hard work, diligence, skill, welfare, or need. Some of the games, to some extent, reward some desirable characteristics, but all of the games incorporate a large element of luck and reward for undesirable characteristics, and on average, at every table, the House always wins. Although people choose to be here, not everything can be dismissed as “option luck,” because they make their decisions against a background of brute luck inequalities. Gamblers with advantaged backgrounds tend to do better than others, and deep pockets have a perpetual advantage. Disadvantaged people don’t have the option to gamble in places that compensate for their disadvantages. But these problems are not the responsibility of the House. It did not create the background conditions. It just gave people an additional option. People choose to come to this place that accentuates their disadvantages, when they could easily have stayed home.

You meet a poker player who seems to have no spirit of cooperative enterprise. He tells you, “I play vicious, and I play to win. I didn’t twist people’s arms to make them come here. The game isn’t always fair, and I make use of any advantage I can to get ahead. The only thing that’s fair about it is that everybody knew the nature of the game before they chose to play. There’s nothing but available open land for hundreds of miles in every direction that people can use any way they want. If they don’t want to play our way, they don’t have to step into the Small Casino.”

Although you may be able to think of reasons to change background conditions, you can't think of any legitimate justification to force people like him to stop doing what they want. Somehow, you happen to know that there are no compulsive gamblers here; everyone is a rational, fully informed adult who chose to come here to do what they are doing, knowing the risks and the inequities. They were free to stay away, but they chose to come to the Small Casino. You finish your free shrimp cocktail and leave without placing any bets—consuming something for nothing in violation of the norm of reciprocity. Like everyone else who doesn't like the Small Casino, you are free to ignore it.

Every year as you return home from your studies, you see that the Small Casino has grown larger; more and more of the land and resources of Nevada are taken up and used for a purpose you want no part of.

Twenty years later, you complete your study of political philosophy, come of age, and head home to Winnemucca. When you reach the Nevada State Line, you pass under an arch over the road with a sign across it reading "Welcome to the Big Casino." It straddles the highway, and covers the hills in all directions. From border to border, everything is owned by the Big Casino. You have nowhere to sleep and nothing to eat without the permission of the Big Casino. You were mistaken about the Homestead Act; you should have known it was repealed decades before you were born. Long before you came of age, all the land and resources of your homeland were made the property of someone else. You can't just take natural resources and use them for your own purposes. If you want resources you have to buy them from someone who owns them. That is, from the House—one of the many small houses that make up the Big Casino.

The Big Casino is willing to let you buy in, to buy your own piece of whatever you want. All you have to do is to work for the Big Casino. If you provide some service to one of the owners, you can make it in their interest to part with some of their property, and you can get your own property to use as you will. The only legal means of survival is service to the House.

So, you walk into one of the small houses that make up the Big Casino and ask for a job. They say, "If you want to work here, play baccarat with the other applicants to help us determine whether we should hire you and in what capacity. After that you'll play poker with the other employees to see how soon you will advance." Another Small Casino asks you to try your hand at craps, black jack, or the slot machines. Wherever you go, you're in the Big Casino. A casino element is involved in whatever you do. To some extent the Big Casino rewards merit, skill, desert, talent, hard work, and diligence in ways that are relevant to the performance of beneficial actions. To another extent, it rewards luck or the skills that are not directly relevant to productivity but that are relevant only to the casino games associated with attaining a position. It serves the needy only in proportion to how much the needy succeed in serving the House. The Big Casino creates risk and unfairness, and it creates inequality in terms of who is subject to the risks created by the casino system. And always, the odds are stacked in favor of the House. You see that people born with disadvantages tend to remain disadvantaged throughout their lives, sometimes performing dull, degrading, low-status, or low-reward jobs for their entire working lives. Other people are born into the group of families that owns the House.

Depending on the combination of your luck, your relevant abilities (such as your skills at doing your job), your irrelevant abilities (such as your skill at the casino games involved with your job), you might strike it rich and attain your independence

in one day; or like many people, you might never strike it rich, spending your life working toward but never attaining independence. If you succeed, you have succeeded in the Big Casino. You have become one of the shareholders of the Big Casino. You have become part of the House.

But suppose you don't want to play that game. You complain to the owner of a Small Casino that you don't want to play his games or serve his interests. He responds, "I'm not forcing you to be here. If you don't want to play, you can go somewhere else. I didn't create the background conditions. I just gave you one option that didn't exist before." The owner of every Small Casino denies responsibility for the whole, because they are only responsible for one part, and they only played their part after the background conditions were set. No single Small Casino owner is responsible for the Big Casino's dominance, but there is no more open land; wherever you go, you're still inside the Big Casino. You can avoid any one Small Casino, but you can't avoid all of them; you can't avoid the Big Casino as a whole.

You go to the main office of the Big Casino Association, but it takes no responsibility for the way individual casinos behave. The Big Casino is merely a loose association of Small Casinos; it simply enforces rules of ownership and exchange, and leaves the owners of property to do with it as they will. "The Big Casino's rules benefit everyone. Many goods and services are produced that would not otherwise be produced. Many opportunities are created that would not otherwise exist." You see that the Big Casino benefits you in some ways, but you also see that it burdens you and reduces your freedom in other ways. You did not choose to trade the burdens for the benefits. That trade was imposed on you. By demanding you trade your labor even for access to natural resources, every Small Casino owner takes credit

for the benefits the Big Casino provides, but no one takes responsibility for the burdens and the unfreedom created by Big Casino as a whole.

The available work is varied and there is a choice of employers. You can work for any one of them, but no matter which one you work for, you work in the Big Casino, and you serve the goals of the House on its terms. You don't have to work directly for the Big Casino. You can work for other gamblers, but there is still a casino element in finding this work, and their ability to reward you is proportional to how well they have succeeded in the Big Casino. Two people who have never served the Big Casino either directly or indirectly have no property to reward each other with. Until you have earned your independence, by satisfying the Big Casino's terms, you are its subject; your need for the means of survival forces you to accept its work, serve its goals, at its pay, under its conditions. The laws of your state make you a nominally free person, but the property rights regime maintained by the state forces you to serve at least one member of the ownership group; the laws effectively put you into involuntary servitude as much as if you were born in debt to the Big Casino.

Although you can ignore any one of its constituent parts, you cannot ignore the whole. You are not bound to any one master, but you are effectively born in servitude. No one would feel injured if you choose to starve on the street. But you will not choose to starve; you will give them your labor as surely as if you were in their debt. The freedom to serve or die is the same kind of freedom experienced by serfs and slaves. You have one benefit serfs don't have: a choice of masters, but you are born to serve at least one of the small casinos. A choice of masters is not freedom. You neither agreed to the laws and circumstances that brought about this situation, nor are you allowed to reject the role ascribed to you by it. You did not choose to

create it, and you cannot choose to ignore it. You are not free. The Big Casino neither follows from nor preserves your freedom.

Eventually, a band of philosopher-legislators starts a nonviolent, democratic revolution. They take over the Big Casino and rebuild it as the Big Cooperative in which everyone works together for democratically chosen goals. They intend to build a democratic Big Cooperative that distributes its products fairly according to what they believe to be an ethically sound theory of social justice, which might be equality of income, the difference principle, welfare egalitarianism, resource egalitarianism, meritocracy, or one of many others.

Unfortunately, the philosopher-legislators find that the gambling tables are infused into every part of the economy and that removing them is costly. Although removing some casino elements is purely beneficial, removing many of the casino elements either decreases the economy's ability to turn effort into welfare or decreases freedom (by decreasing the choice of goals and actions available to individuals). They find also that no possible structure eliminates the casino element. Even a system of strict egalitarianism, in which everyone does identical work for identical rewards, implies good luck for those who like that work for those rewards and bad luck for those who don't. And even that ideal is imperfectly achievable. The philosopher-legislators have to make tradeoffs. The Big Cooperative prohibits many of these things people did in the Big Casino, to the resentment of everyone who liked to do those things, and to the benefit of many who were burdened by those things, but no matter what they do, the Big Cooperative is still, in part, the Big Casino.

Not only do the philosopher-legislators have to decide what goals to pursue; they have to decide which of the casino elements to trade off for the purpose of achieving their conception of fairness. To some extent the Big Cooperative still



rewards luck and irrelevant characteristics, and still stacks the deck in favor of the House. However, the democratically chosen philosopher-legislators decide that the Big Casino is good enough and fair enough for everyone who does not want to starve to be obliged to work for it. No one has access to the resources they need to maintain their existence unless and until they work for the Big Cooperative. Depending on its rules and your luck you might eventually be able to earn your independence in several years; or it could take a lifetime.

Unfortunately, you are one of the people who don't fit in—a dissenter. Perhaps the Big Cooperative is meritocratic, and you're an egalitarian. Perhaps it's the other way around. Whatever the goals of the cooperative project, they are not your goals. You don't like the work, the terms, the rewards, your place in the hierarchy, or the lack thereof. If you can't command better terms, you'd like to be left alone. You go to see the Cooperative Complaints Review Board, but ahead of you in line is one of the people least advantaged under the old Big Casino regime.

The review board tells the least advantaged person, "Congratulations, you are no longer exploited! You would have been right not refuse to participate in the old Big Casino. But the New Improved Big Cooperative Casino is reasonably fair and shares its fruits with you. All jobs are good jobs. Your reasons for wanting to quit have all been eliminated."

The least advantaged person replies, "Maybe you shouldn't tell me when I'm no longer exploited. I'll tell you. You show me the jobs, and I'll tell you when they are good enough."

The Cooperative Complaints Review Board replies, "We're not interested in your individual opinion of justice; we're interested in true justice. We've made the determination in terms of abstract, objective principles of social justice that have been

endorsed by the democratic process. We've imagined what your perspective is like and we've given your position top priority as we formulated the imaginary contract upon which the Big Cooperative Casino is based. We created a list of great job opportunities for you to choose from. Therefore, you must choose one of them."

"If you're so much on my side, why do you want to force me work for you just as much as the bad guys did? If you really want to help me, why not let me decide?"

"Society is based on mutual obligation. Now that your exploitation has been eliminated, you have a duty to reciprocate to others. We appreciate your disadvantages, but if you won't participate, you must just be lazy."

Seeing how things went for your less advantaged brethren, you drop your case. You find that, like the Big Casino, the Big Cooperative doesn't directly force you to serve. If you don't want to serve, the Big Cooperative will leave you alone, but they will interfere with you in ways that make it impossible for you to provide your own food and shelter. If you want to be left alone with access to enough resources to build a decent life for yourself and to follow your own goals, you have to fulfill their understanding of your obligation to serve their goals first.

You cannot ignore the Big Cooperative any more than you could ignore the Big Casino. You are not free. You are not free to pursue your own goals until you have made it in the interest of the Big Cooperative to part with enough property to let you be independent. The laws of the state say that you are a free person, but the property rights structure and system of social duties enforced by the state force you to serve at least one member of the ownership group; as much as before, the laws effectively put you into involuntary servitude. The philosopher-legislators represent the majority and act on what they believe to be fair principles; but they are not you,

and you are still bound to their service. You neither agreed to the decisions that brought about these circumstances, nor are you allowed to decline the role ascribed to you in this situation. You are still unfree. Your position neither follows from nor preserves your freedom.

The revolution failed to make you free because it failed to deal with the root cause of your unfreedom in the Big Casino—propertylessness. When resources are owned (privately or publicly), individuals without property are obliged to work for at least one member of the group that controls property before they can achieve even their bare subsistence, much less a decent life. Whether that group is a capitalist class or a democratic majority, you are its subject. As long as there are people without access to enough resources to maintain independence, there will be people who are unfree.

What kind of revolution would make you free?

Suppose you and I become part of a democratic majority coalition that wins control of the BIG Casino and wants to make people who live there free in the most meaningful way possible. We must try to avoid imposing things on others against their will. So, we will have to allow everyone who lives in the Big Casino to participate equally in decision-making process that governs it, but we cannot hope to get everyone's agreement. Decisions that obtain the agreement of some are likely to cause others to withdraw their agreement. Therefore, we have to seek both the widest possible agreement and the minimum negative impact on those who are disadvantaged by or who dissent from our agreement.

We have to make the Big Casino more like the Small Casino. To the greatest extent possible, we must allow people to ignore the Big Casino if they don't want to participate. As much as we try to ensure that the Big Casino is good for everyone, we

are only a majority coalition; service to the Big Casino is only assuredly service either to the coalition that governs it or to the individuals who own pieces of it. We must not force anyone to serve us unwillingly. We can't make it possible for individuals to ignore the rules that protect others and make the Big Casino work, but we can compensate people for what we impose on them, and we can make it possible for them to refuse active service to the Big Casino. We have all the resources and output of the Big Casino with which to create positive rewards for voluntary participation. As long as meaningful freedom is our priority, these are the only tools we can use.

That is, we need to recognize and respect every individual's independence, and attempt to build a society on voluntary participation of willing individuals. We invite everyone to share in the benefits of participation, but we compensate individuals for the burdens we impose on them before we ask them to serve us, and the least we can leave for any individual—even if they are unable or unwilling to participate—must be enough to meet their basic needs.

The democratic coalition that sets rules in this way says to its disadvantaged and to its dissenters, "Our system of social cooperation is as fair and mutually beneficial as we know how to make it, but it is up to you to decide whether it is fair and beneficial enough to earn your participation."

## **1. The issue**

The representation of the economy in the above story is partly derived from an example by Milton Friedman. He used the example of "an evening at baccarat" to illustrate his belief that although a capitalist economy contains unfairness and leads to inequality, it is justified on grounds that many such differences follow from choice and people ought to be free to choose what they do.<sup>1</sup> I use the story of the Big Casino

to concede that freedom and choice have the potential to justify a great deal of unfairness and inequality, but to illustrate how a modern economy (both in practice and in the visions of many theorists with different political views) fails to deliver sufficient freedom to be justified on the grounds of choice, equality, fairness, or anything else. All economies (that we know how to create) contain what we might call a casino element: they are persistently affected by systemic unfairness, such as nepotism, brute luck, irrelevant requirements, and odds stacked in favor of people with past advantages.

This article summarizes the assessment of this problem and the solution proposed in my recent book, *Independence, Propertylessness, and Basic Income: A Theory of Freedom as the Power to Say No.*<sup>2</sup>

The solution can be put simply. If you can't make the game fair, you can't force people to play. This statement is simple and highly plausible in the abstract. I simply ask the reader to retain that perspective when we look at all the rules societies impose on people without property. The legal system imposes rules of ownership allowing individuals and institutions to interfere with any use the propertyless might make of nature resources on their own. In turn, these rules effectively force the propertyless to participate in an economic system whether or not they agree to it and despite its systematic unfairness.

Reducing the unfairness of the system is not my most central concern, partly because we simply don't have the information or the moral certainty to eliminate unfairness. Unless everyone spends their money (or transfers their goods or efforts) according to some universally agreeable principle of fairness, and everyone has the perfect knowledge necessary to make decisions consistently with that theory of fairness, the casino element will remain. Better rules might reduce that casino

element, but there is very little hope that society can eliminate the casino element to everyone's satisfaction. The economy is not fair; and neither you nor I know how to make it fair. This is no reason to be unfair; we must try to make it as fair as we can. But our inability to be fair is a reason to be magnanimous to people who object to what we've done. If we force anyone to take part, we force them into an unfair system.

Egalitarian political philosophers have expended lot of energy on the difficult task of devising the principles and institutions of a just economic system without the casino element. Property rights advocates have responded by asking: what's wrong with the voluntary exchange of goods and services among free people?<sup>3</sup> If consenting adults want to play a game with a casino element, forcing them to stop inhibits their freedom. Property rights advocates espouse an appealing ideal that freedom as the absence of force is important for everyone, but the version capitalism the support does not deliver that ideal. Capitalism, in practices and in the idealized versions of many theorists, is not a system of unforced voluntary exchange among free people. An appeal to freedom can't justify the a political system that gives one group of people control over natural resources without the consent of or compensation for those without.

The central point of the story is not that the Big Casino is a casino but that it is big—too big to ignore—and its size threatens freedom in two ways. The system of property ownership in capitalism, welfare capitalism, or socialism neither follows from nor preserves liberty. A system that forces people into the position in which they must serve the group that controls property to meet their basic needs does not preserve freedom. Such a system also does not follow from freedom, because its most onerous duties (such as institutions establishing that others control the entire planet)

are forced onto people, not freely accepted by them. An egalitarian attempt to eliminate the casino element but to retain forced participation misidentifies the problem in the modern economy. We cannot eliminate that casino element, but we can avoid forcing people to participate in an economy with a casino eliminate or with any other features to which they might reasonably object.

## **2. The proposed solution**

In simplest terms, the solution is to make the Big Casino more like the Small Casino. In slightly more elaborate terms, I propose three duties. (1) We have a duty to try to stay out of each other's way.<sup>4</sup> We must try not to force other people to play our game. If we declare that all resource belong to an ownership group or to a joint project, we fail in the duty to stay out of each other's way. (2) If the size and complexity of our society make it impossible for everyone stay out of each other's way, we have to seek accord with others who are affected by what we do. That is we must seek agreement rather than to declare hypothetical agreement. (3) If we can't reach accord with everyone, we have duties to seek accord with the largest possible number of people and to minimize the negative impact on those who can't be brought into accord.

The book contains a very tentative exploration of a theory of justice and more detailed exploration of the corresponding theory of freedom. I call the wider theory, *justice as the pursuit of accord* (JPA), because it rests on the belief that people have a responsibility to strive for agreement, in a world in which unanimous agreement is usually impossible to achieve. Agreement plays a central role in this theory, both in the interaction of individuals and in the creation of the basic structure of society, but the theory neither pretends that agreement has been achieved when it has not (as some

contractualist theories do) nor sets up one-sided conditions prior to agreement (as property-rights-based theories do). It assumes that the closest approximation of justice that society can reach is to maximize the number of individuals brought into agreement and to minimize the negative impact on those who are disadvantaged by or who dissent from the social agreement. This duty justifies a strong responsibility on the part of whoever controls external assets to provide unconditional support the poor and the disadvantaged.

The book focuses on the freedom-related aspects of the theory, leaving other aspects for a later work. The duty to stay out of each other's way corresponds to a negative conception of freedom. People might also have a duty to help each other, but I do not rely on the existence of such a duty to support my argument for redistribution. This starting point sets a difficult bar for my argument. I argue for redistribution without relying on a duty to aid, and I argue for unconditional redistribution without denying the existence of a duty to aid.

An entailment of staying out of each other's way and of minimizing the negative impact on others is the respect each other's freedom in the most important and substantive way. Beginning with the familiar idea of negative freedom as noninterference, the book builds a theory of the most important freedoms not to interfere with. I call a theory that identifies the most important freedoms, a theory of status freedom: the effort to identify the difference between a free person and an unfree person.

The book proposes a theory of status freedom that requires personal independence along with familiar civil and political rights. I call this particular theory of status freedom: freedom as effective control self-ownership (abbreviated as ECSO freedom). It is the effective power to accept or refuse active cooperation with other



willing people—in short—freedom as the power to say no. To respect another's ECSO freedom you must avoid forcing them to do anything for you, and avoid directly or indirectly forcing them into a situation in which others can force them to do things for them. This entailment is a major concern of the theory this book.

Independence does mean people actually choose live independently; it means that they participate actively in projects with others only if they have voluntarily chosen to do so. If all individuals choose to participate, when they were free to do otherwise, everyone is independent, but no one lives independently. The independence-based complaint with many theories of justice (including some liberal, egalitarian, welfarist, contractualist, and property-rights-based theories) is that they effectively endorse a mandatory-participation economy, in which one group asserts control over natural resources, creating the condition of propertylessness. In a world where essential resources are controlled by some group of people, the propertyless have no other reasonable choice but to serve whatever group controls property. This condition cannot exist without interference and force, preventing the propertyless doing what they could otherwise do. And thus, it makes the propertyless unfree in the most negative sense of the term.

This book argues instead for a voluntary-participation economy, in which each individual has a reasonable alternative to active participation. Respect for independence demands that we do not force individuals into a state of material deprivation in which they have no effective power to refuse participation.

Arguments for freedom from propertylessness are central to the book. Propertylessness is a persistent characteristic in most economies in the world today. Many people enter economic interaction without property of their own, forced to refrain from satisfying their own desires with their own efforts unless and until they

serve someone who controls property. Propertylessness prohibits individuals from using the Earth's resources to meet their needs. It forces people to accept forms of service that they would otherwise reject. Sometimes it forces people into both service and poverty.

I tentatively call the ideology that follows from JPA “indepentarianism” because of the importance that support for personal independence plays in the theory. Indepentarianism has some relation to left-libertarianism, republicanism, liberalism, and liberal-egalitarianism. It is most distinct from these in the respect it places on personal independence and the stress it places on material deprivation as a threat to freedom. The preservation of independence does not eliminate the casino element from the political and economic system; it only makes individual participation in that system voluntary—making the Big Casino more like the Small Casino. Individual interactions follow from freedom because individuals have the effective power to choose whether they actively participate in projects with others.

The theory implies that the greatest (or most important) equal freedom for all requires a property-rights regime with more limited property rights than the traditional Anglo-American understanding of full individual property rights, and it contains a different justification of the right to private property than is usually proposed. The payment of a tax (such as a wealth or resource-value tax) for the purpose of compensation to the propertyless is not “interference” with property “rights” but is part of the purchase price of property. The justification of private property in resources (and any external assets, we might make out of them) is the payment of taxes for distribution to those who have less to compensate them for interfering with whatever use they might make of those resources. Compensation must be sufficient to preserve each individual's status as free person and to make it in each (otherwise

propertyless) individual's interest to support the greater shares of property held by owners. This policy will increase the negative freedom of the propertyless and eliminate the problem of people whose independence is threatened by economic deprivation without interfering with those who want to obtain relatively large shares of property any more than a seller interferes with a buyer when she demands payment.

To preserve independence in the way I have described above, any redistribution has to be unconditional. Although direct access to raw resources or in-kind benefits might work in some circumstances, the book argues that the most reasonable redistributive strategy to preserve the economic element of ECSO freedom in an industrial economy is the "basic income guarantee" (BIG): a government-provided, unconditional assurance that everyone has a regular cash income large enough to meet their basic needs. The income is "unconditional" in the sense that it is not limited by the imposition of requirements that individuals perform (or show willingness to perform) some kind of work or service in exchange for it. The income is "regular" in the sense of it being paid daily, weekly, monthly, or often enough to ensure stability. There is an enormous literature on the basic income guarantee, and therefore a detailed explanation of the working of it is not necessary here.<sup>5</sup> The ECSO freedom argument in this book supports a basic income not less than enough to provide for each individual's basic needs.

To recapitulate in more exacting language, indepentarianism is the name I give to the theory of justice as the pursuit of accord (JPA); it has three central ideas. (1) People's first duty is try to stay out of each other's way. This duty entails respecting each other's need to maintain core wellbeing, and their equal entitlement to the most important liberties—to status freedom. (2) When it is not possible to stay out of each other's way, people's duty is to seek accord; to seek an agreement in which

each party literally accepts the sacrifices they make in exchange for the sacrifices others make on their behalf. (3) When universal accord is not possible—and it is usually not possible—people’s duty is to seek both the widest possible agreement and the minimum negative impact on dissenters (i.e. those who cannot be brought into agreement). The duty to minimizing negative impact on dissenters requires strong democratic civil rights and, in most contexts, the payment of an unconditional BIG large enough to maintain each individual’s core wellbeing.

### **3. Outline of the book**

This section concludes the article with a chapter-by-chapter summary of the book, showing how it proposes, defends, and examines the ramifications of the theory of ECSO freedom.

After the first chapter previews the book, Chapter 2 defines ECSO freedom in relation the more familiar concept of self-ownership, and shows that ECSO freedom is a separate concept that can stand on its own. ECSO freedom is broader in some ways and narrower in other ways than self-ownership. Chapter 2 discusses how ECSO freedom can be understood as a theory of status freedom, and argues for the need for a theory of status freedom as opposed to scalar freedom. That is a theory of what it means to be a free person as opposed to a theory of what it means to make a person more or less free. A centrally important feature of ECSO freedom is its focus on individuals’ *effective power* to control their interactions. One can interfere with another’s ability to refuse both directly (by forcing them to do something for someone) and indirectly (by interfering with any attempts they might make to produce the goods they need to live a decent life until they do something for someone). ECSO freedom requires “personal independence” or “an exit option,” unconditional direct

access to resources to maintain individuals' effective power to refuse unwanted service to others.

Chapter 3 discusses some of the implications of understanding status freedom as ECSO freedom or independence. It addresses issues such as the alienation of status freedom, and the complexity of freedom and unfreedom. It argues that independence requires unconditional access to sufficient resources to maintain a threshold of human need. The chapter examines several theories of human need to identify that threshold, and argues that the best way to maintain that access in a modern industrialized economy is through an unconditional BIG.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 argue for the importance of respecting and protecting independence. Chapter 4 frames the issue. Two very different aspects of independence are important: freedom from deprivation and the freedom from being forced to serve someone often by the threat of deprivation. The argument hinges on forced deprivation being a significant loss of liberty both in itself and because it can lead to forced service to others' projects. There are two obvious contrary positions: the belief in a social responsibility to work and the belief that private property rights to natural resources must be upheld even though doing so forces one group of people to work for another. The chapter considers three ethical models of human interaction (trade, pure voluntarism, and mutual obligation), all of which are appropriate in different situations. It also considers three mechanisms for getting humans to interact (trade, pure voluntarism, and force). The argument for independence laid out in subsequent chapters involves arguing that trade and voluntarism models are morally appropriate in most situations and that the trade and voluntarism mechanisms are often superior to force even when mutual obligation is morally appropriate.

Chapter 5 makes several first-best ethical arguments for respecting personal independence. It argues that individual consent is a constituent part of what makes most social and economic interaction just, that the trade or voluntarism model is appropriate for most economic interaction, and that respect for human integrity entails respect for individuals' decisions on when and whether to participate in projects with others. It suggests that many features in any socio-economic system will give some individuals reason to object. Often, consensus is not possible even on issue of the basic structure of society. Features necessary to obtain the endorsement of some people will necessarily obtain the objections of others. Chapter 5 then argues that an important justification for any economic system should be that participants literally choose to participate when nonparticipation is a realistic option for those who do object to the institutional structure.

Chapter 6 makes a second-best or indirect argument for the importance of respecting independence. The chapter shows that independence is an important mechanism to protect vulnerable individuals from poverty and exploitation both in market and nonmarket interactions. It concludes that even if we completely disregard the possibility that participants' agreement has direct bearing on the justness of the social project, the requirement to obtain each participant's agreement is an extremely powerful tool to ensure that the goals, methods, and terms of cooperation are good, fair, right, or just and not one-sided in favor of the ruling majority (or any other powerful group).

Chapter 7 briefly recounts the recognition of indirectly forced labor in the history of political thought. It then considers the theory of ECSO freedom in relation to several prominent theories of freedom. Protection of independence does not necessarily conflict with protection of most conceptions of freedom considered, most

of which are theories of scalar freedom rather than status freedom. The chapter argues that theories of freedom would be stronger if they incorporated respect for independence. Any property rights system cannot be consistent with freedom if it prioritizes one person's ownership of natural resources over another person's effective power to have or to refuse interaction with others. It also discusses independentarianism's relationship to sufficientarianism, left-libertarianism, and real libertarianism. Independentarianism has a similar view of natural resource ownership as left- and real libertarians, but it connects these concerns with resources to the sufficientarian concern for a threshold of need to a theory of status freedom. The focus on status freedom gives independentarianism a significantly different perspective from left- and real libertarianism. Equalizing the market value of external assets, as most left-libertarians propose, is not sufficient if it does not provide individuals the power to say no.

Chapter 8 examines the independentarian view of freedom in relationship to liberal-egalitarians theories of justice, arguing that theories that do not respect the independence of the poor are insufficiently egalitarian. It examines Rawlsian arguments that can be used both for and against an enforceable obligation to contribute to social production, and gives several reasons in both ideal and nonideal theory to support the power to refuse for the least advantaged and for everyone.

Chapter 9 considers the question of duty. It assumes that there are some situations in which individuals have an enforceable obligation to contribute to a joint project and the extent to which such an obligation is a limitation on the arguments in this book. It presents this question in the context of the reciprocity or exploitation objection of basic income. It concedes that there may be such duties, but argues that these duties cannot do the work basic income opponents would like them to do:

ground a lifetime obligation to participate in the labor market. Through a series of examples, the level of fairness that a society would have to achieve to justify such a long-term, encompassing duty is not feasible. The chapter concludes that duty could at best ground a temporary national service that would be equally onerous for all participants but not a lifetime commitment to an economic system with unequal rewards.

Chapter 10 summarizes and concludes the argument in this book, which places the respect for independence as part of the basic respect that human dignity requires. Without it “egalitarian” theories are insufficiently concerned with equality and “libertarian” theories are insufficiently concerned with liberty.

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 137-139. He also argues that efforts to eliminate market inequality will reduce the incentives for people to produce value that is good for everyone. I do not address this issue here, assuming that the importance of incentives is agreed by all party's to this debate.

<sup>2</sup> {Widerquist, 2013 #895}

<sup>3</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 163. Although Nozick poses this question in an example in which a just distribution exists, he uses it as part of an argument for capitalism with strong property rights.

<sup>4</sup> When I use the term, “we,” I mean you and me, author and reader: two citizens discussing what rules we think we should live under.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Atkinson, *Public Economics in Action: The Basic Income/Flat Tax Proposal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); John Cunliffe, Guido Erreygers, and Walter Van Trier, "Basic Income: Pedigree and Problems," in *Real Libertarianism Assessed*, ed. Andrew Reeve and Andrew Williams (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Irwin Garfinkel, Chien-Chung Huang, and W. Naidich, "The Effects of a Basic Income Guarantee on Poverty and Income Distribution," in *Redesigning Distribution: Basic Income and Stakeholder Grants as Cornerstones of a More Egalitarian Capitalism*, ed. Bruce Ackerman, Anne Alstott, and Philippe Van Parijs (New York: Verso, 2005); Michael A. Lewis and Karl Widerquist, "An Efficiency Argument for the Basic Income Guarantee," *International*



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*Journal of Environment, Workplace and Employment* 2, no. 1 (2006); Guy Standing, *Beyond the New Paternalism: Basic security as a right* (New York: Verso, 2002); J. Elster, "Comment on Van der Veen and Van Parijs," *Theory and Society* 15, no. 5 (1986); Philippe Van Parijs, *Arguing for Basic Income: Ethical Foundations for a Radical Reform* (New York: Verso, 1992); Philippe Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Philippe Van Parijs, *What's Wrong With a Free Lunch?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Philippe Van Parijs, *Basic Income: A Simple and Powerful Idea for the 21st Century* (Madison, WI 2002); Karl Widerquist, S. Pressman, and Michael A. Lewis, *The Ethics and Economics of the Basic Income Guarantee* (Aldershot, United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2005).; Allan Sheahan, *Basic Income Guarantee: Your Right to Economic Security* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).