In view of the impossibility of doing even remote justice to six such diverse and diverse papers in the short time remaining, my one hope was to find some common threads among them on which to focus attention. The one thing that seemed to stand out was that this appears to be open season on the poor statistically as well as programmatically. The approach in the Smeeding paper on imputing in-kind income, no matter how it is done, would of course virtually wipe out poverty, as we know it, statistically. Citro-Manser, in their zeal to reconstruc families, would even resurrect the dead if they could thereby push a family above the poverty limit. Both Budd-Yuscavage and Whiteman reject the notion that a farm or nonfarm proprietor could possibly be losing money. In the first instance, they would have the IRS audit farmers into the black. For the nonfarm group, the sorry shape of their businesses can be implicitly attributed to all of the money they are drawing out on the side. Even many of the poor themselves, according to Goodreau, Ochinsky, and Vaughan, deny their status by refusing to report receipt of AFDC benefits. Only Mollie Choransky continues to fight the good battle but I sense that even her resolve is diminishing to some extent.

Budd-Yuscavage paper
In the remaining time, I will attempt a few comments on as many of the papers as possible. Whether or not the painstaking and ingenious efforts in the Budd-Yuscavage paper to reconcile the CPS and IRS farm income series really paid off, one must admire the courage of the authors for attempting so prodigious a task. In one year, for example, one of the series was only one-tenth the size of the other. One has to be a bit skeptical, however, of adjustments of the magnitude needed to close the gap between the series. The largest--and the one on which the whole exercise hinges--was an upward adjustment of 40 percent in IRS statistics on income (SOI) estimates to correct for underreporting revealed in tax audits. I am not quarreling with the size of the adjustment (it could, in fact, be too small) but rather to the fact that they did not feel a similar adjustment for underreporting was appropriate for the CPS series, although the latter estimates are also markedly below those produced for the National Income Accounts. They appeared to believe that the two series are essentially independent. However, CPS interviewers are instructed to encourage respondents to refer to records, such as those involved in tax returns. Even if this is not highly successful, the annual CPS income inquiry comes at the same time that most people are preparing their tax returns, so that it seems quite likely that some of the same factors would influence both reports. Another point they make later in the paper also seems to contradict the notion of independence of the series. The authors do not accept the contention that one of the reasons for the higher CPS estimates is that they are sometimes reported in gross rather than net terms, at least insofar as depreciation and other fixed expenses are concerned. However, it is difficult to accept the idea that CPS respondents give offhand answers (without consulting records) or even report typical or average rather than actual income (as the authors believe) and still take account of so esoteric an item as depreciation, which one would think would only come up when preparing something as detailed as a tax return.

On the whole, I think the authors have undertaken a rather thankless and perhaps impossible task. We might look for even greater heroes if they take on--as they threaten to do--the even more divergent Department of Agriculture series.

Smeeding paper
In the Smeeding paper, an effort is also made to reconcile two different approaches, which raises about as many questions as it answers. I thought the paper provided a very useful description of the two main approaches for imputing in-kind income--the Pure Microsimulation method and the so-called Survey method--and of some of their implications. Although the author did not come down clearly in favor of one or the other, one might almost intuitively favor the survey method, whereby identification of recipients of in-kind income is made through questioning of survey respondents and only the monetary value of such receipts is imputed. This would appear to perpetrate the least violence to internal relationships within the micro-units and introduce the least noise in the case of cross-tabulations and multivariate analysis.

Of course, in order to make the most effective use of the Survey approach, a quantum improvement in survey reporting of recipiency would be necessary. I understand the ISDP-SIPP experimental work has made important strides in this direction. If this progress continues--as we have reason to hope--the matter of imputation of recipiency would become a minor or nonexistent issue.

Aside from mention of the fact that it is a difficult matter, the author intentionally omits a discussion of the valuation of in-kind benefits. Although it is recognized that the paper could not possibly cover all aspects of the problem, one could gain the impression--which I'm sure was not intended--that valuation is considered a somewhat secondary issue. For reasons given above, as recipiency reporting is improved, valuation could of course become the whole crux of the matter. I think it would have been useful for the author to have pointed this out, to have mentioned briefly the main problem areas, and to have cited references containing a thorough discussion of these.

Citro-Manser paper
This paper attempted to cover a wide range
one key aspect which was intentionally omitted was the issue of feasibility and reliability of the data. This matter, of course, could (and undoubtedly will) be the subject of many future papers, but I felt its omission with hardly any mention could imply (as I noted for a parallel issue in the previous paper) that it was regarded as of somewhat secondary importance or could be dealt with as a separable problem. However, it is not really possible to discuss concepts (or methodology) without reference to the issue of feasibility or reliability. No matter how ideal a set of concepts may be theoretically, it is obviously of little value if not reasonably measurable in a survey setting. I think it would have been useful for the authors to have pointed this out and perhaps to have identified those conceptual issues which would be most troublesome from this standpoint.

On a more specific point, I think the authors may have been a little hard on the CPS for its inability to reconstruct families, as though this were its major limitation. I think most analysts will agree that nonresponse and underreporting are the crucial problems in the CPS income data and that the issue of family composition could implicitly (as I noted in the previous paper) that was regarded as of somewhat secondary importance or could be dealt with as a separable problem. However, it is not really possible to discuss concepts (or methodology) without reference to the issue of feasibility or reliability. No matter how ideal a set of concepts may be theoretically, it is obviously of little value if not reasonably measurable in a survey setting. I think it would have been useful for the authors to have pointed this out and perhaps to have identified those conceptual issues which would be most troublesome from this standpoint.

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