

Tribute to Brian Barry (1936-2009)

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Brian Barry died in London on the 10th of March 2009 at the age of 73. He was one of Britain's most prominent political philosophers, with a teaching career that took him to the Universities of Essex, Oxford, British Columbia and Chicago, the European University Institute, the London School of Economics and Columbia University. He also became, in the last two decades of his life, one of the most sophisticated and forceful advocates of a universal basic income.

In September 1989, Brian Barry accepted an invitation to attend a conference on the ethical foundations of basic income at the University of Louvain. His assignment was to comment on John Baker's "egalitarian case for basic income" and his conclusion at the time was unequivocally expressed in the title of his chapter in the collective volume that grew out of the conference: "Equality yes, basic income no" (Barry 1992). A couple of years later, however, he delivered a fiery plea in favour of basic income to a neo-liberal audience at the University of Kiel (Barry 1994). From then on, he proved to have become a very consistent, articulate and unusually vigorous advocate of the idea (1996, 1997, 2000). In 2006, in his characteristically despondent style, he even concluded his last seminar at Columbia University by stating that only two important things happened in political philosophy in the course of his career: the publication of Rawls's *Theory of Justice* and the debate on basic income.

Brian Barry was not exactly an easy person nor a charitable critic. Some of his book reviews will be remembered as among the least forgiving in the history of political philosophy. But he was also an incredibly sharp thinker who alerted the philosophical profession to many emerging big and difficult issues, such as intergenerational justice or global justice, long before they became commonplace. Moreover, as forcefully expressed in his last book (Barry 2005), he was one of those philosophers who believe that their job does not reduce to exegetical quibbles and analytical hair splitting, but that they have a role to play in making our world more just.

Brian Barry was a great political philosopher, an invaluable allied on several fronts, someone for whom I have had, ever since I had the privilege of having him as my first Oxford supervisor in 1974, great admiration and great affection.

The basic income movement will miss him greatly, but it will keep benefiting from the stunning strength of his thinking and of his support.

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