

## Reading #3 — Technology, Culture, and Dignity

---

### Poor Citizens to Receive \$1,320 a Month in Canada's 'No Strings Attached'

#### Basic Income Trial

Natalie Shoemaker

*BigThink.com* / November 15, 2016

<http://bigthink.com/natalie-shoemaker/canada-testing-a-system-where-it-gives-its-poorest-citizens-1320-a-month>

**[1]** Ontario is poised to become a testing ground for basic income in 2017 as part of a pilot program. Hugh Segal is the special advisor to the Canadian province and a former senator. He believes a supplemental income of \$1,320 a month could provide a viable path to poverty abatement—effectively replacing welfare programs and a system he described as “seriously demeaning” in a paper discussing this basic income pilot project.

**[2]** Segal suggests this pilot project would provide real evidence to whether basic income is the solution to poverty many governments have been seeking. It would **answer** many of the burning questions and concerns regarding such a system:

- Can basic income policies provide a more efficient, less intrusive, and less stigmatizing way of delivering income support for those now living in poverty?
- Can those policies also encourage work, relieve financial and time poverty, and reduce economic marginalization?
- Can a basic income reduce cost pressures in other areas of government spending, such as healthcare?
- Can a basic income strengthen the incentive to work, by responsibly helping those who are working but still living below the poverty line?

**[4]** In the United States, welfare programs are the staple of big government—a Republican nightmare. Paul Ryan has indicated he wants to phase-out these entitlement programs, however, he’s also concerned about solving the poverty issue in America. If Ontario’s proposed three-year project provides evidence that basic income could do both, we may have a bi-partisan solution.

**[5]** Segal is a conservative. In his view, welfare programs help alleviate some of the symptoms of poverty, but provide no long-term program to get people out. “Testing a basic income is a humane and useful way to measure how so many of the costs of poverty (in terms of productivity, health, policing, and other community costs, to name only a few) might be diminished, while poverty itself is reduced and work is encouraged,” Segal says in the report. A guaranteed income would provide a floor no one would fall beneath and citizens would receive it regardless of employment status. Conservatives like it because it provides an elegant solution that could replace the welfare state and the left love it because it provides a greater social architecture.

**[6]** However, many question how giving people free money could fix many of our socio-economic issues. But we won’t know if we don’t try—if we don’t do the research to find a solution, which is what Segal suggests. “There cannot be, nor should there be, any guarantees about what results a pilot might generate,” Segal writes. “The objective behind this endeavor should be to generate an evidence-base for policy development, without bias or pre-determined conclusion.”

---

**[7]** This test of basic income won't be the first. Researchers and governments across the globe have started implementing similar tests to see what happens when you give people no-strings-attached cash. Finland, the Dutch city of Utricht, and Kenya all have plans to create programs to test this system. Segal believes a program in Ontario could add to this growing body of research. "This Ontario initiative takes place at a time when other jurisdictions, in Canada and abroad, are working in different ways toward a Basic Income approach to better reduce poverty," he wrote. "The opportunity to learn from and engage with these other initiatives should not be overlooked, nor should approaches being tested elsewhere be necessarily re-tested here."

**[8]** A study in Manitoba, Canada, done back in the 1970s provides us with an idea of what a community receiving basic income would look like. Many believe people would stop working, and become lazy. They would be half right, some people did stop working in Manitoba. But when you look at the data a little closer, we begin to see how poverty starts at an early age and how basic income could help them get out.

**[9]** Allow me to explain: People in the town received a set income of \$9,000 a year (by today's standards) from the government. Evelyn Forget, an economist and professor at the University of Manitoba, who looked over the data from the study says there was a 9% reduction in working hours among two main groups of citizens.

**[10]** Here's the kicker: New mothers were using their additional income to extend their maternity leaves and spend more time with their infants, and teenage boys were using that income to stay in school. "When we interviewed people, we discovered that prior to the experiment, a lot of people from low-income families, a lot of boys in particular, were under a fair amount of family pressure to become self-supporting when they turned 16 and leave school. When Mincome came along, those families decided that they could afford to keep their sons in high school just a little bit longer," Forget told *PRJ* in an interview.

**[11]** Poverty affects all of us in some way (at some point 3 in 5 Americans experience it personally in their lifetime). All of us pay for its upkeep through taxes and can see how it wears down the institutions within our local communities. Basic income could be the solution. We have some data; we need more in order to make the proper call. Ontario's experiment will show what would happen if people between the age of 18 to 65, living below the poverty line, received a monthly income of \$1,320 (\$1,820 if they are disabled). Would they be better able to save and find work?

**[12]** "There's no magic bullet," said Jennefer Laidley of the Income Security Advocacy Centre. "So it's key that government is now exploring various solutions— reforming existing social assistance programs, improving the quality of work, and considering basic income."

---

## **'A sea of despair': White Americans without college degrees are dying younger**

**Matt Pearce**

*LA Times* | March 23, 2017

**[1]** In 2015, a pair of economists received widespread attention for their study showing that since the late 1990s the death rate has been rising for middle-aged white Americans. Now a new analysis by the same Princeton University team has identified which part of that population was driving that trend: people without college degrees. White men and women in every age group between 25 and 64 who did not have college degrees saw

their mortality rates increase between 1998 and 2015. Those with degrees saw their mortality rates decrease. "There are two Americas," said Anne Case, who conducted the research with her husband, Angus Deaton, a Nobel laureate. "There's an America for people who have gotten a college degree, and an America for people who have not gotten a college degree. And if you had a checklist of well-being, the people without college degrees are getting worse and worse, and people with college degrees are doing very well." The analysis, published Thursday in the Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, found that the problem appears to be distinctly American. In Europe, mortality rates for people with low levels of education are falling more rapidly than for those with more education. In every age group the researchers examined, white Americans with a high school education or less now fare worse than blacks as a whole—a reversal of the situation in 1999.

**[2]** Blacks and Latinos have seen steady improvement in mortality rates as whites without college degrees have been going in the other direction as a result of drug overdoses, alcoholism and suicide and a recent halt in a decline in deaths due to heart disease. The nation's opioid abuse epidemic played a major role. But the authors said an underlying culprit is the widespread erosion of institutions that provided stability in American life for much of the 20th century: the manufacturing industry, the church, unions and stable marriage. "A long-term process of decline ... began for those leaving high school and entering the labor force after the early 1970s," and "traditional structures of social and economic support slowly weakened," the authors wrote. "These changes left people with less structure when they came to choose their careers, their religion, and the nature of their family lives," they wrote. "When such choices succeed, they are liberating; when they fail, the individual can only hold him or herself responsible." The result, the authors conclude, is a "recipe for suicide," adding that other risks include alcohol abuse, drug use and overeating.

**[3]** The authors touch on themes of working-class white disenfranchisement that became a major undercurrent in the 2016 presidential campaign and turned "Hillbilly Elegy," a book by J.D. Vance about hope and hopelessness within rural America, into a bestseller. The book focused on Appalachia, but Case says the problem stretches all over America, not just in rural areas, and may explain why voters were interested in political outsiders like Donald Trump on the right and Bernie Sanders on the left. "There's just a sea of despair; there's an enormous amount of pain," she said, describing "wages that don't rise with experience" and "an inability to create and keep stable marriages" among working-class whites. "There's a lot of lack of structure in people's lives that give balance and meaning." Case said the situation may continue to worsen. "People just entering the labor market now without a college degree are getting hammered even more," she said. And older whites won't see comprehensive government relief in retirement, Case said. "Social security is not going to magically wave its wand and make you whole again," Case said. In an earlier version of this article, these quotations from the authors' study were not quoted accurately: "A long-term process of decline ... began for those leaving high school and entering the labor force after the early 1970s," and "traditional structures of social and economic support slowly weakened," the authors wrote.

---

## **Behind Our Anxiety, the Fear of Being Unneeded**

**The Dalai Lama and Arthur C. Brooks**

*NYT* | November 4, 2016

**[1]** In many ways, there has never been a better time to be alive. Violence plagues some corners of the world, and too many still live under the grip of tyrannical regimes. And although all the world's major faiths teach love,

compassion and tolerance, unthinkable violence is being perpetrated in the name of religion. And yet, fewer among us are poor, fewer are hungry, fewer children are dying, and more men and women can read than ever before. In many countries, recognition of women's and minority rights is now the norm. There is still much work to do, of course, but there is hope and there is progress.

**[2]** How strange, then, to see such anger and great discontent in some of the world's richest nations. In the United States, Britain and across the European Continent, people are convulsed with political frustration and anxiety about the future. Refugees and migrants clamor for the chance to live in these safe, prosperous countries, but those who already live in those promised lands report great uneasiness about their own futures that seems to border on hopelessness. Why? A small hint comes from interesting research about how people thrive. In one shocking experiment, researchers found that senior citizens who didn't feel useful to others were nearly three times as likely to die prematurely as those who did feel useful. This speaks to a broader human truth: We all need to be needed.

**[3]** Being "needed" does not entail selfish pride or unhealthy attachment to the worldly esteem of others. Rather, it consists of a natural human hunger to serve our fellow men and women. As the 13th-century Buddhist sages taught, "If one lights a fire for others, it will also brighten one's own way." Virtually all the world's major religions teach that diligent work in the service of others is our highest nature and thus lies at the center of a happy life. Scientific surveys and studies confirm shared tenets of our faiths. Americans who prioritize doing good for others are almost twice as likely to say they are very happy about their lives. In Germany, people who seek to serve society are five times likelier to say they are very happy than those who do not view service as important. Selflessness and joy are intertwined. The more we are one with the rest of humanity, the better we feel.

**[4]** This helps explain why pain and indignation are sweeping through prosperous countries. The problem is not a lack of material riches. It is the growing number of people who feel they are no longer useful or needed, no longer one with their societies. In America today, compared with 50 years ago, three times as many working-age men are outside the work force. This pattern is occurring throughout the developed world—and the consequences are not merely economic. Feeling superfluous is a blow to the human spirit. It leads to social isolation and emotional pain, and creates the conditions for negative emotions to take root.

**[5]** What can we do to help? The first answer is not systematic. It is personal. Everyone has something valuable to share. We should start each day by consciously asking ourselves, "What can I do today to appreciate the gifts that others offer me?" We need to make sure that global brotherhood and oneness with others are not just abstract ideas that we profess, but personal commitments that we mindfully put into practice. Each of us has the responsibility to make this a habit. But those in positions of responsibility have a special opportunity to expand inclusion and build societies that truly need everyone. Leaders need to recognize that a compassionate society must create a wealth of opportunities for meaningful work, so that everyone who is capable of contributing can do so. A compassionate society must provide children with education and training that enriches their lives, both with greater ethical understanding and with practical skills that can lead to economic security and inner peace. A compassionate society must protect the vulnerable while ensuring that these policies do not trap people in misery and dependence.

**[6]** Building such a society is no easy task. No ideology or political party holds all the answers. Misguided thinking

---

from all sides contributes to social exclusion, so overcoming it will take innovative solutions from all sides. Indeed, what unites the two of us in friendship and collaboration is not shared politics or the same religion. It is something simpler: a shared belief in compassion, in human dignity, in the intrinsic usefulness of every person to contribute positively for a better and more meaningful world. The problems we face cut across conventional categories; so must our dialogue, and our friendships. Many are confused and frightened to see anger and frustration sweeping like wildfire across societies that enjoy historic safety and prosperity. But their refusal to be content with physical and material security actually reveals something beautiful: a universal human hunger to be needed. Let us work together to build a society that feeds this hunger.

---

## **Universal Basic Income Won't Make America Great Again, Either**

**Michael R. Strain**

*Washington Post* | April 4, 2016

**[1]** Donald Trump— a man who is cozy with white supremacists, violence, religious bigotry and misogyny— is the likely presidential nominee of Lincoln's party. One quite minor consequence of this ongoing disaster is that I find it hard to say much at all about U.S. public affairs other than to make the simple observation that, well, Trump is an ongoing disaster. So in searching for something to write about with more layers than Trump, I looked abroad, to Finland of all places. And to Canada, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland. All of these countries, to one degree or another, are exploring **Universal Basic Income**.

**[2]** Imagine eliminating the entire welfare state— no more food stamps, cash and housing assistance, payments to the disabled, and all of the rest— and replacing it with a simple, elegant, single program: Every American gets a check just for being a citizen. All Americans would be given enough money to ensure that everyone can afford the basics necessary to live above the poverty line.

**[3]** This program— universal basic income (UBI)— promises great relief to its beneficiaries. No longer are the poor subject to the whims, requirements and irritations of government bureaucracy. Under UBI, the welfare state is eliminated; the bureaucracy, gone. Gone, too, is the stigma associated with drawing benefits— if everyone wears the UBI scarlet letter, then no one does. Eliminated are the "poverty traps" associated with the "phase outs" of many of today's safety net programs; UBI never phases out, so an extra dollar of work does not result in a loss of safety-net benefits. In a world with UBI, citizens no longer need to go to the government when the circumstances of their lives change: when they lose jobs, become disabled or see their incomes fall below a certain level.

**[4]** Of course, there are many ways to implement a UBI program, with many bells and whistles that can and cannot be included. But the basic structure asks much from citizens by providing a base of economic security on which liberty must be properly practiced. Simply put, if you choose to spend your UBI check on drugs and alcohol and subsequently find yourself hungry and homeless, the government won't help you. For UBI advocates, this is a *feature*, not a bug: Under UBI, citizens are responsible for their own choices. Even if those choices are bad, they remain their choices. Liberty is elevated; paternalism is dealt a devastating blow.

**[5]** But perhaps liberty is elevated a bit too much? At the risk of sounding unfashionable, one reason that I can't support UBI— despite its many attractive and seductive features— is that we need a little paternalism. It is right

---

and just that we have a social safety net— in a nation as wealthy as ours, no one should be able to fall too far. But UBI money doesn't come from the Money Tree, and that reality needs to be respected. If we take money from John to give to Matthew, who would starve without it, then we owe it to John to make sure that his money is appropriately spent on Matthew's food and shelter, not on Matthew's alcohol and gambling. And surely there are a lot of Matthews out there who, if given the chance, would spend John's money on alcohol and gambling. In addition, we can be confident that under UBI, at least some people will be taken advantage of, losing their benefit money. The children of recipients who spend their UBI unwisely also stand to lose quite a bit, and society needs to keep those children at the forefront of mind when evaluating safety-net programs.

**[6]** In short, the wisdom of in-kind benefits would be made readily apparent if we adopted UBI. Although removing stigma and the need to ask the government for help are appealing, they also result in outcomes of questionable morality. My wife is a very healthy woman. My neighbor has a serious physical disability. Should both receive the same amount of support from the government? Should a healthy man in his 20s and a blind man in his 40s be treated equally by the social safety net? I don't think so. But under the logic of UBI, they would be.

**[7]** Or would they? Another issue with UBI is its lack of realism. If UBI were introduced here, it wouldn't take long for a politician to point out that, say, blind people need more support than those without physical disabilities. And then workers who are disabled on the job deserve extra support over and above their base-line UBI benefit. And then it wouldn't take very long for UBI to transform into something that looks very much like the system we have today. Why, then, change in the first place?

**[8]** Then, of course, there is work. UBI would reduce work by reducing the need to work. If you think work is good, as I do, then this is a bad outcome.

**[9]** A job provides much more than a paycheck. At a basic level, work occupies our time, which can be quite good in and of itself. (Do you want to live in a world filled with young men who don't need to work?) Perhaps more significantly, working liberates us from our passions by directing them to the end of social improvement, creating a society characterized by mutual contribution, mutual dependence and mutual obligation. In a UBI world, those who choose to work will support those who choose not to— not those who can't work, but those who won't. This really would be a world of makers and takers.

**[10]** That's not a world I want to live in.