

The problem of stability and the ethos-based solution

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Abstract

Can unconditional basic income policies be designed to generate the motivational conditions that make possible their own support? Unconditional redistributive schemes do not take formal precautions to deal with potential motivational problems that may affect their stability. For example, they are designed to give people the freedom to decide whether or not to participate in the job market. However, scholars like Philippe Van Parijs and Simon Birnbaum think that the promotion of an ethos of justice can potentially do the necessary motivational work to secure the stability of unconditional redistributive institutions. Their solution lies in changing people's behavior through an informal motivational mechanism rather than through a formal rule or institution. This paper argues against that 'ethos-based solution.' It presents three reasons to distrust that solution. First, it argues that even broader and more inclusive ethoi of justice can become oppressive and violate people's freedom. Second, it suggests that the formal and informal strategies to generate that ethos may be difficult to implement, monitor, and control. Finally, it argues that the difficulties associated with implementing and developing that ethos of justice may lead us to either preserve an undesirable status quo or to implement suboptimal redistributive policies..

Keywords

Unconditional basic income, Stability, Ethos of justice.