

Transcript

Upstream Podcast
Episode 7.1: Universal Basic Income - An idea whose time has come

[Upstream Theme Music - Lanterns]

[River sounds]

Men's and Women's voices: You are listening to Upstream.

Della: A radio documentary series that invites you to unlearn everything you thought you knew about economics. I'm Della Duncan.

Robert: And I'm Robert Raymond.

Della: Join us, as we journey upstream.

Men's and Women's voices: To the heart of our economic system and discover cutting edge stories of game-changing solutions based on connection, resilience, and prosperity for all.

[Street interviews]

Della: What's your name?

Michael: Michael.

Della: Michael, thank you. And how old are Michael and where are you from?

Michael: Twenty-two years, from Monterey Bay.

Della: Wonderful. So the question we're asking everyone is if you were given \$1,500 from now until the rest of your life, unconditionally — so no strings attached — by the government, as a universal basic income for you, how would your life be different? How would it be impacted?

Michael: Well I mean honestly I probably wouldn't be working right now if I got a universal basic income. Or at least, working full-time that is. I could focus a little bit more on school and the things that really I think would be a little bit more grounding to me. However, because we don't have that, I have to currently be working full-time in order to make ends meet. So it would definitely benefit my life in the fact that I could put my energy towards so many different things than just this one outlet that I have now.

Della: And how do you feel about other people getting this basic income too?

Michael: I feel like it's a basic human right to have a roof over your head, honestly. And people shouldn't have to worry about that month-to-month. [Laughs]

Della: What's your name?

Vadim: Vadim.

Della: Vadim?

Vadim: Yeah, you can call me Vadim.

Della: Vadim. And you said you just arrived from Russia, from near Moscow. And what kind of work do you do in Moscow?

Vadim: I work in my own bakery.

Della: Oh, Russian bread?

Vadim: Yup, why not? [Laughs]

Della: Wonderful, yeah. So the question for you is if you were to get an income from the Russian government for \$1,500 a month, every month, for the rest of your life, no conditions, how would your life be different?

Vadim: I will help for people who is more needed that me.

Della: So you would continue to work at the bakery...

Vadim: Yeah, exactly...

Della: But you would take the \$1,500 a month and you would give it to homeless people?

Vadim: Yep. That's right.

Robert: What if everyone got it?

Della: What if everyone got it?

Vadim: [Surprised sound] It's gonna be some chaos.

Della: Chaos?

Vadim: Yes, yes, yes.

Della: It's gonna be chaos? In what way? Why would it be chaos?

Vadim: I have some problems in English, so this guy gonna be my...

Della: Translator?

Vadim: Yeah.

Della: Ok.

[Vadim speaking Russian]

Vadim's Translator: When everyone's gonna have money, everyone's gonna be greedy and not so helpful to each other.

Della: Ok, so you're saying that if you were given — just you — were given \$1,500, you would be generous, you would give it to other people. But if everyone was given it, everyone would be more greedy.

Vadim: Mhmm.

Robert: Would you be ok just saying your first name and your age and..

Emma: [Laughs] Oh, now you've gone too far!

Robert: Your social security number? [Laughs]

Emma: My age? I'm a lady! [Laughs]

Robert: [Laughs] Whatever you're comfortable saying.

Emma: My name's Emma, and I am 32 years old. [Laughs]

Robert: Great. And so we're out here in Palo Alto. We're asking people what would they do if they were given \$1,500 every month from the government, and no strings were attached, how would that change or impact your life?

Emma: Well, you say that's \$1,500 you could just be generous with. I guess the thing about living here in the Bay Area is that everything is so much more expensive than what we're used to. And I'm here on a European Fellowship, so I get paid the same salary I did when I was working back in Europe, but everything else is insane. So it limits your life, it limits what you can do, I mean, that would be rent every month. You know it frees you up to go out but also just, I don't know, do other things. I'm lucky enough to enjoy my work, it just doesn't pay that well. So, yeah, it would definitely change life a lot. Is that gonna happen?

[Music - Fae of Man]

Della: Well, it might. And in some ways, it actually already is. In this episode of *Upstream*, we'll take a close look at the idea of *universal basic income*, and ask the question: what it would mean if people received money just for being alive? Versions of this idea have been talked about for hundreds of years, dozens of pilot studies and experiments have already taken place, and today it's on the discussion table in many different communities.

As you might imagine, this is a contentious topic. There's a lot of debate around how much it would be, who would get it, where the money would come from, and even whether it's a good idea in the first place.

As we tackle these questions, we'll explore some of the bigger, deeper issues tied to this radical concept. What might be some of the unintended, systemic consequences of a universal basic income? What effect would it have on the future of work? Would civilization fall apart because everyone would just hang out on their couch all day? These

are just a few of the themes we'll get into in this first of our 2-part series on *universal basic income*.

[Stanford]

Della: We're here right now on Stanford University's college campus. And we're here because there's a course being taught in the philosophy department called the Philosophy of Universal Basic Income. Let's go find out more.

Juliana: My name is Juliana Bidadanure. I am an assistant professor in philosophy at Stanford University. I'm French, I grew up in the suburbs of Paris, and I lived in England for about ten years where I did my studies in philosophy. And I moved to the U.S. about a year and a half ago.

Della: So, how would you describe Universal Basic Income?

Juliana: Universal basic income is what has been described as a disarmingly simple policy. It consists on giving people cash on a monthly basis with no strings attached. And that many sound like a crazy idea, but there are very strong reasons why we would want something that ambitious.

Della: Before we get into those reasons, let's take a closer look at what we mean when we talk about universal *basic income*. First of all, a basic income would go to individuals, not households, as some benefits often do. It would also be an income that is *unconditional*, meaning there's nothing one would need to do or not do in order to receive it. That means it would be *separate from* and *in addition to* any income from paid work.

You might hear *unconditional* and *universal* used interchangeably, but they actually mean very different things. Universal refers to *who* gets the basic income, and there's actually still a lot of debate around how universal is defined. Would it go to all legal residents? Or just citizens? Would minors receive it? And should it be regional, national, or even global? And lastly, another key term is the word *basic*, which is also under debate. What is a *basic* income? Is it enough to keep you from starving, or is it enough to allow you to live a comfortable life? We'll carry these questions with us throughout the episode, but first, we asked Juliana to tell us what sparked the interest in a whole course on the topic in the first place?

Juliana: So, initially the idea was that there's more and more interest within the tech community for basic income as a policy. And that's because there's an increased concern that current technological developments might lead to a very bleak future for jobs and that we should start worrying about what we are gonna do when robots are taking over.

[Begin automation newsclip montage]

[Ominous music]

Man's voice: The age of robots has been anticipated since the last century...

Man's voice: Are the droids taking our jobs?

Woman's voice: The list of companies planning to replace human jobs with machines is growing...

Man's voice: Forty-seven percent of jobs in America are at, or will be at risk, of automation over the next two decades...

Man's voice: This is the single biggest job category in America?

Man's voice: That's correct.

Man's voice: And it could go away within the next two decades?

Man's voice: That's the fear.

[End automation newsclip montage]

Della: If you've already heard about universal basic income, or UBI, it was likely in this context, as a way to respond to job loss due to increasing automation. This is where most of the interest in UBI from Silicon Valley — where Stanford is based — comes from. Tech leaders like Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk, for example, have come out in favor of basic income because they claim to see it as the most sensible way of avoiding inevitable mass unemployment. Turns out this perspective is just one part of the story, here's Juliana again.

Juliana: The kind of automation interest in basic income is a really dominant one, right here right now. And so the idea of the course was the bring computer scientists, mechanical engineers, people getting interested in basic income because they are kind of realizing the social responsibility they have — to bring them to see that the basic income debate can't be reduced to the automation debate. And that there are, you know, many, many different arguments for basic income coming from a variety of different perspectives. And in fairness, I mean I lived in Europe for a long time, for most of my life, I'm just really recently here in the U.S. And I've actually been writing on basic income, reading on basic income, and automation was like a very, very small part of the puzzle. So, the idea of the class was to show that there's an interest in the discussion on the freedom based argument for basic income, right? So some libertarian, neoliberals have argued that basic income is the instrument of freedom, it will free people to do whatever they might want to do with their time. And so there is a debate within kind of more liberal leaning theories of justice. And then we do kind of a week on the egalitarian argument for basic income, and also the egalitarian concern that, you know, basic income might not be enough and basic income might in itself be sufficient to reduce inequalities and so that it might even be a — in some kind of cynical critiques — it might even be a trojan horse of neoliberalism.

Della: By a "Trojan Horse of neoliberalism" Juliana is referring to the questionable intentions behind the push for basic income that comes from the right of the political spectrum — predominantly from neoliberals and libertarians.

The idea behind these versions of a basic income is that we should abolish public services entirely and simply give people the cash instead so that they can purchase all their services on the market. Things like welfare programs, public housing, healthcare, and in some extreme cases, even public education spending would be cut entirely and replaced by a basic income.

On the other hand, a progressive — or egalitarian — UBI would likely replace *some* services — because things like unemployment benefits or food stamps may become redundant — but most public services would still remain intact. A progressive version would also be high enough to ensure that the policy would create a *truly* free labor market, where workers could freely choose the work they want to do or even whether or not to engage in paid work at all. If the income level was not high enough to ensure this freedom, UBI might actually serve as a subsidy for employers who could then get away with paying lower wages by relying on the basic income to make up the difference.

As you can see, the left-wing and right-wing versions of basic income are quite different and would have radically different effects on society. Here's Juliana again with the rest of the course.

Juliana: We also have a week where we discuss kind of whether basic income can help foster a more gender-just society. We have a week on racial justice and basic income. Black Lives Matter has endorsed basic income as part of their manifesto, and that's I think something that doesn't really get discussed as much but there are very, very strong reasons to believe that basic income will benefit those who are least well-off in this society. And so it might have an important impact on racial justice. And so, we do almost seven weeks of that, and then we arrive at automation. And so they see that automation's actually — it's an important part of the puzzle, that needs to be taken seriously and needs to be studied, but it's definitely not the entire debate. And that's really important to separate it out simply because we might want to say, 'well look, we still need to resist some technological changes anyway, and fight for basic income.' It's not that we have to accept those changes and then support basic income. We might want to accept those changes, and go for basic income, but it's not necessary. They don't necessarily work together. And I think that message is very important.

Della: Confining the discussion of basic income to a debate about job automation is unnecessary and limiting. And in fact, it can actually be harmful. We met up with economist and author Doug Henwood who weighed in about *his* thoughts on automation and how it connects with the idea of a universal basic income.

Doug: People have been talking this way about automation resulting in the end of employment for decades, centuries probably. And it just hasn't happened yet. But from just looking at, for example, the last few years of this business cycle, is that if automation was coming in and replacing employment, we would be seeing very rapid productivity growth. And by all the conventional measures we're not — in fact, we're seeing some of the weakest productivity growth in the history of the American economy over the last couple of years. And that is exactly the opposite of what you'd expect to see if the robots were really taking over. Now you know there's the driverless car coming and all that — who knows, maybe it's different this time. But there's really just no evidence looking at all the conventional economic statistics that jobs are disappearing in that way. And I think some of that talk actually is counter-productive. And think that the notion that jobs are disappearing makes people more scared than they have to be. It makes them less likely to make demands on their boss, or less likely to make demands on the political system. Moderately bad times tend to make people more conservative. They pull in and want to protect what they have. So I think making things sound worse than they are probably is not politically constructive [laughs]. Even though I think a lot of people say these things with good intentions. For example, if jobs are disappearing, we need a universal basic

income — I think we need a universal basic income even if jobs aren't disappearing. So I think you should make the argument on the principle, and not tell stories that may not be true.

Juliana: Thanks to my mechanical engineer and computer science students, I've really realized that we have no idea what we're talking about when we are starting speculating about the future of work. And I think the plurality of futures that we might have to consider in order to answer the question 'would basic income help at all?' is something that not — I've not realized the extent to which we are struggling, and even those who are at the center of those changes — so, working on robots and the softwares of the future — don't know either. And I think what philosophers have been quite good at, political philosophers, is at saying, 'well, let's worry about feasibility concerns later, let's have visions, let's have utopias, let's push them forward and see if we can indeed get there. And I think the past twenty years have been wonderful in showing that actually those really big, transformative, radical ideas can start becoming more and more feasible when people take them seriously.

[*Music break - Bedrockk*]

Della: Speaking of envisioning utopias, here's Rutger Bregman, author of "Utopia for Realists: The Case for a Universal Basic Income, Open Borders, and a 15-hour Workweek". We asked him about one of the first questions that came to *our* mind when we first heard about basic income: "If *everybody* was simply given more money each month, wouldn't that just cause inflation, and the prices of everything to go up?"

Rutger: If you would finance the basic income with just printing additional money then almost all economists would agree that at some point you're going to get inflation. Actually, there are some economists right now, and some other people who say that we should do that. It's called helicopter money, or quantitative easing for the people. Because we don't have enough demand right now, and, I mean, we're also giving a lot of free money to banks right now, so why not give it to the people instead? And sure, in the short run you can do that, but obviously in the long run you won't be able to finance a basic income that way. So almost all serious proponents I know of basic income agree that we would have to finance it with taxes. And in that way, inflation is only going to be a problem if everyone is going to be lazy with a basic income. I mean, then you would have fewer goods and services but the same amount of money chasing those goods and services, and then obviously then you'll get inflation. But if that's not true — if people keep their jobs and may even do some more socially valuable work, paid or unpaid, then inflation is not going to be a problem.

There's one other thing though, is that some people worry that — about the rent. Won't houselords just raise the rent? Well, let me first say that UBI is not a panacea that will suddenly solve all problems. If houses are too expensive then you need to build more houses, or you need to cap the rent, or get more social housing, or whatever. You know, you always need additional policies, basic income is never going to be enough. Although, you should remember that a basic income will enable many people to move. To a different area with lower rents, a risk that they now won't dare to take because you know, they can't afford to stop working for a few weeks and move somewhere else. But with a basic income they could. So it would be interesting to see what kind of dynamics

would start with a basic income also on the housing market. And if people start moving, and leave those expensive neighborhoods, well then houselords might want to let their rents go down again. I think that you probably need other policies as well but we already, we need them right now, I mean it's already a problem. But it's not an unsolvable problem.

Della: You might have noticed that Rutger's optimism regarding the inflation question was based on an assumption that people would remain productive if they received a basic income. But, would people still be productive if they got a basic income? What's to stop them from just not working? There's a lot to say in response to this question, but before exploring the answers, it's actually quite interesting to first explore the question itself. Here's Rutger.

Rutger: When you ask people, 'what will you do with a basic income?' most people aren't worried about themselves, right? They say, 'I've got dreams, I've got ambitions. I'll put the money to good use.' But always if you ask them, 'what will other people do with a basic income?' They're really worried. They'll probably waste it on drugs, or alcohol, or they'll watch Netflix all day, or...[laughs]. So, that's why many people are, at least in the first instance, skeptical of a basic income. And a big reason here is the news, because, I mean, the news is always about exceptions, you know, it's always about things that go wrong: corruption, crises, terrorism. In the U.S., people watch like five hours a day of television, so they are being inundated with the message that most humans are corrupt, and lazy, and want to rig the systems, et cetera, et cetera.

Kathi: It's such an interesting question, you know, that we would assume that if we were not engaged in waged work, that we would just sort of lie around. As if waged work becomes the very epitome of what it means to be active.

Della: This is Kathi Weeks, professor and author of the book *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. We called her at her office at Duke University in North Carolina.

Kathi: I think it's also just sort of a symptom of how many hopes and expectations we pin onto waged work. That is, if we didn't have access to waged work we would never get off the couch, or get out of bed. And I think that's patently false, because obviously there's many people who are not engaged in waged work right? Traditionally many women who have had only partial access to waged work, but who have been engaged in enormously productive kinds of activities, even if they hadn't been rewarded with a wage. I think that that worry is itself a kind of revealing symptom of how many expectations we pin on this very fragile thing called waged work. We imagine that if we're excluded from it, that we would no longer be able to engage in any kind of meaningful activity. Well, I mean, if you look around, people are engaged in meaningful activities all of the time. In fact people are struggling in the few hours outside of their waged jobs to engage in all kinds of practices of care, and creativity, and sociality. People are constantly struggling to have more time outside of waged work to engage in a myriad of activities.

Della: It might be helpful to explore this concept of *waged work* a bit more before we move forward since it's so central to some of the assumptions about productivity that are embedded in that question about whether people will just stop working.

Kathi: It's a strangely difficult concept, the wage system — you could think of it also as a job system — but it's the system part that's a little bit harder to grasp because I think we're really good at thinking about jobs — particularly our jobs, or the job of our friends — but we're not really used to, you know, taking the step back to look at work as a kind of system. You know, why is work the main way that we gain access to income? Why are so many of us required to work? Why are we required to work for so long? Why is, you know, forty hours the standard of full-time work? You have bigger questions about the relationship between work and life in our country.

So I think you do have to kind of take this step back, and when you do that you can kind of see that the capitalist economic system fulfills these two tasks simultaneously. And one of them is to generate profit, right? So to give people returns on their investment, to kind of, you know, stock up more investment capital. That's one of them. It's doing pretty well on that score. And the second function is to distribute income to the rest of us, right? And how are the rest of us going to get income that we need to live? Well, the idea is that we gain access through waged work. And I think that, you know, that's why I'm trying to get at when I think about a wage system.

Now in a pre-industrial economy, waged work wasn't the primary way that people earned their livelihood. They might have been working on a family farm, or trading various tasks for food or others kinds of things. With industrialization, waged work came to be the primary way that people, you know, made access to income. And that made people who were engaged in other kinds of activities — I'm thinking of unwaged household workers for example — all of a sudden, their work was no longer seen as work, because then work attached to this idea of waged work and anyone who was doing other kinds of productive activities, that was no longer coded as work.

Della: And so, you've talked about how the UBI debate might actually help start a dialogue about the failures of the wage-system?

Kathi: Yeah, absolutely, I mean I think that's one of the important things about the fact that we're talking about a basic income now, is it's really an opportunity to stage some really important public discussions about, you know, is the wage system working or not? What does it mean to have — as people have described the post-2008 recovery — a “jobless” recovery? And what does that mean for the future of work as a system of income distribution? It forces us to ask, ‘well, why are some contributions to the social good attached to a wage, and why are some not, in some ways?’ And even, you know, ‘why is this the best way to distribute income? Is waged work really robust enough of a system to deliver on that promise that it'll allow people the means to live in a society?’

[Music break - Godspeed you Black Emperor]

Della: Part of the reason the myth exists that people would instantly stop working the second they had a chance, is because our whole economic system is based on the idea that work is a disutility and that we're all driven by the rational, self-interested motive to do as little of it as possible. But actually, we're conflating the separate concepts of *work* and of *jobs*. Is it *work* that we have a problem with? Or is it actually *jobs*?

Juliana: Just think of all the things that we could do if we weren't completely stuck in that, for me, backwards looking perspective on work and the life-course. Where, you know, you study for a number of years, then you're on the job market, then you work, you have a job for your entire life, and then you retire. I think that entire structure needs to be rethought, I think education should be lifelong, I think job should also be lifelong, if you want to, but work should be part of it all, that's for sure. And then just a life where the centrality of jobs is challenged — the centrality of work, I don't think should be challenged. I mean, people disagree on that, but, from a more social democratic perspective, I do think that work is the backbone of our communities. It's the thing that gives us link. And so I'm really in favor of a society where people are, you know, encouraged in various ways to contribute, to do volunteering work, to look after each other. I think that just our conception of work is so narrow, and I think that we shouldn't make an income dependent on what work you end up doing, what activity you end up doing, because there'll always be an oppressive way of choosing and picking out the occupation that we think matter.

Della: We're so deeply embedded within the wage system that we find it difficult to even *think* about ways to meet our needs without it. And we don't even realize when we're making grand assumptions about human nature and what actually counts as productivity, based on this very narrow and relatively recent way of organizing a society.

Juliana: I really do believe that people's reactions to basic income are mainly ideological [inaudible] people's first reactions: 'People are just gonna not want to work anymore, why would you work if you don't have those incentives anymore?' And so I think that it's ideological in the sense that, well, it's not based on evidence, it's just this profound distrust in human nature. And actually what's interesting there is that there's absolutely no evidence that that's what people end up doing when they get cash. And I think that can't be stressed enough.

Della: So what *does* the evidence say? To find out, let's travel back in time to a small town deep within the prairie lands of central Canada.

[*Manitoba interlude*]

Man's voice: A place called Manitoba. Now, just what is Manitoba? It's a province in Canada — the keystone province, right in the center. And it's becoming the holiday target for more and more vacationers every year. It's only four hundred miles from Minneapolis or Regina, less than a thousand miles from Toronto, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City. Manitoba is still the center, whether you come from Montreal or New York, Vancouver or San Francisco, by plane, train, bus, or car.

Eric: Okay, right now my name is Eric Richardson. I'm a carpentry instructor at a community college here in Winnipeg, and I've been here about four years. Originally from Dauphin, Manitoba, and uh, yeah. We've lived a few other places but always end up in Manitoba. Yeah.

Della: When Eric was a child, his parents were the recipients of a form of basic income that the Canadian government experimented with in the seventies. They called it Mincome. Mincome wasn't a UBI in the classic sense, but instead, it's what's known as a negative income tax — which is basically a top up if your income dips below a certain amount. The experiment occurred in a few towns in Manitoba, but Dauphin was the only

saturation site, meaning that in town was eligible. We asked Eric to tell us a little bit more about what he remembered.

Eric: When I grew up okay, my parents — children were seen but not heard. So they didn't really tell you what they were doing. You were just a kid and you [laughs], you did what you were told and, you know, stuff like that. But years later my mum started doing interviews about Mincome. And then I found out that we were on this program. So, over the course of time, I realized that when certain things happened in our household, it was largely in part to that program.

Della: So what happened as a result of Mincome? What were some of the impacts that it had on your family?

Eric: Okay, my parents were — my mum was hairdresser and my dad he was many things, but he was like a handyman when I was growing up, but he had a bad heart so he didn't work a fulltime job, so to speak, he sort of worked here and there, like nothing steady employment. And basically what happened was that the government set up this program that if your family income was under a certain amount, you would get extra dollars, alright? So we always had enough to eat and everything, but there were no extras, okay? Your clothes are hand-me-downs, or whatever, that you went out to restaurants maybe once a year. My parents grew a garden, they canned stuff, and it was all — I guess now you'd say it's all natural foods but back then it was [laughs] it was because there was — you didn't really go to the store that much. So, when some extra money showed up, a few different things happend.

Della: What happened differently? What changed in the household?

Eric: Well, my parents went out and bought a brand new table and chairs. And we [laughs] we never had any new furniture in the house, that I can remember, and then all of a sudden this new table and chairs shows up. We lived in an older, two-story house that had hardwood floors, and it was kind of off-level, so the chairs were caster chairs with bucket seats, so they rolled around on the hardwood. But they would roll away from the table because the floor was sloped so my dad, my mum and dad went back and they bought an area rug to go underneath the table so the chairs wouldn't roll away, so it was quite a big red-letter day in my family when this new furniture showed up.

Evelyn: Most of the people I've talked to reported that in fact Mincome made a big difference in their lives. It made it possible for them to — if I can quote one of the participants — to add some cream to the coffee.

Della: This is Dr. Evelyn Forget. The quote that she just mentioned is actually from Eric's mother. Dr. Forget is the researcher famous for uncovering the data behind the Mincome experiment, decades after the program had already ended.

Evelyn: I was an undergraduate between 1974 and 1978, when the Canadian experiment was taking place, so, it was always something that was sort of sitting at the back of my mind and I would go into my economics classes and my professors would say, 'There's this wonderful experiment that's taking place, way out west somewhere in Canada, that's gonna revolutionize the way we deliver social programs in this country.' So I was waiting for something spectacular to happen, and I graduated — I went on to graduate school — and this just sort of dropped off the radar, it was sort of sitting at the

back of my mind but nobody talked about it anymore. And I went on and did a lot of other things, and about fifteen years ago I started to do a lot of work in the area of health and poverty, and this old experiment sort of came back to mind. And I wondered at that point whether we could find anything about what happens if you actually have an effective way of alleviating poverty. Does it improve people's health? Does it improve their quality of life? So that's essentially why I started working in this area.

Della: A change in Canada's government in the middle of the Mincome experiment caused the program to end somewhat abruptly when the new administration pulled the funding. The researchers were left with a vast amount of data that was never analyzed. It wasn't until Dr. Forget recently uncovered the eighteen hundred dusty boxes of paper files that we really began to learn anything about the findings. Before Dr. Forget's work, the only data that had been published was a single labor market analysis of some of the results. We asked Dr. Forget about that study and how she got involved.

Evelyn: The researchers found that primary earners — that is adults with real jobs — it didn't have much of a labor market effect at all. If you offered them a basic income, they didn't really change their behavior very much. But there were two groups of people who did reduce the numbers of hours they worked: married women — secondary earners — reduced the number of hours they worked in an interesting way, when they left the labor market to give birth they tended to stay out for longer periods of time. So they effectively used the Mincome stipend to buy themselves longer maternity leaves, longer parental leaves. The other group of people who reduced the number of hours they worked, really dramatically, were tertiary earners. And here the language you use is really, really important. If you're not a supporter of basic income what you report is that young, unattached males reduced the number of hours they worked really dramatically. And if you are a supporter, you look a little bit more closely at the data and realize that what you're talking about is teenaged boys. Teenaged boys — adolescent boys — reduced the number of hours they worked.

So, really my work started when I went looking for those adolescent boys because I had a pretty fair idea of where I'd find them. So I called the provincial Department of Education and I got high school registration figures, and it turned out there was a nice increase in high school completion rates exactly coincident with the period of the Mincome project in Dauphin. So those young unattached males who were fleeing their labor market responsibilities were in fact in high school. I tracked down some of the participants in the experiment and talked to the families, and what we were told was that young boys, in particular in low-income families, had previously been under a fair amount of family pressure to become financially independent as quickly as possible so that the family money could be spread among the younger children. And when Mincome came along some of those families decided that they could support their sons in high school a little bit longer. So those boys were working fewer hours because instead of leaving school at the age of sixteen and taking a job, they were staying in high school and some of them were graduating during that period. So I think that was the first finding of my work that excited me a little bit.

Eric: Let's face it, the more people that are educated with more skills, the better society you're going to have. So it's an investment in your society. So, like a lot of people just straight away, "Oh, everybody's going to get lazy, or write it off, or whatever, nobody's gonna work." Well, it's exactly the opposite, eh? Because people who work, want to work, you know, and they'll just do other things. If you never had new furniture, you'd

buy new furniture, if you needed training you'd go for training. The money was just given to you, you could do what you want with it. It was completely no strings attached, so it's whatever suited your needs most, that's what you'd use it for.

Della: As Dr. Forget started to dig through the data, she reached out to the local paper and radio stations to ask for people to come forward to speak with her about how Mincome had influenced their lives. She wanted to give life to the data she had found and get a sense of the legacy of the program. This is how she connected with people like Eric's mother.

Evelyn: I also heard from a librarian — and I think this is the story that comes to my mind most often — when I met her, she'd just retired. And she told me that when Mincome came along, she was at that point collecting welfare, and she was a single mother of two young daughters. And she kept going to her welfare caseworker and asking to take some job training, because she wanted to become independent. And here's an indication of how different the world was in the 1970s than today, she was told by her caseworker that she should stay home and take care of her kids, and that the system would take care of her. And she wasn't really pleased with that response. And so when Mincome came along, families were given a choice, they couldn't both collect welfare and be on the Mincome scheme, so she withdrew from welfare and registered for Mincome. And under Mincome she could spend the money any way she wanted to, so she went and took some job training at a local community college and got a part-time job, that eventually turned into a full-time job. And as I said, when I spoke to her she had just retired after many years as a district librarian in the public system. And she was incredibly proud of having modeled a different kind of a life for her daughters. So in her house there are graduation pictures of both her daughters, both of whom had become professionals, and gone on to live good lives. And she was very grateful to Mincome for giving her that opportunity.

Della: The Dauphin experiment dispels the myth that waged work is the only incentive that people have to be productive, contributing members of a society. Most people didn't quit their jobs to spend more time doing drugs and well ...whatever the equivalent was of Netflix was back then. And those who *did* stop working only did so only to care for their family or to further their education. Here's Rutger with another experiment that took place in the city of London in 2009 that also supports these findings.

Rutger: This was a very small experiment actually, it happened in the financial district of London in 2009. So what they did is they gave thirteen homeless men, who had been living on the streets for years and years, some of them more than forty years, they gave them three-thousand pounds in spending money. And they were completely free to decide to spend it on whatever they wanted, you know? And even at that organization — that charity organization that did that — you know, even there there were quite some people skeptical, like, 'Hmm, is this really going to work out?' But then it turned out that the men put the money to really good use. You know, one of the bought a hearing-aid, a dictionary, or one took gardening classes, and, most importantly, a year after the experiment, seven out of thirteen of the men had a roof above their head.

Juliana: We should really move away from the really divisive rhetoric that has tended to separate what we often refer to as the deserving poor from the undeserving poor. There is this idea that, you know, those who are on benefits are benefit scroungers, free-riders, wealth queens, people who are just benefiting and playing the system, and benefiting

from the system. And so, the idea that we should move towards more unconditional benefits is also to kind of refuse the starting point, the assumption, that we should distrust the poor, and that we should distrust people and what they do with cash. So, what we want to do is to kind of shift the paradigm and start thinking about benefits as the safety net that enables you to actually open yourself to the various opportunities for meaningful work that are already available around you. And that might include caring, volunteering, that might include political campaigning, that might include many things that count as work in some sense, but that are not currently remunerated in the labor market. So, you know, and also it enables the opportunity to lead a more multi-sided existence where one year you may decide that you want to spend more time looking after an elderly, you know, grandparent or parent. But if you have a full-time job, you can't possibly spend that time. And you feel like that year, that's the thing that you want to do, and that you have to do. Or another year you might, you know, need to spend more time with a child that needs support right now — not tomorrow, right now. And basic income, by being unconditional, and not discriminating between different activities, enables those opportunities.

[Music Break - Harps]

Della: The findings from Mincome and many other similar experiments give us a glimpse into the short term consequences of severing wages from labor, but what would the long-term systemic effects be? Here's what we might imagine.

Rutger: We've got a huge waste of human potential going on right now, in two respects. So, we've got millions of people living in poverty, that's one source of waste of human potential. But the other one is that millions and millions of people are now stuck in jobs that may pay very well, but they don't care about it at all. It's what we call bullshit jobs [laughs]. And a recent poll in the U.K. found that as much as thirty-seven percent of British workers have a job that they think doesn't need to exist. In finance, in marketing, corporate lawyers, you name it. So, what will probably happen is that if you give everyone a basic income, that many people with lower incomes, that the people are doing incredibly important work, like garbage collectors, teachers, nurses, they can always fall back on their basic income. So they'll have a lot more bargaining power, which means that their wages will have to go up. Now, there are a lot of people nowadays in B.S. jobs that don't add anything of value and they won't have additional bargaining power. So, what will happen with a basic income in the long run is that the wages will much better reflect the social value of jobs. And think about participation in politics. Takes time, right? Many people can't afford to — they cannot afford to spend time on, you know, thinking about all these issues, making a difference on a local level, et cetera. Basic income will make it possible. There are so many examples and ways in which it would empower people to live a more productive, fulfilling life.

Juliana: We should think about the frustration of not being able to do what you want to with your life, the frustration of not having employment, all that frustration and the violence that it creates in a society at a given time. That's also something we have to think about very seriously. I mean, Guy Standing has written about the precariat and this growing mass of people who don't have an occupational identity, and who don't have occupational security, and who end up joining neo-nazi groups, for example, in eastern Europe. He draws a very clear connection between that violence and the economic insecurity, and the frustration that comes with it. That's something that we need to think

about. Do we want to, kind of, demonize those young people? And think that they are just radically different from us? Or do we want to think that economic insecurity is the driving force anxiety here, that is producing all that hatred and all that violence. And it's not just that of course but it's a really big part of the puzzle.

And so again, I think we have an opportunity to do something very radical, something would take us to the next step, really. And there will be plenty of challenges in that next step. That won't solve climate change, that won't solve many, many things. So there will be so many struggles. But at least, maybe we'll have more free time to actually contribute to those challenges and do something about those — and that's another thing, the challenge of trying to regain control over our time and over how we use our time. Everyone is overwhelmed. Those who are employed are over-employed and overwhelmed, or they're in precarious employment that do not allow them to take time off. Or, they are the underemployed, who still end up spending all their time looking for jobs. So, the question is really, 'Can we, and should we, find ways to gain control of our time so that we can really spend it better. You know, looking after the kids that need to be looked after, looking after the elderly people that need to be looked after, doing all the political, and volunteering, and campaigning work that is needed to make our society more cohesive, and just really give it a future. Because right now it's looking pretty bleak.

Eric: It feels like you're going sideways. Like It just takes so much money these days, you know, to run your household, pay your cable bills, keep the water, keep the wolf from the door, as they say. Like it just, [inaudible] a ridiculous amount of money. And you end up with people like Donald Trump, for instance, that are billionaires, you know, and it's like, well, we all work hard, why does one person get to have a billion dollars, and the next guy is just, you know, scraping by. So, there's gotta be a way of redistributing the wealth somehow, so it's a bit fairer.

Della: So what do you think is the root cause of this economic inequality?

Eric: Yeah, okay. Obviously the standard answer to that, the root of all evil is the love of money, eh? And money's really easy to measure, so you always think of, 'Oh, this guy has a million dollars so he must be a great guy.' Or happy, or whatever. Like you can't measure a lot of these intrinsic things, like somebody's doing what they want, or they're taking care of their family, or they're looking after their parents, or their elderly parents, or whatever. So it's all these other things that we don't look at. So, everything comes down to a cost, and it's, 'Oh, it's gonna cost so much money, and blah blah blah. Well, it costs money not to do thing. So, definitely we gotta get past this money issue and start — what do people need, and the basic needs of the people, and even if it's a form of housing too, if everybody has a place to call their own, I mean, that would be a start.

Della: And so you're a teacher of carpentry skills and you also are willing to speak with people like us, and I know you were also on Marketplace. So has this upbringing for you got you involved in politics, or campaigning, or political activism, or really advocating for policies like this at all?

Eric: [Laughs] I've that about it, but, oh man, it seems so hard to change people's minds [laughs]. Once upon a time I thought one person can make a difference — which is true, one person can make we get [inaudible] people working together. But you yourself may have noticed that it's like, the it's the harder you try it seems like you can't change

things. I have no idea why [laughs], why that is but I guess it's maybe an age thing, maybe I'm getting older, so...

Della: I feel like you're, you know, being an activist, or a, you know, political activist by helping us tell stories and by allowing people to interview you and share about the project so thank you so much for that, it's been great talking with you.

Eric: Well, thanks Della. Good luck down there.

[Street Interviews]

Robert: Hi, What's your name?

Robin: My name's Robin.

Robert: If you were given a universal basic income, for the rest of your life, enough to satisfy all of your basic needs, what do you would do with the money? How do you think it would change your life?

Robin: I think that for the first little while I would just kind of catch up on human stuff that I don't get to do cause I'm making money. Like I would go visit my nieces, and like my cousins, and I would, like, finish reading all of my books, and like catch up on my shows, and take naps and stuff. And I suspect that once I finished the human needs that I had — the connection needs that I had — and once I got tired of, like, entertaining myself in a shallow way with books and movies, I think then what I would do is my curiosity would take over and I would start learning stuff that I wanted to learn about. Like I would maybe learn how to play the piano, or I would, like, write and direct a play, or like, figure out architecture. So I think I would — once I settled my human needs out — I think I would make a lot more art and I think that I would spend time satisfying a lot of educational curiosity.

Della: Okay, thank you so much. What's your name by the way?

Angelica: Angelica.

Della: Angelica, could you just say a little bit about what you do?

Angelica: I'm a medical assistant at Stanford, and I've been there for about a year in the orthopedic department.

Della: So, if you were given, \$1,500 a month, every month from next month to the rest of your life, with no strings attached, how would your life be different?

Angelica: I just moved back with my mom, maybe last Wednesday, so it's a week today. And, I moved back because I found out I have a garnishment, I have to pay back my school loans, I was paying rent somewhere else, I can no longer afford to pay rent on my own, car payments, everything. I had to sell my car, so I'm walking home right now, to my mom's house, So my god, that would help a lot. Yeah.

Della: So it would help with — you would find a place to live, you would maybe have a car payment, but, do you think that you would change your work, or you would continue to work as a medical assistant?

Angelica: I would continue — I'm happy where I am write now. I wish, you know, I earned more, but unfortunately that's how it is, but, I'm happy where I am. I would just continue my life, maybe as it, maybe not even get a car — I like walking. People ask why I walk so much, I walk an hour to work, and an hour home, but I enjoy it. Right now it's just a little hiccup in life but hopefully it'll get better.

[Outro Music]

Della: Thank you to all of our guests and to Face of Man, Bedrockk, Godspeed you Black Emperor, and Harps for the music you heard in our episode today. And make sure you stay tuned for the second episode in this two-part series on universal basic income, where we'll ask the question: could a progressive UBI lead to the end of capitalism? Or would it actually hinder the transition to a post-capitalist world? Stay tuned to find out.

Kathi: On the one hand, it's clearly a reformist proposition, not a revolutionary one. So that, I think if we did institute a guaranteed basic income, it would not spell the end of capitalism. So I don't think of it, in and of itself, as a revolutionary proposition. But I do think of it as opening up a path.

Manda: In our rush to look at capitalism, or how to change business, or how to be sustainable, we haven't stopped back and asked ourselves, as a species, as a culture, as a nation, as a tribe, as a family, as an individual, 'What are we here for? What do I actually want to do? If I didn't have to earn a living, what would I chose to do?' And UBI gives us a step on the way to that, and I think, like the other changes that we're seeing, it's a step that will snowball very fast because if you give people a taste of freedom, they're going to get to like it.

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