

Economic Freedom and Universal Basic Income: Compatible or Contradictory?



PRESENTER:

Elena Kosmas

BACKGROUND:

“Freedom” is everywhere in political talk — but what does it really mean when you’re struggling to make ends meet?

In today’s economy, millions are technically “free”, but can’t afford to:

- Leave exploitative jobs
- Take creative or personal risks
- Or simply rest

This project asks:

Can anyone be truly free without economic security?

- It examines how different thinkers redefine the meaning of freedom.

UBI becomes the battleground where these definitions collide:

- Is it a dangerous handout?
- Or a step toward meaningful autonomy?

Why it matters:

UBI isn’t just about income—it’s about what **freedom** means in the 21st century.

METHODS

1. Close reading of key scholarly and historical texts on economic freedom and basic income.
2. Comparative analysis of philosophical definitions of “freedom” across ideological traditions.
3. Interpretation of arguments for and against redistribution through the lenses of justice, autonomy, and state power.
4. Thematic synthesis of competing visions of what it means to be “free” in an economic system.

Does **basic income** harm economic freedom? Or is it the **key** to it?



Basic income might look like an economic free ride — but for some, it’s the only way freedom becomes real. In his 1958 lecture *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Isaiah Berlin drew a distinction between negative and positive liberty — freedom from interference versus the power to act. Classical liberals say basic income breeds dependency, but left-libertarians challenge that idea by arguing that freedom means having the power to say “no” to exploitative work.

“A society that puts equality before freedom will get neither. A society that puts freedom before equality will get a high degree of both.”

— **Milton Friedman**



“A defensible liberal theory of justice, that is, one that is truly committed to an equal concern for all and to nondiscrimination among conceptions of the good life, does justify, under appropriate factual conditions, a substantial unconditional basic income.”

— **Philippe Van Parijs**

SCAN FOR REFERENCES

