

Technologies, culture, work, basic income and maximum income

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Abstract Radical changes of our cultural values in the near future are inevitable, since the current culture is ecologically unsustainable. The present proposal, radical as it may seem to some, is accordingly offered as worthy of consideration. The main section of this article is on a proposed scheme, named Asset and Income Limits, for instituting maxima to the legitimate incomes and assets of individuals. This scheme involves every individual being associated with two bank accounts, an asset account (their own property) and a holding account (held in escrow). Other parts of the advocated change in economic landscape are a radically different understanding of the concept of work and the introduction of a basic income. The roles of technology and culture, in creating both the opportunities and the obstacles to a transformation of society, are discussed. Non-monetary, non-convertible rewards for exceptional contributions to society are described. The scheme enhances freedom, being neutral in relation to many other value systems, such as the secular/sacred spectrum. The qualitative versus quantitative dichotomy is addressed, and it is concluded that the most that can be said of a just and sustainable society that has yet to be created is that the maximum income should be *no more than* one order of magnitude greater than the basic income, that is ~10 times at the most. Incentives for profitable employment would still be sufficient, and paying the basic income out of taxes on sales and/or non-basic income would be feasible.

Keywords Maximum income · Basic income · Sustainability · Work · Technology · Culture

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1 Introduction

The coming period must bring order to our minds, our production, our feeling, our economic and social development. It has to bridge the gap that, since the onset of mechanization, has split our modes of thinking from our modes of feeling.

Giedion 1948 p v

Sixty-four years since Sigfried Giedion wrote these words, the disorder and fragmentation of our culture is as problematic as ever (Barber 2008; Battersby et al. 2012; Beddington 2009; Brown 2002; Collins 2012; Cottey no date; Daly no date; de Angelis 2007; Douthwaite 1999; Duchrow and Hinkelammert 2004; Forbes no date; Kempf 2008; Kortzen 2001; Murphy 2011; Pizzigati 2004; Rifkin 2000; Robertson 2012). The present article aims to contribute to finding the needed order and coherence. Its core section is on Maximum income. Two other sections, on Work and on Basic income, go with it to make an economic package. If the recommendations (or something like them) became the norm, they would be part of the foundation of an orderly and coherent culture. This requires a spurt of cultural evolution, something which is not as far-fetched as conventional thinkers imagine. For the planet's ecology is already stressed and mighty changes are in train. This rapid evolution *may* take the form of decay—not of this or that empire, as happened frequently in the past, but of human civilisation globally. It is nevertheless important to hold onto hope, for without hope, we will not even attempt the intellectual and practical work needed to avoid such a bad outcome. The task is nothing less than a change of human values, from desires to dominate other humans, life forms and inorganic materials on the earth, to desires to cohabit this planet. The recent reaction against consumerism—see