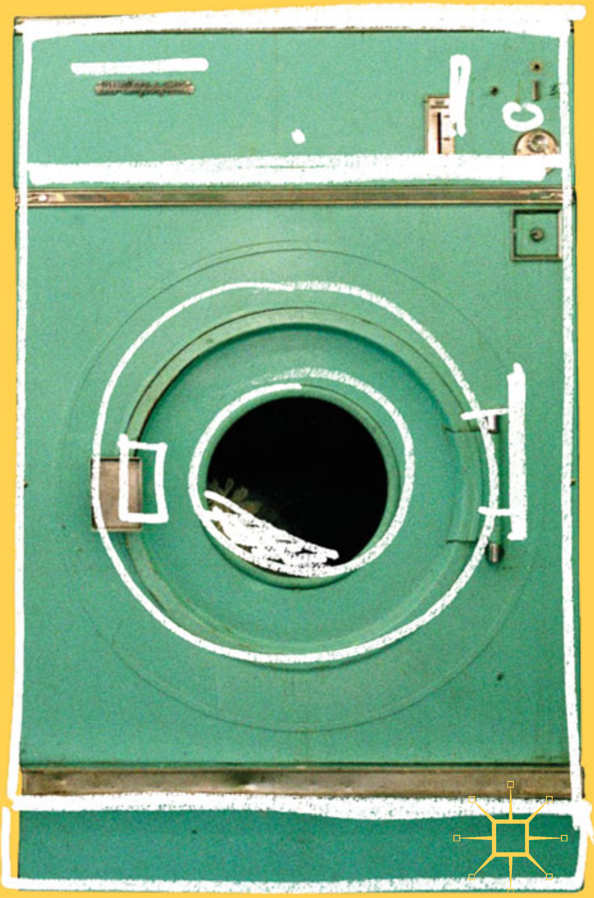
THE POLITICS OF DEPENDENCE

Economic Parasites and Vulnerable Lives

PATRICK J. L. COCKBURN



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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-78709-1 ISBN 978-3-319-78908-8 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018938324

Parts of Chapter 3 originally appeared in "Street Papers, Work and Begging: 'Experimenting' at the Margins of Economic Legitimacy," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 7(2) (2014): 145–160. www.tandfonline.com/; http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2013.837630
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Cover credit: Hannah Stouffer/Getty Images

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For Nia and Ffion.
May you be as beautiful as adults as you are now.

Preface

This book is an attack on the idea of 'the self-made man.' The sense of independence and merit concentrated in that idea quickly dilutes once we actually take the trouble to look at our economic practices. But as societies we often fail to do this. Why? Unfortunately, the contrast between independence and dependence is a very useful political weapon. I wrote this book at a time when it was once again becoming normal and acceptable in public political discourse to openly scapegoat social groups and suggest that their removal would bring justice and prosperity. In June 2016, voters in the UK voted to leave the European Union after months of political campaigning stigmatising European nationals in the UK, and resulting in increased violence against immigrants and pro-EU politicians. In November 2016, Donald Trump was elected President of the USA on a platform that promised to build a wall between the USA and Mexico in order to stop illegal immigration. In Germany, the anti-migrant far-right political party, Alternative für Deutschland, made significant advances in the September 2017 federal elections. In Denmark, where I am writing this book, The Danish People's Party is so popular (21% of the vote in 2015) that other major parties scramble to find policies that are equally hostile to refugees—housing them in tents in isolated areas made the 'Integration Minister' the most popular minister in government for many months. This is not a book about national politics, immigration, racism, religion or xenophobia; it is a book about economic dependence. But charges of illegitimate economic dependence are very often part of the fuel on which the politics of hate burns.

Part of my argument is that we need to dilute that fuel with a bit of realism about economic dependence: economic dependence is much more widespread and has many more dimensions than harsh rhetoric about social parasites would lead us to believe. Parasitism is a feature of the lives of the many, not the few.

In the book, I argue that the ideological association of participation in markets with economic independence has cast a shadow across a whole range of practices that become invisible or suspect, from domestic work to street paper vending. To counter this crude view of economic independence, I argue that our most taken-for-granted economic practices and institutions, such a property, money and inheritance, do not free us from dependence, but simply structure our economic dependencies in ways that we have forgotten about. In the light of the rise of right-wing populism noted above, I have to admit that the dangers of market-focussed political ideology (often glossed as 'neoliberalism') that I focus on in this book may have been eclipsed by the dangers of the thinly veiled racism of contemporary right-wing populism. Nonetheless, I believe that attacking the sense of independence implied in the idea of the self-made man is not so different from attacking the sense of independence implied in the idea of self-made nations. Thinking seriously about economic dependence is, I hope, a way to re-politicise our economic practices and institutions without reaching for the scapegoats provided by the politics of hate.

If I have managed to think seriously about economic dependence in this book, it is thanks to the help of a number of people and institutions. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the financial support of The Carlsberg Foundation and the Danish Council for Independent Research, both of which supported periods of research that went into the writing of this book. I would also like to thank those who read and commented on parts of the manuscript. My thanks to Andrew Sayer, Chris Pierson, Nicholas Blomley, Casper Andersen, Christian Olaf Christiansen, Mikkel Thorup, David Cockburn, Maureen Meehan Cockburn, Nigel Pleasants, Niklas Tørring, Raffaele Rodogno and Uffe Juul Jensen. I would also like to thank the editorial staff at Palgrave Macmillan for their help with preparing the manuscript.

Aarhus, Denmark Patrick J. L. Cockburn

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 1933, the British author George Orwell wrote the following comment on begging:

> People seem to feel that there is some essential difference between beggars and ordinary "working" men. They are a race apart – outcasts, like criminals and prostitutes. Working men "work," beggars do not "work"; they are parasites, worthless in their very nature. It is taken for granted that a beggar does not "earn" his living, as a bricklayer or a literary critic "earns" his. He is a mere social excrescence, tolerated because we live in a humane age, but essentially despicable.
>
> Yet if one looks closely one sees that there is no *essential* difference between a beggar's livelihood and that of numberless respectable people. Beggars do not work, it is said; but, then, what is *work*? A navvy works by swinging a pick. An accountant works by adding up figures. A beggar works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting varicose veins, chronic bronchitis, etc. It is a trade like any other; quite useless, of course – but, then, many reputable trades are quite useless.[1]

Apart from being quite funny, Orwell's comment on begging is also disorientating: do we really have so little reason to think of some activities as 'real work' and others as 'parasitic'? Is the difference between 'productive' activities and 'unproductive' ones really so arbitrary? Are there really so many 'reputable trades' that are 'quite useless'? The power of Orwell's observation comes from a stubborn empiricism: he '*looks closely*' at the

P. J. L. Cockburn, *The Politics of Dependence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8_1

world of people doing things and can't find the source of our normal value-laden distinctions there. We begin to ask: where do these distinctions come from then, if they are not somehow to be found in the activities themselves?

These are questions that probably produce different reactions in different people. On the one hand, we might be tempted to brush Orwell's comments aside: while some respectable trades are quite useless (bonus-soaked CEOs?), these are exceptional; most work is useful (or value-producing) in a way that begging is not. We even have a science that helps us to work out what is productive and what isn't: it is called 'economics.' On the other hand, we might hop on board the social constructivist train and ride to the end station: yes! All normative distinctions are more or less arbitrary products of power struggles and cultural prejudice so let's stop believing in the sense of any of them. A third option, which this book will pursue, is to get onto the social constructivist train a bit less enthusiastically—but get on nonetheless—and to try to take seriously the *reasons* that people have for going to the effort of making these distinctions at all. The distinction that this book is concerned with is that between 'dependence' and 'independence.' Why does dependence matter to people? What do they mean by it? And how should we speak about it?

Every political and theoretical account of what a just society and economy would look like is built upon assumptions about which social actors are dependent upon which others, and which forms of dependence are legitimate and which are not. These assumptions can be strikingly different from one another and can support radically different conclusions about what laws, policies and practices provide fair and efficient ways to organise the production and distribution of society's resources. For this reason, it is important to ask why and how people go about making distinctions that condemn others as 'dependent,' as 'unproductive,' or even 'parasitic.' What view of economic and political relationships do these distinctions rest on? And do different starting points for describing economic institutions, practices and relationships lead us towards different views of who is problematically 'dependent' on who?

The answer to this last question is quite simply 'yes.' The claim that *welfare recipients* suffer from a kind of immoral dependency on the state (the view of the conservative Right) only makes sense against a background picture of economic life that makes the labour market look fair, makes recipients look lazy and makes other forms of dependence (e.g. on family) seem less problematic, or indeed, makes them invisible.

On the other hand, the claim that *financial capitalists* are a kind of economic parasite (the view of many on the radical Left) rests on the idea that property rights in capital goods are unjust, that the task of allocating capital should not be counted as productive work, and that there is a distinction between the 'real' economy of goods and services and the 'merely' financial economy of credit and rent. When the welfare state or contemporary capitalism (or both) is under attack in political debate, it is often stereotyped figures like these that encapsulate and summarise the criticisms directed at a wider system of laws, institutions and practices.

Where people are accusing one another of being 'parasites,' it is clear that economic dependence has become synonymous with immorality and injustice. Those who are dependent are to blame. But economic dependence is a topic that also raises a very different set of political and moral issues: not about parasitism, but about *vulnerability*. To be dependent is also to be vulnerable to the withdrawal of support, and this kind of vulnerability is something that particular social groups have suffered much more than others. Feminists criticising the patriarchal structures of past and present societies have often seen dependence as a condition forced onto women by the institutions and informal power structures of these societies. They have also pointed out that some people are inevitably dependent upon others (e.g. children on adults) in ways that have important consequences for the social division of labour. Dependence, then, is a social issue that puts both vulnerability and parasitism on the agenda of political debate and theory. These two normative poles run through the debates that this book examines and tries to push forward.

Where, then, do we find these debates about dependence? The present book is primarily focussed on the politics and political theory that surrounds the institutions of modern capitalist welfare states. This means that the public and theoretical debates that it looks at have mostly taken place in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and often continue in the present. They are debates about specific social institutions (or sets of institutions), like the welfare state, and about the concepts that we use to understand economic life: like 'productivity' and 'unearned income.' They are thus primarily about *economic* dependence in modern capitalist welfare states. But worries about dependence have a long intellectual history stretching back much further. Civic republican political theorists have for centuries argued that we need a sufficient degree of (economic) independence from others in order to be responsible political actors, and property qualifications for suffrage have often been justified with the claim. But even those who have wealth are faced with another question about dependence—where did that wealth come from? Criticism of some ways of making money is almost as old as history itself,[2] and more specific worries about 'unproductive' activities have been a key theme in modern political economy. The eighteenth-century French school of economic thinkers known as the Physiocrats saw all sectors of the economy except agricultural production as essentially 'sterile' and incapable of generating real value. And in the book so often pointed to as the founding work of modern economics, *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith (surely aware of the comic effect of the claim) lumps together 'churchmen, lawyers, physicians, [and] men of letters of all kinds' with 'players, buffoons, musicians, opera-singers and opera-dancers,' all of whom are guilty (together with the military) of living off 'other men's labour.'[3]

Smith's arguments certainly had a political purpose (to attack the landed interest and the laws that restricted what he saw as the 'natural' operation of markets), but it has been the socialist tradition of political and economic thought that really built a whole vision of society on the division between productive and unproductive people. For example, in just a few words Rosa Luxemburg used the imagery of 'the parasite' to not only condemn a whole economic system (capitalism), but also specifically attack one of the social institutions that structure how that system works (the patriarchal family):

> Aside from the few who have jobs or professions, the women of the bourgeoisie do not take part in social production. They are nothing but co-consumers of the surplus value their men extort from the proletariat. They are parasites of the parasites of the social body.[4]

The figure of the parasite here does more than simply condemn these social actors; it implies a whole way of understanding the economy in which class, patriarchy and exploitation are key ideas. Luxemburg gives a brutally clear answer to the question: who could this society and economy *do without?*

'The women of the bourgeoisie' may have been taken off the parasites blacklist since 1912, but the attack on dependence—in criticisms of 'unproductive' work or 'social parasites'—has historically taken many forms. For example, the 'parasite' was a central metaphor of the Nazi propaganda of the Third Reich, used to justify the scapegoating and eventual genocide of the European Jews.[5] Given these associations, it is unsurprising that 'parasites' rhetoric doesn't appear a great deal in the public arena of democratic politics today. Political leaders do, however, certainly still use the milder language of 'dependence' to characterise the lives of some members of society. This doesn't make their arguments fascist or murderous, but the point is still to cast suspicion on a section of society and a way of living. For example, when (then) Prime Minister David Cameron defended his Welfare Reform Bill in the UK parliament in 2011, his imagery conjured up a whole section of society living in a parallel world, certainly not a productive world, filled with flashing lights and fog:

> The benefit system has created a benefit culture. It doesn't just allow people to act irresponsibly, but often actively encourages them to do so.
>
> Sometimes they deliberately follow the signals that are sent out.
>
> Other times, they hazily follow them, trapped in a fog of dependency.[6]

Such imagery is not unique to Cameron. Tony Blair articulated similar ideas as Prime Minister and Leader of the (UK) Labour Party, and successive US presidents, from Bill Clinton to Donald Trump, have voiced their concerns about 'welfare dependency.'[7] Even the chief architect of the US welfare system, F. D. Roosevelt, thought that dependence on welfare support was 'destructive to the national fiber.'[8] Cameron's point, when he sketches his view of 'dependency culture' as a kind of fog, is clearly that most of us are *not* trapped in such a fog.

In this book, I aim both to make sense of such claims and to undermine their appeal and simplicity by showing how a serious concern with dependence would not lead us to such simple conclusions. To give an idea of my critical strategy, let me suggest what I think is an appropriate response to Cameron's rhetoric. We might try to insist that there is no such thing as a 'benefits culture,' and that the fog Cameron refers to has never existed. I think that a more powerful response would take the opposite line of attack and ask: which of us is *not* economically dependent? Isn't reliance on intergenerational transfers of wealth also a form of dependence that the conservative Right would rather not talk a great deal about? Perhaps just not such a 'foggy' form of dependence? In line with this kind of response, I will argue throughout the book that the politics of dependence is not really about whether we accept dependence or not as a society, but about which *forms* we accept and how we structure these forms of dependence through our social and economic institutions.

Of course Smith's unproductive 'buffoons,' Luxemburg's 'parasites of the parasites' and Cameron's disoriented welfare dependents belong to arguments that were developed in dramatically different socio-economic contexts, and they have very different political purposes. But they are certainly all worries about dependence in some form. They illustrate, from very different times and places, that dependence is a topic that can be used to build bridges between *descriptions* of economic practices and *normative judgements* about people in society. Marking the divide between dependence and independence is a way of separating the grey tangle of social life into the black and white of good and bad, just and unjust, legitimate and illegitimate.

In cutting a path across a number of debates about dependence, and developing the political theory of economic dependence, this book pursues three main goals.

The first (mostly in Part I) is to observe how some people get labelled as economically dependent in a way that marks them off from the rest of society. What is involved here is either the stigmatisation of a social role or the convenient 'forgetting' of unpaid work, or both at once. In these ways, some economic roles and practices *disappear*, appear *empty* or even appear *parasitical*, in the theories and rhetoric generated in our societies about economic life. In order to understand how this works, my basic question is: where does a description of economic relations have to start, and what does it have to assume, in order to represent the world as divided into dependent and independent people? The point here will be to show that *normative* argumentation about economic life usually, without making this explicit, draws on what might be called a 'socio-economic ontology': a basic view of social and economic relationships into which certain normative assumptions are built from the very beginning, and within which some aspects of the world are highlighted and others are quietly sidelined.

Second (mostly in Part II), the book aims to use dependence as a thematic starting point for describing the politics surrounding key social institutions that structure economic and political relationships. The book examines critiques and justifications of the welfare state, of private property, of money and of inheritance. I will suggest that struggles over these ideas, and the institutions that embody them in particular societies, can often be usefully analysed as struggles over the social organisation of *vulnerability*. We only begin to look at these political debates in this light when we take issues of dependence as our starting point: how do these social and economic institutions both *address* and *generate* various forms of dependence? It is a constant problem in both public debate and political theory that our arguments tend to look at social institutions from the perspective of those who benefit most from them: to have a job in the formal economy, to have property and to have money have become synonymous with being independent; but don't labour markets, property and money also *generate* the dependence of those who look at them from the 'outside'?

The chapters of the book shift back and forth between the negative concern with parasitism and the positive concern with vulnerability. However, my point throughout the book will be that these two sides of dependence cannot be cleanly prised apart from one another. Rather, these are the two views of dependence that confront one another in political and moral arguments: charges of parasitism are met with reminders of vulnerability; claims to vulnerability are met with accusations of parasitism. The sections of the book are simply weighted differently in their focus on either the charge or the response.

The third aim in what follows, throughout the book, will be to take sides in the political and theoretical debates that I analyse, and argue that some views of dependence take the topic more seriously than others. Against those who either condemn dependence or celebrate it, I argue that dependence as such is simply a fact of all societies: the important political questions are about what forms of dependence exist and how we structure dependency relations through our social—and primarily our economic—institutions. The central argument of the book is that only by greatly widening our view of economic dependence, and seeing just how many forms this can take, can we begin to clearly distinguish between the forms that we want to live with and the forms that we don't. The aim of the various chapters is to revive a sense of the *choices* that we face concerning some of our basic economic institutions if we take the topic of dependence seriously. Sometimes this means showing what a commentator or debate has *left out* of view by framing problems of economic dependence too narrowly, and how this omission has distorted the normative reasoning that rests on the basic social description.

Developing the political theory of economic dependence goes against the grain of most political theorising about economic justice today. For one thing, both economic science and political philosophy have had a tendency to bypass actual social practices and institutions by asking questions about the relationship between rational individuals and a single abstract organisational structure: for economics, this structure is *the market*; for political theory, it is *the political community*. Where political philosophers have been interested in an economic institution, it has tended also to be the market and its relation to the political community.[9] What we lose here, in terms of our view of economic practice, is the fact that issues of economic justice engage a huge range of social relationships and institutions at once: justice in the allocation of property is connected to justice in the labour market, which is connected to justice in the home, which is connected to justice in gender relations, which is connected to justice in the welfare state, which is connected to intergenerational justice, and so on and on in enormously complex webs of political problems. Questions about dependence force us to think *laterally*, across what are often treated as separate spheres of social life. A focus on dependence can't give us an overview of all of this complexity at once, but it can make links that we would otherwise overlook. In Chapter 2, for example, we'll see how feminist accounts of dependence link the issue of welfare dependency to the dependency of women on men in a patriarchal society and to the dependency of children upon mothers.

Another reason that the focus on dependence might seem at odds with much contemporary political theory is that the ideal of 'independence' guides so much normative thought about economic justice: for most Marxists, the question is how workers will gain their independence from the shackles of a capitalist economy; for libertarians, the question is how individuals can protect their independence against intrusive state institutions; for Rawlsian liberals, such as those who advocate 'property-owning democracy' a key question is how to make individuals independent enough of social pressures that they can enjoy the 'fair value' of their political liberties.[10] This focus on securing *independence* of some kind is understandable: it seems hopeful. Compared to it, the question of how to *organise our dependencies* may seem mildly depressing and certainly lacking in revolutionary fervour. However, I will argue that the role of 'independence' in our moral vocabulary is often as a justificatory device for a specific form of economic power and status: from the heights of 'independence'—as wage earners, or homeowners, or firm-owners—we look down on those who remain caught by the web of 'dependence.' 'Independence' is thus a concept that we use to smuggle normativity into our descriptions of the world, and it's often an ugly normativity.

The tradition of political theory that has been most suspicious of dominant visions of 'independence,' of celebrations of individual 'autonomy' and of contractarian views of justice that imagine social relations through the metaphor of contractual relations is feminism. The concerns and the critical strategies pursued in this book are inspired in large part by feminist political theory. That makes it a good place to start for situating my arguments in relation to existing scholarship.

Dependence in Feminist Political Theory

I have suggested, and will argue, that the attempt to understand normative arguments about social and economic justice should begin with the attempt to understand the basic view of 'the economy' that these arguments presuppose. I have called such basic views 'socio-economic ontologies.' Thus, where we begin in describing economic relationships is crucial to where we will end in our normative points about dependence. And feminist political theory has been exceptionally good at finding starting points that elegantly and radically rework our views of economic practices and institutions. Examining the relationship between unpaid work and formal employment has been one such starting point.

The Wages for Housework campaign started in Italy in the 1970s brought to public debate the demand that the hidden and private world of housework be recognised for what it was: the foundation on which capitalist economies rested and hence the prerequisite for all of the wage labour and capital accumulation that went on within them. At the same time, Marxist feminists were embroiled in a theoretical debate about the nature of this domestic labour, and more specifically about whether unpaid labour in the home constituted a form of *exploitation*.[11] For the purposes of this introduction, the internal debate amongst Marxists is less important than the broader critique of the patriarchal structures of the capitalism of the time. The wider point was that without the reproduction of the labour force—through sexual reproduction, care work and daily maintenance of the home—the whole of what 'counted' as 'the economy' (the world of formal employment) would collapse. This radical expansion of the critique of capitalism, locating political struggle not just in the factory but also the home, had everything to do with questions of dependence. The model of the single-earner household kept women dependent on men for access to money, and this dependence was socially visible and sanctioned, while the deeper structural dependence of the patriarchal wage-earner economy on the 'uncounted' work of women needed to be exposed to the light of day and mobilised in political argument. The 'independence' of men had both ideologically and practically rested on the practices that made housework culturally and economically invisible; the demand for wages was a demand for visibility. At least when voiced by the more radical critics, the demand for wages was not made in order to gain 'equal' status as workers, but to clarify further the extent of exploitation within capitalism.[12]

While patriarchal capitalist regimes of production and accumulation are the broad target of left-wing feminist political theory, many feminists in the last 30 years have focussed more specifically on issues of dependence within modern capitalist *welfare states*.[13] Welfare state policies have the potential to counteract the specifically patriarchal forms of dependence that a gendered division of labour can impose on women: economic support from the state can give women an option for exit from abusive relationships, and state-supported childcare and rights to maternity leave from work can give women realistic chances of remaining in formal employment if they have children. However, feminists have also been acutely aware that welfare states have not always worked against patriarchal power structures, but sometimes simply reproduced them in bureaucratic forms. One criticism has been that welfare states have often been structured into 'two-tiered' systems of support, which protect citizens better against typically 'male' vulnerabilities (e.g. to unemployment) and worse against typically 'female' vulnerabilities (e.g. to single parenthood on low income).[14] Another criticism has been that the forms of support more relevant to women than to men (e.g. support for single parents) have been by far the most culturally and politically stigmatised welfare programmes.[15] As Ann Shola Orloff points out '[s]olo mothers have served as a "test case" of the extent to which welfare states address women's economic vulnerabilities […].'[16] Nonetheless, welfare states have held out hope for many feminists that the informal power relations embedded in patriarchal social structures might be countered by the formal power structures instituted in welfare state policies.

Dependence is an important problem for all feminist analyses of capitalism and welfare states, and is often linked to a theoretical attack on liberal political theories that evaluate social justice using the metaphor of the 'social contract.' Social contract theory is based on the idea that we can explain justice in political society by thinking about the conditions that rational, individual, autonomous and unencumbered subjects would agree to as they enter into society with one another. But if we recognise dependence as a basic feature of human existence, then it becomes problematic to use social contract theory to justify our basic political and economic institutions: we are *not* all 'independent' and 'autonomous' agents who either *could* 'contract in' in social reality or *would* 'contract in' in a hypothetical thought experiment.[17] Furthermore, we trick ourselves when we imagine that we can start any political myth with such independent actors; in fact our very idea of independent actors, once we try to flesh it out at all, tends to be embedded in a form of social existence that already involves the subjugation of others. Thus, in Carole Pateman's critique of social contract theory in *The Sexual Contract* and her criticism of welfare state policies in *The Disorder of Women*, she reconstructs the form of social existence that remained implicit in social contract stories: her feminist critique shows how the 'independence' of men is constructed, both in political theory and in popular ideology, on the hidden dependence of women.[18] Charles Mills would later argue in *The Racial Contract* that the 'independence' of the political actors in classical social contract theories also generally presupposed the subordination of racial 'others.'[19]

The attack on social contract theory is common to most left-wing feminist political theory, but dependence has also been taken up by feminists, and those inspired by feminism, to make a more specific point about the centrality of *care* to social existence. With this narrower focus, we begin to move from critiques of ideologies of 'independence' to positive theories of how economic and political institutions should respond to the fact that we *inevitably* depend on one another in certain ways. Thus, ethical and political theories of care place the fact of human dependence and interdependence at the centre of their accounts of justice.[20] As Daniel Engster puts it, care theory 'begins with individuals already existing in society and *dependent* upon one another for their survival, development, and social functioning, and highlights the unchosen obligations we all have towards others by virtue of our *interdependency*.'[21] Dependence in this theoretical context has thus shed the connotations of parasitism and moral corruption so obvious in Luxemburg's attack on 'parasites' and Cameron's attack on welfare recipients. 'Care theory,' either explicitly feminist or inspired by feminism (like Engster), emphasises care as a positive response to a universal human condition: we need to care for one another because we are all inevitably dependent; the real political problem is that this care is often undervalued and poorly supported by our social institutions. Eva Feder Kittay has argued, for example, that we need social institutions that will support *those who care for* dependents such as children, the elderly and the disabled.[22] She perceptively points out that inevitable dependencies such as the dependence of children on adults can create further dependencies, such as the dependence of parents on welfare states for support and protection, and that many important political questions revolve around how we as a society deal with these derivative forms of dependence.

This focus on different layers of dependence is also present in Martha Fineman's work, in which she again distinguishes between 'inevitable' and 'derived' dependence, arguing that the delegation of caring responsibilities to the family unit (as the 'private sphere') has hidden dependency relationships from political view.[23] Fineman has also tried to move debate beyond just dependence to a broader analysis of vulnerability as an essential aspect of the human condition that states need to respond to in policy making and law. Similarly to what I will argue in a moment, her sense of the limitations of 'dependency theory' has its roots in the thought that the analysis of the organisation of care does not cover the necessary range of political issues that we should be concerned with.[24]

Political theories that focus on care are important because they show how different society can look, and therefore, how different the stakes of social justice can look, when we start not with autonomous individuals but with individuals already bound by commitments to care for specific others. Broader theories of vulnerability similarly emphasise how *unevenly* laws and economic practices impact upon people as a result of the concrete social circumstances in which those people find themselves. These kinds of arguments can be said to build on an alternative socio-economic ontology to that underpinning liberal political theory: they challenge the assumption that the most important political relationship is that between individuals and the whole political community (when we think about care or vulnerability, we are forced to think about family structures and much more) and the assumption that we can adequately describe the operations of economies by only focussing on the formal monetary economy principally organised through markets. If we do the latter, then we miss huge sectors of the unpaid economy, much of which consists of care work.[25] We miss, too, the reasons that some people remain more exposed to pressure, manipulation and suffering than others.

My approach in this book owes an enormous amount to the critiques of ideologies of 'independence' that we find in Pateman and many others. The ethics of care is one line of thought that has developed out of this broader feminist tradition. However, I have introduced this work on care also in order to mark my distance from it. The subsumption of issues about dependence under issues about the provision of care tempts us to isolate the politics of 'good' dependence (e.g. of children) from the politics of 'bad' dependence (e.g. of financial capitalists). But we need to remember that even the dependence of children has not always been regarded as morally acceptable—or at least the threshold for determining where independence begins has shifted dramatically over time.[26] Dependence may be a human condition that makes care an inevitable and central feature of our lives, but dependence is also a condition that we create through our social institutions and justify and condemn in our political debates. Those developing the ethics of care have no intention of taking focus away from the *social* production of dependence, and theorists like Kittay and Feder manage to keep both 'constructed' and 'inevitable' forms of dependence in view.[27] But what we do see when they and other theorists focus on care is a tendency to elevate the fact of dependence amongst people, often glossed as 'interdependence,' into a kind of moral insight: *the more* we recognise this fact, the better we will do in our social and political quandaries. This suggestion, particularly strong in the kind of theory of care Engster develops,[28] has serious limitations. Whether intended or not, trying to make 'interdependence' bear a great deal of normative weight produces a 'flattening' in our concept of dependence. We are pushed towards thinking that issues about dependence should be framed in this way: interdependence is the human condition, care is the human solution, and the organisation of care is the social and political task. Such a framing misses a great deal of importance. For example, the dependence of workers on the owners of capital assets for access to the means of production *is relevant* to how people care for one another, but a recognition of interdependence, and the fact that we have all been cared for, does not help us a great deal in analysing the politics of property relations.

Where feminists have developed their most profound insights about dependence, they have resisted the slide from a politics of dependence to an ethics of care and retained the sense of 'dependence' as a *political* condition, not just a social fact. In a way, this is what authors like Martha Fineman have tried to do by moving from dependence to vulnerability in their theorising. But this leaves the problem of dependence too quickly, assuming that dependence always concerns care, and leaving the darker sides of dependence untouched. Thus, keeping the political dimension of dependence clearly in sight, Carole Pateman captured with great clarity some of the tensions within feminist thought: 'Some feminists have enthusiastically endorsed the welfare state…. However, the enthusiasm is met with the rejoiner from other feminists that for women to look to the welfare state is merely to exchange dependence on individual men for dependence on the state.'[29]

'Economy' in What Sense?

Feminist political theory has suggested that we look for the interrelations between the formal economy (of jobs, wages, and the buying and selling of commodities in markets, etc.) and the informal economy of reproductive work (including care work and domestic work). In other words, the 'economy' doesn't stop where the trail of money ends, and the politics of economic practice don't end with strikes and revolutions. Of course, those studying societies in which markets and money have (or had) only a marginal role in the organisation of production and consumption have never limited their view of 'the economy' to what happens in markets and 'workplaces.' Economic anthropologists have always seen money, markets and formal employment as economic institutions and practices amongst many that structure how resources and labour are organised in a society.[30]

The economic historian and social theorist Karl Polanyi gave the clearest articulation of the concept of 'economy' that made sense of anthropologists' work and allowed us to meaningfully discuss the transformation of societies and economies over time. He is most famous for a handful of key ideas that would be used, re-used and sometimes misused, in the social sciences and particularly economic anthropology and economic sociology from the mid-twentieth century until today: the idea of the economy as 'embedded' in social relations, the idea of 'fictitious' commodities, the idea of the 'double movement' of social change and the idea of the economy as 'instituted' process.[31] Thus, in opposition to the economic science of his time (and today), Polanyi defined the economy as 'an instituted process of interaction between man and his environment, which results in a continuous supply of want satisfying material means.'[32] He called this the 'substantive' meaning of 'economic.' The important point about this definition is that it makes no reference to that key idea of neoclassical economics, and that studying the economy is about studying rational choices about resource allocation in a world characterised by scarcity. Neither *choice* nor *scarcity* is essential to the processes that Polanyi aims to study when he sets out to look at the economy (they *may* or *may not* be important depending on the practice and the resource in view). He is concerned with how people sustain themselves, sustain others and reproduce the social networks in which both of these processes take place. In Chapter 4, we will look in more detail at Polanyi's ideas, especially the famous metaphor concerning 'embeddedness': the idea that markets have, throughout most of history been 'embedded' in social relations. Whether contemporary markets have been cut loose from these relations, or whether this 'freeing' of markets has always just been a hopeless libertarian dream, is an issue that has been much debated.[33] For the moment, though, I would like to illustrate why the idea of 'economy as instituted process' is useful for thinking about dependence and the politics of dependence.

Polanyi is helpful for thinking about economic dependence, and the politics that addresses it, because he developed what I consider to be a 'full' view of economic practices: economies often involve market exchange, but they also inevitably comprise processes of redistribution, of reciprocity and of house-holding.[34] Against this backdrop, we can then see how political rhetoric about economic relations often operates by 'subtracting' from this full view and leaving us with a partial view that better supports the desired normative conclusions. This might mean subtracting 'house-holding' from our view of economic life, or relations of reciprocity between people, or the redistributive processes of welfare states. Such 'subtractions' don't deny the existence of these processes, but simply place them 'outside,' and in contrast to, the core of economic interaction—markets.

Like feminist arguments that use the idea of interdependence to expose how partial common cultural and theoretical views of 'independence' have been, a Polanyian view of the economy helps us to see how limited accounts of economic relationships can be. Family structures channel flows of resources just as much as markets do; legal systems and welfare states are just as much a part of the basic architecture of modern economies as markets, banks and money. Even where these background institutions are not excluded entirely from discussions of economic justice, it is often assumed that the *paradigm case* of an economic relationship is a market relationship, and the *paradigm case* of a fair economic interaction is a trade between equals in a market. When we start with

Polanyi, we have no reason whatsoever to regard free exchange between equal and 'independent' actors as paradigmatic of either how economies *are* or *should be*. To return to Orwell's example, begging would certainly be part of Polanyi's economy. While it may be difficult to see begging as an 'instituted process' today, it certainly would not have been difficult in nineteenth-century China, where it was common for beggars to be organised through city-based guilds.[35] Economies in this sense change in drastic and interesting ways and are comprised of a multitude of interlocking social institutions from markets, to families, to the administrative arms of welfare states. Of course, my emphasis on the 'fullness' of Polanyi's view of economic practices is not meant to suggest that Polanyi got everything right and that his work was not lacking in any way; my point is simply that he gives us a view of economic life that is broad enough to act as a useful contrast to the relatively narrow accounts of economic relations, which, for example, stop looking for 'the economy' where the money runs out and where we move from the market into the realm of other social institutions like the family. Next to feminist political theory, Polanyi's view of economic practices is the second theoretical pillar underlying my approach in this book.

Extending Polanyi's view of economic relations into the study of political arguments, I will argue that accusations of illegitimate dependence and parasitism can be analysed as attempts to 'hollow out' parts of social life, making them appear 'empty.' Thus, we might say that cultures and theories are invested in particular ways of identifying an 'empty economy': a whole range of practices where money changes hands (the beggar's cup gets fuller), or something happens (the buffoon entertains someone), but where *something* remains lacking—something like usefulness, value or production. The example of street newspapers illustrates the point. In many societies, there exist organisations that produce magazines to be sold specifically by homeless people as an alternative or supplement to charity or welfare support. But those selling street papers often meet aggression and abuse at the hands of the public.[36] One way to try to understand this is to see that those attacking street paper sellers (verbally or occasionally physically) want to 'de-mask' the activity as not 'real' work—an empty shell. Of course, people pretending to work in offices don't tend to come in for his kind of abuse: their empty labour is rarely linked to the stigma of dependence, which tells us something about how powerful and partial widespread views of the 'empty economy' can be.[37] I will look at the case of street papers in more detail in Chapter 4.

The empty economy is something we imagine, describe and argue about every time we engage in denouncing someone as parasitical, or judging them as 'dependent,' or branding an activity as 'unproductive.' The metaphor is not perfect, but it does help us to visualise the processes that this book is about: the efforts, primarily of political theorists but also of politicians and activists, to, on the one hand, 'fill' the empty economy with value and, on the other hand, to displace the charge of emptiness and uselessness onto another set of economic actors, thus identifying a different empty economy. To illustrate the point, housework has long been treated by political economists as so empty as to be completely invisible in their analyses.[38] On the other hand, the work of financial institutions like investment banks and mortgage lenders is increasingly criticised as in reality being 'empty,' useless, even 'parasitical.'[39] 'Filling up' housework and 'emptying out' financial work takes time and effort put in by public commentators and political theorists.

Market Dependence

The book contains no chapter on markets, despite the fact that markets are an economic institution that is of great importance to all contemporary economies. The reason for this is that the question of the justice of markets is in the background of almost all of the chapters. Markets are closely connected to our understandings of dependence and independence in many contexts: so much so, in fact, that some political arguments seem to assume that to take part in markets is practically *synonymous* with being independent, while failing to do so is synonymous with dependence (see Chapters 2 and 4). Even critics of markets have sometimes accepted the link between markets and independence, and simply pointed out that we are in fact all dependent on one another in our social lives *outside* of markets. However, what I will be particularly interested in this book is the very different idea of 'market *dependence*.' In Chapter 5 on money and Chapter 6 on property, we will be looking at arguments that suggest that a market economy structured through private property is one in which people are made fundamentally dependent. This is not the cosy 'interdependence' of a society with a great division of labour and hence in need of a meeting place to exchange things (Adam Smith's view of markets as generally benevolent); this is the dependence of people who are denied access to resources *except* through markets: housing, workplaces, even food. Of course, this is the flip side of the benevolent markets idea—to focus on how private property excludes and how money operates as a release from that exclusion is just a way of re-describing exactly the same set of relationships from a different normative starting point.

The idea of 'market dependence' has been used to understand the development of capitalism in early modern Europe,[40] but it also has much relevance for understanding more recent history and contemporary society. If we consider how economies work in times of famine, for example, then the importance of the idea of 'market dependence' immediately becomes apparent. Peasants with direct access to land for growing food will be affected very differently at times of famine from those who depend on markets for their access to food: soaring prices or collapses in the monetary value of labour may leave the former relatively unharmed, but may leave the latter in dire need.[41] This market dependence is also something that states have actively tried to create, most obviously in colonial contexts where imposing taxes that have to be paid in money has been a means of inducing colonised peoples to work in the monetary economy.[42] The idea of 'market dependence' has also been used to describe exactly what it is that welfare states release citizens from.[43] Here, the clash of ideas that the politics of dependence involves is at its most obvious: for critics of the welfare state, resources distributed by the state create an immoral and corrosive dependence; for defenders of the welfare state, these policies are exactly what pulls us out of dependence on markets and family structures.

While not using the term 'market dependence,' social theories of debt have also drawn attention to the underlying forms of dependence that the association between independence and markets can easily conceal. Such theories focus not only on dependence as a basic human condition, but also on how we *become* dependent, and marked as indebted, through the institutions that we use to structure economic practices. The basic insight shared by economic,[44] anthropological,[45] and philosophical[46] studies of debt is that *debt* is prior to *exchange* in the organisation of social life. This is a difficult point, so it is worth unpacking in two steps. First of all debt is *historically* prior to exchange in the sense that ancient moneys were used principally as measures of debt, and only later did money become used and thought of as a means of exchange. But second, debt is a form of *power relation* that is more fundamental to contemporary politics than the exchange relation between supposed equals in markets. While the historical point may seem rather distant from the politics of economic dependence today, the point about power is surely not. The debtor–creditor relation has radically limited the sphere of democratic politics and fundamentally structured the ways in which welfare states, governments and businesses can function. Before being a citizen with social or political rights, and before being a worker or even an owner, people living in the era of neoliberal economics and politics are *in debt*. While I do not follow this line of argument explicitly in this book, theorists of debt have also powerfully attacked the assumption that markets are an economic institution that we can and should associate principally with 'independence.' My own arguments will not be an attack on markets as such, but the idea of 'market dependence' lies behind and motivates a number of discussions in this book, especially in the chapters on property and money.

On Looking from 'the Outside'

The concerns of this book owe much to feminist political theory and the social sciences of economic practices. But the kind of political theory that I develop here also has close affinities with work in critical legal studies. Critical legal scholars (often building on the tradition of legal realism) have been particularly good at developing a mode of critical inquiry that turns our perspective on specific laws and social institutions 'inside out.' What I mean by this is that critical legal scholarship sets out to reveal the fact that judges and theorists have had a *bias* towards describing and justifying specific laws and institutions from the point of view of those who are best served and protected by these institutions. The critical task then becomes the re-description and evaluation of these laws and institutions 'from the outside'—or the point of view of those for whom these laws and institutions are a burden or even a harm. Property law is the best example here. Both courts and the academy have had a bias towards analysing property law from the perspective of *owners* of things. This means focussing on the rights and privileges that ownership bestows on owners: the normative questions that then seem pressing are questions about the *limits* of these rights and privileges. However, what does private property look like for those who confront it as a power in *other people's* hands? What does property look like to the 'outsider'? The answer is that it looks like a restriction on what that outsider can do, and a restriction that will be enforced not only by private individuals, but by the state. Thus, critical legal scholars have productively studied property by looking at its effects on social life and economic justice from the perspective of 'property outsiders,'[47] from 'the margins'[48] and quite simply 'the homeless.'[49]

Only one chapter in this book is focussed on property, but this critical strategy of looking at social institutions 'from the outside,' from the perspective of those upon whom they place burdens, runs through the book.

Meanings of 'Dependence'

So far I have briefly situated my concerns with dependence in relation to feminist political theory, a Polanyian view of economic relationships, and touched on some important ideas for my arguments: the 'empty economy,' 'market dependence' and 'looking from the outside.' Now, it is important to say more precisely it is exactly that this book deals with under the heading of 'dependence.'

In the examples that I have used so far, it is clear that there are a number of kinds of *things* that people worry about when they worry about dependence: this is the *who* and the *what* of dependence. They also worry about a range of different *kinds* of dependence. It is worth unpacking these two points in turn by making some distinctions, before suggesting how they do in fact hang together.

We can begin with the 'who' and 'what' of dependence: whose dependence and what practices *might* this book be about, and who and what *is* the book about?

First of all, there are *people as defined by their bodily and mental capacities.* Feder and Kittay call children and some disabled, ill or elderly people 'inevitably dependent.'[50] Their point is not, of course, that we can't organise society in better ways that make such people less dependent, just that there are special kinds of care that such people will always need compared to others. As may be clear from the discussion above about theories of care, the present book won't be focussed a great deal on 'dependents' in this sense.

Second, we can talk about people as dependent within *a particular social role that they occupy.* Much of the book will be focussed on the ways in which particular social roles come to typify 'dependence' in arguments about social and economic justice, and there are clearly two sides to this. On the one hand, when people talk of capitalists or rentiers as 'parasitic,' what is implied is that they depend on the productive efforts of others while not producing useful things themselves: the dependence might go unnoticed, but it is there. On the other hand, social figures like beggars, housewives, welfare claimants or feudal peasants can be called 'dependent' because their access to resources is largely controlled by other people with greater power over those resources. Their claims to sustenance are thus contingent upon the will of others. The first sense of dependence as based *on* power and the second sense as subjugation *to* power are distinguished further below.

Third, we can talk not about social roles but about *forms of activity, sectors of an economy or even whole economies*. Is the public sector in capitalist welfare states dependent upon the private sector (for tax revenue)? Or is the private sector dependent upon the public sector (for healthy and competent workers)? Thus, sometimes our concerns with dependence are on a macro-level that abstracts from individual people and social roles and tries to grasp the sense in which a whole set of practices or institutions depends upon another set. For example, 'dependency theory' within international relations is concerned with the structuring of the global economy such that some countries remain dependent on the industries and economic policies of other more powerful countries. While I won't be engaging with global political economy in the book, this impersonal sense of dependence—of one set of institutions or practices depending on another—is important for the 'structural' sense of dependence that I discuss below.

Fourth (concerning the 'who' and 'what' of dependence), it is the simple sense in which *as human beings we are all dependent*. This meaning of 'dependence' is developed in philosophical[51] or psychological[52] accounts of dependence as a general human condition. This sense of dependence will also be peripheral to the present discussion.

Having made these distinctions, I can say that dependence in the second and third senses noted above will be central to the book: it will focus on dependence as a feature of social roles and on the relations among various economic practices. But it is still unclear exactly what this means until we make some further distinctions concerning *kinds* of dependence. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon provide an extremely useful taxonomy of the kinds of dependence that have concerned the public and political theorists over time. They distinguish an *economic* sense, a *socio-legal* sense, a *political* sense and a *moral/psychological* sense.[53]

These labels help us to track arguments in political discourse, and I will return to them in Chapter 2. But we need a different set of distinctions in order to set the agenda for this book. What will help us here are distinctions between *structural dependence* and *practical dependence*, on the one hand, and *vulnerability* and *parasitism* on the other hand. Together these senses of dependence make up what I will call the 'dependence compass,' which helps us to situate different senses of dependence that are at stake in different contexts.

By *structural dependence*, I mean a relation between two groups in society wherein the lives and practices of one could not carry on as they do without the other. The relationship is *impersonal* and appears in social life as a feature of basic social and economic institutions. There is of course a trivial sense in which change in one part of society will necessitate change in another part, but there is also a non-trivial sense in which social justice is at stake. For example, industrial capitalist accumulation is structurally dependent upon wage labour, and wage labour is structurally dependent upon reproductive labour (in the home): removing links in this chain makes practices 'higher up' in the chain impossible to continue in their present form. There are difficult issues to be faced here if further analytical claims and distinctions are going to be made on the basis of this idea of 'structural dependence': is it mutual? How much does one part have to depend on the other? And so on. But for the present purposes what matters is the contrast with *practical dependence*.

By *practical dependence* I mean a condition in which a person's access to a *resource at a given point in time and in a given social situation* is through others who have more immediate access to that resource, or more powerful control over it. The point of the contrast between the 'structural' and the 'practical' aspects of dependence, then, is to draw attention to the fact that, however, much different parts of an economic system, and the people occupying them, might depend upon one another in the abstract; at no particular time or place (structurally), the circumstances on the ground in the course of actual social interaction may look quite different. Thus, in a patriarchal society organising work on the model of the single-earner household, men in aggregate may be structurally dependent upon the unpaid housework of women, whose care for children and domestic work is essential to the reproduction of the economy as a whole, but individual women remain practically dependent upon men for access to money and hence the other resources that money can buy. And just as capitalist accumulation may be structurally dependent upon wage labour, individual workers certainly remain practically dependent on the owners of capital (or today, those who represent them in the workforce) for access to the means of production: if I've been fired, I can't keep using this office to write emails. The contrast between structural and practical dependence, then, is a starting point for understanding the huge differences in the ways that people use the concept of 'dependence' in normative arguments: when a critic from the radical Left argues that financial capitalists are parasites, the implication is that they are structurally dependent upon the work of others; the point is not that they are practically dependent on a daily basis—quite the reverse. Part of my point in this book will be that moving between difference *senses* of dependence, and reversing our view on the economy by switching from one to the other, is very important for normative arguments about social and economic justice.

The contrast between practical and structural dependence is meant to make explicit a contrast between senses of dependence that is already present, but not clearly articulated, in existing debates and literature. The same is true of the contrast between dependence as parasitism and dependence as vulnerability. This more normative contrast between senses of dependence is related to the first contrast in ways that I will try to make clear during the course of this book. For the present, it is worth noting that when we describe the practical dependence of individuals we *tend* to be focussing on their vulnerability; when we describe the structural dependence of groups of individuals, taken in aggregate and related not personally but institutionally, we *tend* to be focussing on dependence as parasitism.

With this compass of meanings of dependence in mind, we can also note that the *stigma* of dependence attaches to some social roles and practices far more readily than others. A capitalist may depend on wage labour in order to make a profit, but she does not generally suffer from the stigma attached, for example, to begging. Women may be practically dependent upon men in patriarchal societies, but this doesn't necessarily mean that this dependence is stigmatised: in fact, quite the opposite has been (and is) the case. When I talk about the stigma of dependence, then I simply want to capture what is happening at the level of culture and public debate, when dependence becomes a morally loaded idea.

Having put all of these distinctions on the table, it is also obvious that most of the time people aren't going around using these labels in their theories and public arguments. In fact, even the word 'dependence' isn't central to all of the discussions that we will be looking at. Accusations of 'parasitism,' claims about 'vulnerability' and theories about 'unproductive' labour will all be included. But there is a basic underlying concern that ties all of these issues together. It is this: the *legitimacy* of social roles and economic practices is at stake when we set them in relation to other roles and practices in our political arguments. Since these implicit and explicit claims about legitimacy often remain undeveloped and based on partial descriptions of economic practices and institutions, the various chapters in this book will both aim to say something about how others *have* worried about dependence and how they *might have*, or *should have* worried about dependence. The distinctions I make above are made to help with moving between these two aims, and, in particular, moving back and forth between political arguments about vulnerability and political arguments about parasitism—showing, too, how the one can spill over into the other.

Outline of the Book: Aims and Structure

This is a book of reconstructive political theory. By this I mean two things. First of all, some of my arguments start with examples of debates, crises or problems from public life and reconstruct the issues and stakes through the lens of a theoretical problem (e.g. in Chapter 2). Second, where my arguments start with theoretical debates, particularly in the social sciences, I aim to reconstruct the *political* relevance of these debates, by showing how the construction of knowledge about social and economic relationships is inherently normative (e.g. in Chapter 3). As should be clear by this point, the theoretical problems that guide this reconstructive work are: how do our institutions structure our dependencies? And how do our theories and arguments about these institutions describe and analyse our dependencies?

Unlike much contemporary Anglophone political philosophy developed as applied ethics or moral philosophy, my aim is not to construct a 'theory of justice' or to search for the normative principles that should underpin the organisation of dependence in society. In a field dominated by the search for normative principles, this is a work of theoretical *description*. As applied ethics, political philosophy tends to build on thin understandings of the institutions that it wants to say something normative about.[54] Political philosophers study *the market*; they generally leave it to economists, anthropologists and sociologists to study *actual* *markets*.[55] They look at the effect of *money in general* on social relationships, not the differences between different forms of currency. They build arguments for and against *private property*, but they rarely look into the various ways in which a private property regime can be structured (this they leave to lawyers). In this book, I also make generalisations. I develop arguments about 'the' welfare state, for example. But I try to shift our political attention from questions of *more or less* (more or less market, more or less monetary values, more or less private property, more or less welfare state) to questions about *how* these social institutions can function in different ways with consequences for the politics of dependence. This agenda means that I am far more reliant on fields of scholarship outside of political philosophy—particularly economic sociology, economic anthropology and history—than on works within the 'field.' For some readers, then, the book might not seem normative *in the right way*. My only real defence to this criticism is that re-descriptions of states of affairs, institutions and even theories make it possible to think more clearly about politics every bit as much as a statement of normative principles does. Those who want a definition of dependence and a theory of the normative principles that this feature of human existence generates will be disappointed.

How will this reconstructive political theory of dependence proceed then? Part I focusses on how the cultural contrast between statuses as 'dependent' and 'independent' draws on the assumption that participation in markets (particularly labour markets) is paradigmatic of what it means to be economically independent. Thus, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 look at social actors who are made invisible or suspect by their failure to work in jobs.

Chapter 2 examines how in the last 40 years the concept of 'dependency' has been central to critiques the welfare state as an ideal model of social and political organisation. The chapter first gives an overview of prominent critiques of 'welfare dependency,' particularly in the USA since the 1980s, and discusses the welfare reforms that politicians sought to justify with these arguments. The most powerful responses to this 'dependency critique' came from feminist political theorists such as Nancy Fraser, Linda Gordon and Eva Feder Kittay. The chapter gives an overview of the ways that these and other feminist political theorists have used dependence as a theme to explore the injustices of both a patriarchal and capitalist economic order. Finally, the chapter argues that the lessons developed by feminist political theory about 'dependency' are extremely valuable but that the concept of 'interdependence,' which is both implicit and explicit in much of this theory, does not suffice as a new basis for political debate and theory. The feminist lessons need to be reformulated with a focus on political choices *between* the forms of dependency inherent in different ways of structuring our basic economic institutions and relationships.

Chapter 3 introduces the range of poor souls who have been labelled as 'unproductive people': from buffoons to housewives. The chapter shifts us from public debate to theoretical debate and outlines the ways in which the dichotomy between 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour has been used in the history of political economy, including in the works of Adam Smith and Karl Marx. It was against the backdrop of Marx's claims about 'unproductive labour' that twentieth century political theorists discussed whether we should retain a distinction between productive and unproductive labour, and if so, what purposes that distinction served. Working through these debates, the chapter gradually focusses in on why the idea of productive labour mattered particularly for feminists, who saw unpaid housework being sidelined in orthodox Marxist political economy. Rather than a public debate about dependence, then, the chapter examines a theoretical debate in which our basic view of economic practices was at stake. It asks: where can we see value creation in the economy? And what chain of power relations links unpaid work in the home to profits made in the commodity market? And how do answers to these questions affect our views of who depends upon who in society?

Chapter 4 introduces Karl Polanyi's view of the economy as a set of interlocking instituted processes. What this opened up for was the idea that studies of the economy should not be confined to the paradigmatic buying and selling interactions in competitive markets, but should try to understand how societies meet their needs and wants. The processes in which they do this include redistribution (as in welfare states), reciprocity (as between kinship groups), exchange (in markets) and house-holding (in family units). This chapter outlines Polanyi's approach to the study of economic practices and suggests that his work provides the appropriate descriptive basis for a political philosophy of economic justice that tries to grasp how political rhetoric makes parts of the economy (in Polanyi's sense) look 'empty': I use the example of street papers and their place in the moral economy of contemporary societies to illustrate my argument. The chapter thus introduces the idea of 'the empty economy' to label the practices and institutions that a broad Polanyian view of the economy would *include*, but which are strategically *excluded* (or devalued) in some discourses concerning economic justice.

In Part II (in Chapters 5, 6, and 7), the focus is on economic institutions and practices that have become so foundational to modern capitalist societies as to appear natural and immutable. The chapters on money, property and unearned income (particularly inheritance) emphasise that choices about how to institute these are choices about *power*: what kinds of power people can have over one another, and how that power is distributed.

Chapter 5 asks: what does money do to our dependencies? For some, state-issued money is a sign of our dependence on this centralised power, and many activists have developed alternative currencies as a way to *re-scale* our dependence relations: from dependence on the whole of society (supposedly represented in the state) to dependence on local communities (e.g. Ithica Hours and Bristol Pounds) or international, non-state, networks (e.g. Bitcoin and Faircoin). This chapter draws on recent scholarship within the humanities on money, asking what kinds of dependence we institute in the various forms of money that interlock (e.g. private bank credit and central bank 'base' money) and compete (e.g. local currencies and national currencies) in contemporary societies. It frames the normative stakes of these choices about money using Jean Jacques Rousseau's republican vision of a constitution for Corsica as a model for thinking about the relationship between economic and political power.

Despite a long history of political theorising about property, property today is the great understudied topic in political theories of economic justice. While Rawlsian political theorists have recently rediscovered property through the idea of 'property-owning democracy,' the debate has long remained stuck on the issue of *distribution* (how much everyone gets) and has only just begun to examine ownership as a specific *form of power* that structures relations of dependence. In Chapter 6, I return to the work of legal economist, Robert Hale, who expressed more clearly than anyone how property constitutes a power of 'private government,' and I discuss why this view of property matters for thinking about dependence as vulnerability to pressure and coercion, especially in a market economy.

Chapter 7 examines a foundational distinction in discussions of economic justice: the distinction between earned and unearned income. The distinction is extremely important for all critiques of profit and rent extraction as forms of appropriation. Thus, financial capitalists have long been viewed as parasitic: first because they are *capitalists* and thus earn through their property rights rather than their labour and second because they deal in *finance*, which many view as detached from 'the real economy' of production. This chapter briefly sketches the conceptual history of the metaphor of 'parasites' which has been recently and influentially used by political economist Michael Hudson in his *Killing the Host: How Financial Parasites and Debt Bondage Destroy the Global Economy*.[56] It goes on to contrast the impersonal dependence involved in unearned income gained through rent extraction, with the very personal form of dependence characteristic of inheritance, and follows Thomas Piketty in suggesting that together these mechanisms produce great social inequality and injustice. However, the chapter also argues that we should not be normatively complacent about the idea of 'earned income' and assume that it represents a 'productive' economic contribution in contrast to unearned income. We are all far more deeply dependent than such complacency implies.

The principle lesson of the book, summarised in the conclusion, is that placing issues of dependence at the heart of political theorising about economic justice opens up important issues that have been marginal to contemporary theoretical debate, but which are central to our lives: particularly concerning the forms of vulnerability we experience. The book argues that only by broadening our view of economic dependence—looking beyond the usual suspects such as welfare recipients—can we begin to compare the economic lives of social actors in the right way. We compare them by first recognising the commonality of dependence and then differentiating the kinds of dependence that characterise specific social roles. The important political question is not 'how do we ensure *independence?*' or 'how do we recognise *interdependence?*' but rather 'how shall we institute our dependencies in the best way?' This question yields an alternative set of stakes in theorising about economic justice: our dependencies need to be spread in ways that protect us from dominance and extreme vulnerability. We need a politics for a world of economic dependence.

Throughout the book, I hope to stimulate some sense of wonder about how and why we map normative distinctions onto the world of economic practices that we live with. In the same reflections on begging in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell remarked that 'In practice nobody cares whether work is useful or useless, productive or parasitic; the sole thing demanded is that is shall be profitable.' And he went on, 'A beggar, looked at realistically, is simply a businessman…he has merely made the mistake of choosing a trade at which it is impossible to grow rich.'[57] What Orwell is pointing to is the absurd reversal in which the monetary value of an activity sometimes serves as our *starting point* for deciding on whether it is useful or not. If only begging were more profitable, he suggests, we wouldn't regard it as parasitic. This doesn't seem right when we reflect on the criticism that financial capitalists have come in for in recent years, and we might also be doubtful that a wealthy class of beggars would endear them to the wider public, but Orwell has surely captured something important here. Sometimes the normative distinctions that we use to think about economic justice are the effect, and not the cause, of the institutions and practices that structure social life. The truth about dependence and independence cannot be sought 'behind' our social institutions; rather the politics of dependence and independence is generated in our struggles over these very social institutions.

Notes

1. George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954 [1933]), 173.
2. It was certainly a worry for the founding figures of Western philosophy: Aristotle famously distinguished between property as a resource for use and property as a resource for exchange. The use of money simply to make more money (i.e. usury), he considered the most illegitimate and unnatural form of acquisition. See Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Peter L. Phillips Simpson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 57 (1258a34). For a commentary on Aristotle's arguments, see Christopher Pierson, *Just Property: A History in the Latin West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31–34.
3. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books I–III* (London: Penguin, 1986 [1776]), 271 and 278.
4. Rosa Luxemburg, "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle," in *Socialism and Barbarism: The Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott (London and New York, NY: Pluto Press, 2010), 170.
5. Andreas Musloff, "From Social to Biological Parasites and Back: The Conceptual Career of a Metaphor," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 9(2) (2014): 25.

6. David Cameron, "Prime Minister's Speech on Welfare Reform Bill" (Speech, Westminster, 17 February 2011), accessed 15 December 2016. Transcript available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-on-welfare-reform-bill.
7. Tony Blair, "Leader's Speech" (Speech, Brighton 30 September 1997). Transcript available at: http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=203; Bill Clinton, "*A Plan to End Welfare as We Know It*" (Television Broadcast, 1992), accessed 15 December 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/bill-clinton-in-1992-ad-a-plan-to-end-welfare-as-we-know-it/2016/08/30/9e6350f8-6ee0-11e6-993f-73c693a89820_video.html; George W. Bush, "Remarks at West Ashley High School in Charleston" (speech, South Carolina, July 29, 2002), accessed 16 November 2016. Transcript available at: http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=63040; Donald J. Trump, *Time to Get Tough: Making America Great Again* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2011), 107.
8. Quoted in Brendan O'Connor, *A Political History of the American Welfare System: When Ideas Have Consequences* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 223.
9. Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (London: Allen Lane, 2012); Deborah Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not be for Sale* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010); Lisa Herzog, *The Invention of the Market: Smith, Hegel and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jason F. Brennan and Peter Jaworski, *Markets Without Limits: Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Serena Olsaretti, *Liberty, Desert, and the Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
10. Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson, eds., *Property Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1971]); John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (London: Belknap, 2001).
11. Diemut Elisabet Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 45–82.
12. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 8.
13. For an overview, see Ann Shola Orloff, "Gendering the Comparative Analysis of Welfare States: An Unfinished Agenda," *Sociological Theory* 27(3) (2009).
14. Orloff highlights this criticism before arguing for its limited relevance in contemporary welfare states, see Orloff, "Gendering," 324.

15. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of *Dependency*: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19(2) (1994).
16. Orloff, "Gendering," 327.
17. See, for example: Martha Fineman "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20(1) (2008): 10–11.
18. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).
19. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997).
20. Eva Feder Kittay, and Ellen K. Feder, eds., *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
21. Daniel Engster, *The Heart of Justice*: *Care Ethics and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7 (emphasis added).
22. Eva Feder Kittay, "Welfare, Dependency, and a Public Ethic of Care," *Social Justice* 25(1) (1998).
23. Martha Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2004)
24. Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject," 11. Fineman shares the turn to vulnerability with a number of other legal and political theorists. See: Martha Albertson Fineman and Anna Grear, eds., *Vulnerability: Reflections on a New Ethical Foundation for Law and Politics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); Bryan Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights* (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006); Peadar Kirkby, *Vulnerability and Violence: The Impact of Globalization* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2006).
25. For a strong defence of 'liberalism' against feminist criticisms, see Martha Nussbaum, "The Feminist Critique of Liberalism," in *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
26. Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
27. Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen F. Feder, "Introduction," in *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, ed. Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen F. Feder (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 2.
28. 'We all have a duty to care for others because we are all dependent upon the care of others for our survival, development, and basic social functioning. Since we have all made claims on others for care and continue to do so, it is inconsistent and immoral by our own implicit moral standards

to ignore or deny the claim of others for care when we can help them.' Engster, *The Heart of Justice*, 71.

29. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 199–200.
30. Important works in the field include Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, Mauss, 1969 [1925]); Paul Bohannan, "Some Principles of Exchange and Investment Among the Tiv," *American Anthropologist* 57(1) (1955); Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch, eds., *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For an excellent introduction to the field see Chris Hann and Keith Hart, *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).
31. For a recent overview of Polanyi's work and influence, see Fred L. Block and Margaret R. Somers, *The Power of Market Fundamentalism: Polanyi's Critique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
32. Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," in *Trade and Markets in Early Empires*, ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Pearson (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1957), 33.
33. Although I think those who see the 'disembedding' of markets as an ideological dream rather than a real possibility are clearly more faithful to Polanyi's view: for an example of this line of argument, see: John Lie, "Embedding Polanyi's Market Society," *Sociological Perspectives* 34(2) (1991).
34. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957), 52–55.
35. Hanchao Lu, *Street Criers: A Cultural History of Chinese Beggars* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
36. Patrick J. L. Cockburn, "Street Papers, Work and Begging: Experimenting at the Margins of Economic Legitimacy," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 7(2) (2014).
37. Roland Paulsen, *Empty Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
38. Nancy Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution and Development in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought," *Signs* 16(3) (1991).
39. Michael Hudson, *Killing the Host: How Financial Parasites and Debt Bondage Destroy the Global Economy* (Desden: ISLET Verlag, 2015).
40. Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 2(1) (2002).
41. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
42. Mark Peacock, *Introducing Money* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 147–168.

43. Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 28.
44. Geoffrey Ingham, *The Nature of Money* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).
45. David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York, NY: Melville House, 2012).
46. Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neo-Liberal Condition*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012).
47. Lorna Fox O'Mahony, "Property Outsiders and the Hidden Politics of Doctrinalism," *Current Legal Problems* 67(1) (2014).
48. André J. van der Walt, *Property in the Margins* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2009).
49. Jeremy Waldron, "Community and Property—For Those Who Have Neither," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 10 (2009).
50. Kittay and Feder, "Introduction," 2.
51. Alasdair Macintyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001).
52. Albert Memmi, *Dependence*, trans. Philip A. Facey (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984).
53. Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of *Dependency*."
54. For an extended methodological critique of political theory as applied ethics, see Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
55. While philosophers like Michael Sandel and Debra Satz are certainly interested in markets for *different kinds of things*, they are not, like economic sociologists, interested in *different kinds of markets*, i.e. different practical, technical and legal arrangements that we put under the umbrella of 'markets.' For a set of case studies revealing this diversity see Donald Mackenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu, eds. *Do Economists Make Markets? On the Performativity of Economics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
56. Michael Hudson, *Killing the Host: How Financial Parasites and Debt Bondage Destroy the Global Economy* (Dresden: ISLET Verlag, 2015).
57. George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954 [1933]), 173.

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PART I

Who is Dependent?

CHAPTER 2

Economic Dependence and the Welfare State

In the last 40 years, the concept of 'dependency'[1] has been pushed into the limelight by analyses and commentaries that critique the welfare state as an ideal model of social order and re-evaluate actual welfare policies in countries around the world. The moral evaluation and the political governance of the poor is, of course, not an issue that began with welfare states, and 'dependency' is a concern that began well before the Reagan and Thatcherite eras of neoliberal reforms in the USA and the UK. But from the 1980s until the present day, it has gradually become standard for both Right and Centrist politicians and commentators to explain and justify the policy shift towards 'workfare' with reference to a section of society that has made reliance on economic support from the state into a way of life: the ideas of 'welfare dependency' and of a 'culture of dependency,' which are meant to describe that way of life, became, and remain, common in political rhetoric.

The issue of dependency cuts across the traditional Left/Right dichotomy of national politics in interesting ways. This is because criticisms of dependency can be grounded in very different accounts of the causes of dependency and can suggest very different solutions to the problem. On the one hand, conservatives (with both a big and a small 'c') have used the ideas of 'welfare dependency' and a 'culture of dependency' to argue for cuts to welfare budgets, but they have also used them to argue for the transformation of welfare programmes in ways that actively intervene in the bad cultural habits that the concepts identify. In other words, while some on the political Right simply favour small government, others focus

P. J. L. Cockburn, *The Politics of Dependence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8_2

instead on 'paternalistic' government policies that seek to shape the behaviour of welfare recipients by incentivising and coercing them into seeking and keeping work, and more generally pushing recipients to conform to an economic life-mode deemed morally acceptable (e.g. having a job).[2]

On the other hand, the issue of dependence exposes other fault lines on the political Left. While few aim to defend 'dependence' as such (although feminists have done much to recast the idea in a positive light, as I discuss below), it is an issue that forces commentators to take up an evaluative stance on welfare state regimes: should they be defended as absolutely necessary to offset the effects of a capitalist economic system in which a section of society is *made* and *kept* poor by the operations of the labour market and the unequal distribution of productive assets? Or is the welfare state indeed part of the problem, and should be replaced by a radically different mode of economic and social organisation, such as the socialist state or so-called property-owning democracy, the latter suggested by the liberal Rawlsian Left of political philosophy?[3]

The problem of reforming welfare states thus provides the context for examining the many different ways in which political commentators, from politicians to academics, try to describe socio-economic relationships using the concept of 'dependence' in ways that imply and support normative conclusions. These conclusions both judge ideal-typical social actors and suggest the proper response to them.

Many social scientists and political commentators have used the idea of welfare dependency to pose important empirical questions about how populations respond to various welfare policies. For example: Do welfare programmes really provide a disincentive for people to find work or is this a myth? What forms of support (in cash or in kind) produce what kinds of patterns of behaviour amongst recipients? How does altering the requirements for receiving state support (e.g. requirements that the recipient is actively seeking work) alter the number and the kind of applicants for this support?

While these are important questions, this chapter has a different agenda—one that is philosophical and theoretical, rather than empirical. My focus is on getting a clearer view of the *normative* work that the concept of dependence is doing in debates about 'welfare dependency,' and I will be trying to get that clearer view by placing the concept of 'welfare dependency' within the context of the broader problem of *economic dependence* in general. In other words, we need to ask: Is there something significantly different, and uniquely bad, about dependence on state-administered welfare payments and services, when compared to all of the other relationships of dependence in which social actors find themselves? If we focus only on the opposition between state support and labour markets as two contrasting sources of income, we narrow our view of economic practices in a way that practically gives the normative question a foregone conclusion: it will be hard to resist the simple conclusion that the contrast between dependence and independence maps neatly onto the contrast between state support and employment in the labour market.

Fortunately, there exists a tradition of political theory that shows the way out of this dead end—a dead end where politicians often seem a bit too happy to turn round in circles. Feminist political theory, and more specifically the critique of economic practices and institutions from the viewpoint of women's emancipation, has profoundly shifted the theoretical terrain on which we can pose questions about dependence. Feminist social and political theorists like Silvia Federici, Carole Pateman, Eva Feder Kittay, Nancy Fraser, Linda Gordon and others question the idea that the state–citizen relationship can be normatively examined in isolation from other important relationships that make up social and economic life as we know it. Fraser and Gordon's seminal article 'A Genealogy of Dependency' was published in 1994, providing a profound resource for commentators sceptical about the simple dependence/independence dichotomy on which critics of the welfare state often drew (and draw). The first, and most important, 'black box' that they (and feminists before and after them) open up, and which radically reframes the state support vs. labour market contrast, is the home and the nuclear family structure. Can our normative evaluation of 'dependence' on the welfare state really be cleanly separated from issues about the web of dependencies in which social actors live within the home: children upon parents, women upon men (historically for status and money), men upon women (historically for the unpaid work that made the male 'bread winner' life-mode possible)? Once the question is posed, the answer seems obvious: of course, these diverse dependencies are interconnected with our normative questions about the contrast between welfare state support and labour market employment.

The feminist interventions of the 1980s and 1990s thoroughly critiqued the welfare dependence discourse prevalent in influential political rhetoric at the time and thoroughly contextualised this normative use of the dependence/independence dichotomy. They have the power to shift our attention from the morally black and white distinctions of 'dependence' and 'independence,' on which the 'welfare dependency' concept draws, to a spectrum of forms of dependence that challenges us to articulate exactly what we value and dislike in each. While politically convenient, the dependence/independence contrast conceals as much as it illuminates. It conceals the fact that all socio-economic positions can be described as embedded in relations of dependence.

But even these profound feminist critiques tend to anchor problems of dependence in the politics of the family and the home and have usually not connected the issue of economic dependence with other key institutions like property and money. One of the central ideas that emerged out of feminist interventions on welfare dependence is that we need to build an ethics of *inter*dependence that could guide policy making. I argue, however, that the turn to an ethics of 'interdependence' doesn't pose the political problem sharply enough, partly because it encourages us to think of issues of dependence principally as issues about support and care. These *are* important issues about dependence, but they do not address the many forms of *economic* dependence that this book is about.

We need to move beyond the home, and explicitly feminist concerns, to a wider discussion of the many forms of economic dependence that we should have in our analytical toolbox when evaluating the problem of 'welfare dependency.' As Gøsta Esping-Andersen pointed out in his classic work on the welfare state, one way to understand the welfare state is precisely as emancipating citizens from '*market* dependence.'[4] On the other hand, Esping-Andersen has himself been criticised for belonging to a the 'mainstream' of political theory that 'still resists the deeper implications of feminist work, and has difficulties assimilating concepts of care, gendered power, dependency, and interdependency.'[5] I am not claiming to develop the deep implications of the feminist agenda in this book. But I will argue that the feminist critique of welfare dependencies rhetoric establishes useful contrasts between structural and practical dependencies, on the one hand, and vulnerability and parasitism on the other. These contrasts need to be made more explicit, and they need to be carried over into the analysis of other institutions that have not been at the heart of welfare dependency debates.

The intent of the chapter, then, is to clear some conceptual ground and to introduce the metaphor of the 'dependence compass,' which points to different senses of dependence relevant to normative reasoning about economic life. I will be suggesting here and throughout the book that the important question that we should be asking ourselves is not 'how do we recognise interdependence?', but rather: What are the specific social and political evils and goods that become concretised in different forms of dependence, whether that is dependence on family, community, state, charity or the owners of various forms of property? And what political choices can we make that create, abolish and reorganise these forms of dependence?

Welfare Reform and the Rhetoric of 'Welfare Dependency'

One of the most important dimensions of welfare state reform in many countries around the world in recent decades has been the development of policies that give the state an active role in pushing and pulling people into formal employment. In this section, I illustrate this trend in the USA and the UK, where it has been accompanied by a great deal of 'welfare dependency' rhetoric. I then focus on the USA, where responses by political theorists (particularly feminists) have been most strongly developed.

Both the USA and the UK have seen welfare reforms in the last 25 years that combine incentives to find and keep formal employment with sanctions for those who fail to do so. On the 'pull' (incentive) side, some reforms (such as those enacted in many states in the USA) allowed recipients of benefits who found work to keep both their benefit payments and a percentage of their new wage for a limited period of time.[6] On the 'push' (sanction) side, policy makers have used various pressures including limits on the period of time that individuals can receive state support, caps on the level of support, compulsory participation in training programmes, tighter testing of recipients' eligibility and sometimes even rules that require welfare recipients take unpaid jobs in order to keep their benefits. In general, these have been called active labour market policies (ALMP), but where they are most demanding for the welfare recipient (and often most controversial), commentators have labelled this as a shift from 'welfare' to 'workfare.'

By the early 1990s, after dependency had been squarely on the political agenda for at least a decade, there was convergence from the Centre and the Right of US party politics on the need for welfare reform.[7] The Democrat Clinton administration of the 1990s was responsible for major reforms, which furthered decentralisation of welfare policy to the individual states and opened the door to workfare policies that varied from state to state. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children programme (AFDC), which had its roots in the 1935 Social Security Act, and which had originally aimed to provide assistance to children 'deprived of parental support or care by reason of death, continued absence from the home, or physical or mental incapacity of the parent,'[8] was finally dismantled in 1996, partly under pressure of demographic changes such as the massive increase in single-parent families and the increase in women's formal employment as a social norm. With so many more mothers in formal employment, the 'non-working' mother on state support became an easier target for criticism. AFDC was replaced by the programme called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which bears the important political point in its title: *temporary* assistance, which presumably terminates in formal employment.[9] The Act that brought TANF into existence was called the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).

In the UK, the most recent Labour governments (1997–2010) oversaw major welfare reforms that sought to integrate welfare recipients into the workforce through financial incentives and sometimes compulsory training and work programmes. These were presented as a series of 'New Deals' for different social groups and involved varying degrees of compulsion depending on the group (e.g. different rules for people under 25, people over 25, people with disabilities, 'lone parents').[10] The trend of linking welfare benefits to work has continued under more recent governments. Workfare policies enacted under the Conservative government (2015–2017) and the previous Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (2010–2015) government have been heavily criticised by trade unions,[11] campaign groups[12] and political commentators[13] for making acceptance of unpaid employment a condition for continuing to receive state support for some social groups.

Accompanying these reforms in both the UK and the USA was political rhetoric and academic commentaries that identified 'welfare dependency' as the major problem that reforms should tackle. When Bill Clinton famously claimed in his 1992 presidential campaign that he would 'end welfare as we know it,' what he meant was that his government would 'break the cycle of welfare dependency': 'It's time to make welfare what he should be' said Clinton 'a second chance, not a way of life.'[14] And President George W. Bush could count on being understood when, in a major speech on welfare he argued that 'I understand leaving welfare is not easy, but it's an essential step toward independence from

Government. Work is the pathway to dignity and to freedom and to self-respect.'[15] Before he became president Donald Trump repeated the same 'welfare dependency' rhetoric in his 2011 book, *Time to Get Tough*, where he claimed to find welfare dependency 'morally offensive' because it 'robs people of the chance to improve.'[16]

In the UK in 1997, the newly elected New Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said to his party's annual conference that 'The new welfare state must encourage work, not dependency.' And the anti-dependency rhetoric continues as a commonplace in more recent years. For example, in 2011 then Conservative Prime Minster David Cameron addressed the UK Parliament on the Welfare Reform Bill (2011), conjuring up imagery of welfare recipients 'trapped in a fog of dependency' and 'hazily' responding to signals sent out by the welfare system.[17] While not as prominent and influential as their counterparts in the USA, political commentators (e.g. from think tanks) in the UK have also tried to strengthen the dependency critique combining statistical analysis with narratives of the effects of the welfare state on the 'character' and 'independence' of citizens.[18]

In the more detailed look at welfare dependency debates below, I focus on the US context where the academic debate on the topic has been most fully developed, both on the side of dependency critics and on the side of the feminist critics of the critics, who I turn to in the next section.

While the general idea of a contrast between 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor clearly has a much longer history, the more specific idea of 'welfare dependency' also goes back considerably further than the political rhetoric illustrated above.[19] Already in the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt argued that 'Continued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber.'[20] The issue of welfare dependency seems to cut across the Left–Right divide. It was in fact scholars on the political centre-Left who developed ideas about the 'culture of poverty' to explain the nature of poverty in the USA in the 1960s. Daniel P. Moynihan, who placed dependency most squarely on the mainstream political agenda with his government discussion paper *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (from 1965),[21] and his later book *The Politics of Guaranteed Income* (from 1973),[22] was a figure who served under both Democrat and Republican administrations and was often frustrated with the political agendas of both.[23] However, it was conservative political commentators in the 1980s and 1990s who developed the 'welfare dependency' idea into a guiding theme justifying welfare reform.

Two prominent and contrasting lines of argument are important to explain. On the one hand, conservative critics of welfare dependency argued that growing welfare budgets in the 1970s had not lowered poverty levels significantly, but had hugely increased the number of 'latent poor': those who would be below the poverty line without government assistance.[24] They argued that what explained these seemingly perverse trends was the fact that welfare support was tempting people away from the labour market by making low-paid jobs unattractive, and thus pulling people from the independent way of life in which income comes from the labour market into the dependent way of life in which income comes from the government. For those who saw welfare *itself* as the problem, the solution was simply to cut welfare, which would have the happy effect of both 'helping' people into independent lives and cutting state budgets.

On the other hand, however, some conservative welfare critics argued not for cutting, but for transforming the welfare system towards a paternalistic workfare system: one in which receipt of benefits would be linked to various kinds of good behaviour requirements.[25] Commentators like Lawrence Mead argued for increased governmental supervision of the lives of poor people: shepherding them into work through workfare programmes; intervening in reproduction and family life by dissuading unwed pregnancy and tutoring young mothers; requiring people to stay in training and educational programmes.[26] In short, 'Telling the Poor What to Do' was said to be acceptable and necessary.[27] Through this paternalistic lens, welfare dependency was viewed as symptomatic of a broader problem: the breakdown of social order (particularly in the inner city) and the weakened grip of traditional virtues and values on poor Americans. Mead approvingly summarised the welfare reforms of the 1990s in grandiose language: 'Those who would be free must first be bound.'[28] One of the striking features of Mead's views is the fact that welfare assistance has become so synonymous with dependence that leaving welfare appears to be a triumph of 'self-reliance' *even* where the person becomes poorer and where the person must now be helped by *family* rather than the state.[29]

The two arguments summarised here propose to end welfare dependency in two contrasting ways: the one with 'smaller government' (i.e. cuts to welfare spending) and the other with 'bigger government' (i.e. paternalistic interventions into the lives of the poor). Despite their differences, however, they share several underlying assumptions that will be the target of feminist criticism in the next section.

First, perhaps the most obvious normative work that the concept of 'dependency' does, especially when used as part of the phrase 'culture of dependency,'[30] is to frame our view of who is responsible for poverty in a society. If dependency is a 'culture,' or a 'way of life' (as Clinton said), this implies that, on the level of the individual, dependency is a kind of *habit* that people have the power to change in themselves (at least if they are given the right chances). The idea of a '*culture*' of dependence also conveniently suggests something that people learn from one another and pass on from one generation to the next. The idea is acceptable for humanitarian liberals because it doesn't blame individuals except insofar as they are caught by a 'culture' that was not of their making; it is acceptable for illiberal conservatives because in the end it allocates collective responsibility to a whole underclass who actively want to stay in their 'culture' and need to be rudely pulled out of it. In short, the concept of a 'culture of dependency' is an extremely powerful shortcut to distributing blame for poverty onto those who suffer it, and perhaps also the state administration that have 'allowed' such habits to develop.

The second salient feature of these arguments is the exclusive focus on the contrast between state support and the labour market: income from the former source is synonymous with dependency; income from the latter source is synonymous with independence. It is as though these two kinds of socio-economic positions were all that the world was made up of. On the one hand, it is as though dependence on the welfare state was the only kind of dependence in a society, so that leaving *this* dependence automatically implies some kind of emancipation, regardless of whether the money now comes from a job, a family or a charity. On the other hand, it is assumed that economic independence is synonymous with wage earning: the discussion is all about getting *jobs*, as though this was the highest aspiration that the poor could have when it comes to economic practices. The neat mapping of dependence onto welfare support and independence onto paid formal employment gives this argumentation a striking descriptive and normative simplicity, which is extremely attractive for politicians trying to tell convincing stories about society and its ills.

Third, the breakdown of the nuclear two-parent family is a prominent theme in both the small government and big government versions of dependency critique. But the family features here as a *moral* unit rather than as an *economic* one. The breakdown of the nuclear two-parent family is discussed as a symptom of declining virtues and general irresponsibility, rather than as a fact that poses particular sets of economic problems for mothers and children. Rather than a threat to the family, forcing people into work will actually be a boost for the traditional family structure by making single-parent families economically unviable. The idea of the family as the site of unpaid work is completely absent from the discussion.

Fourthly, these arguments assume that the problem of welfare dependency is *primarily* a problem about the welfare state, and only secondarily, if at all, a problem about the labour market. The ideas of 'welfare dependency' and a 'culture of dependency' focus our attention on the things that tie welfare recipients to the state, rather than the things that repel them from the labour market: such as low wages, bad working conditions and lack of jobs where people live. While authors like Mead do believe in mixing coercion that pushes people with incentives that pull people into the labour market, they certainly never develop this into an argument for drastically improved working conditions through labour legislation that is tough on employers when it comes to working hours and wages. The assumption is that insecure and low-paying jobs really are a step-up for everyone—if only they could see it that way.

We can perhaps understand the political attractiveness of these portraits of an irresponsible underclass, when we note that while substantially different from one another (e.g. in the levels and kind of public health care provision) the UK and the USA have both tended to structure their welfare policies in ways that address provision primarily to those who cannot afford the alternatives offered by the market, i.e. to the poor rather than the middle classes.[31] In the USA, 'welfare' has become synonymous with only those redistributive programmes that support the poorest in society.[32] This contrasts, for example, with the structure of welfare states (paradigmatically the Scandinavian welfare states) that have invested a great deal in attracting the loyalty of a middle class that identify a much broader range of state provisions as 'welfare': including childcare provision, relatively generous unemployment insurance and state health care. Where welfare services, on the contrary, are widely regarded as supportive of primarily the poorest section of society, it is relatively easy for those who do not use these services (or receive these payments) to imagine a special 'culture' attached to them.

It is not the task of the present discussion to empirically investigate the accuracy of this idea: the aim of this section has been to *reconstruct the arguments* that present 'welfare dependency' and the 'culture of dependency' as serious social problems; the aim of the next section is to identify the *conceptual* limitations of the arguments thus reconstructed. I have already begun to suggest the blind spots and implicit assumptions that make their accounts at all plausible to begin with. In the next section, I turn to feminist political economy to develop a series of more detailed criticisms of these blind spots.

Feminist Critiques of Patriarchal Capitalism

The welfare dependency arguments canvassed above treat the family as a black box, in the sense that who depends upon who within the family unit is not even mentioned as relevant to the question of dependency on the welfare state. The unpaid economy and the structure of social relations within families remain truly invisible in the 'welfare dependency' discussions.

Articulating dependence as a political problem has been at the heart of feminist political theory since its beginnings.[33] It is perhaps the oldest lesson of feminism that the family is not only a moral unit but also an economic and political one. Not only did marriage contracts for centuries deprive women of their property under laws of coverture, but the family has historically been and remains in many societies, the site of unpaid work undertaken by women: from care work to domestic work like cleaning and cooking. The family is thus a social unit, governed by both official laws and unofficial norms, where the monetary economy meets the non-monetary economy. The now old-fashioned ideal of a nuclear family comprised of a male 'bread-winner' participating in the labour market and a female caregiver undertaking unpaid work in the home is one model for how that meeting of the formal and informal sides of the economy should be organised. As Carole Pateman put it referring to public life and political theory: 'The sturdy figure of the "worker," the artisan, in clean overalls, with a bag of tools and lunchbox, is always accompanied by the ghostly figure of his wife.'[34]

This model of the patriarchal nuclear family, with only a male breadwinner, is not the dominant form of family organisation today in many countries including the USA.[35] It was only realised on a large scale in capitalist democracies in the period between World War II and the early 1970s.[36] However, it does seem that the ideological grip of this arrangement has left a profound mark on the ways that questions of political and economic justice are posed in public life and in academic scholarship.

Many normative problems about welfare state organisation revolve around fundamental questions concerning the proper relationships between states, markets and families. Trying to understand those relations from the perspective of women's emancipation provides a very concrete starting point for showing the interconnection between power and politics, between, that is, social norms and relations on the one hand, and institutional frameworks of rights and duties on the other.[37]

One key idea that has come out of feminist political theory is that human beings are *interdependent*, and that recognition of this fact of human existence radically reframes normative questions about political and economic institutions. As Ann Shola Orloff puts it when summarising feminist scholarship on welfare state regimes, 'Drawing on the experiences of women's political action and an understanding of interdependency as the basic human condition, new citizenship rights essential to emancipation have been enunciated by gender scholars….'[38] This new conceptual anchoring in 'interdependence' is very important, but also restricted in certain respects, which I will examine in the final part of this chapter. The task of this section is to present feminist accounts of dependence and interdependence that show the serious blind spots (to put it mildly) of the dependency critics discussed above. If this *Gestalt* shift on 'dependency' is convincing, we will then be in a position to evaluate what we can and can't do with the concept of 'interdependence.' I begin here by painting left-wing feminist approaches to economic practices and welfare states in broad strokes and then move on to feminist arguments that specifically respond to 'welfare dependency' rhetoric.

In a recent discussion of the historical place of care work in capitalist economies, Nancy Fraser concludes with the claim that women's emancipation '…requires reinventing the production-reproduction distinction and reimagining the gender order.'[39] This idea of 're-inventing the production-reproduction distinction' expresses a viewpoint that is characteristic of a profoundly insightful tradition of feminist political theories about economic dependency.

Major contributions to this tradition emerged in the 1970s with feminists like Silvia Federici and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, who pushed the critique of capitalism beyond Marx's famous analyses of the exploitation of labour by examining the relationship between paid and unpaid work in modern capitalist societies. While Marx acknowledged the home as the site of the reproduction of labour power (where labourers nourish and repair their bodies enough to return to work the next day), he never identified the gendered dimension of this process or conceptualised women's reproductive work as unpaid labour.[40] Federici has aimed to make this hidden foundation of capitalist social and economic organisation visible, both by describing it in political theory and by taking part in campaigns like Wages for Housework (started in the 1970s) which aimed to force the public and politicians to see the economy within the home.[41] What Federici shares with theorists like Nancy Fraser and Carole Pateman is a sense for the cruel paradoxes concerning social and economic organisation that are revealed when we unpack issues of economic dependencies. To summarise this, we can use the ideas of 'structural' and 'practical' dependencies outlined in the Introduction.

On the one hand, we have a basic *structural dependence* of the formal economy on the informal economy (or roughly equivalent: of production upon reproduction). These are the ways that men (in aggregate) depend upon women (in aggregate). On the other hand, this structural dependence is in fact maintained through forms of *practical dependence* that make individual women dependent upon men within the traditional nuclear family unit.[42] In the 1980s, Pateman pushed the argument even further by claiming that not only is the 'independence' of men (as wage earners) predicated on the practical dependence (i.e. subordination) of women, but so too is the *welfare state* as a form of political organisation which now draws on both women's unpaid care work (in the home) and their paid wage work (in taxes).[43] More pessimistically and more radically than Federici, Pateman points out that 'Some feminists have enthusiastically endorsed the welfare state….However, the enthusiasm is met with the rejoiner from other feminists that for women to look to the welfare state is merely to exchange dependence on individual men for dependence on the state.'[44]

While these groundbreaking analyses would be applicable in any patriarchal and capitalist welfare state, the growth of dependency rhetoric and the welfare reforms in the USA in the 1990s meant that feminists now saw their diagnoses amply confirmed in explicit political rhetoric and policy making. Writing in 1994, two years before the PRWORA, Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon identified 'dependency' as a 'keyword of US politics.'[45] In their analysis of this keyword, they combined historical research with philosophical critique to identify shifts in the meanings of 'dependency' over time. With the shift from preindustrial English society to industrial capitalism, we see also a shift from a world in which 'dependency' was used to describe an overarching condition of subordination, to a world in which different forms of dependence were beginning to be differentiated and cast in various normative lights. While in preindustrial society 'dependency' could capture economic, political and legal elements of social status all at once by contrasting the 'independent' heads of households with everyone else in those households (from wives and children in the immediate household to tenant farmers in the extend household), various historical developments including industrialisation and colonisation set the scene for the development of distinct senses of 'dependency' including an *economic* sense, a *socio-legal* sense, a *political* sense and a *moral/psychological* sense.

One of Fraser and Gordon's key points is that over time much of the 'dependency' discourse has shifted into a moral/psychological register, which makes dependency into a character trait rather than the outcome of a social process. The idea of dependency as a form of *social subordination* has all but disappeared with the growth of this view of dependency as a kind of 'personality disorder,' which particularly attaches to the single mothers receiving aid under AFDC.[46] As they point out, this can seem sadly ironic when put into historical context: 'Apparently lost, at least for now, are the struggles of the 1960s that aimed to recast AFDC as an entitlement in order to promote recipients' independence.'[47]

Since the welfare reforms of 1996, Eva Feder Kittay has done the work of refocussing our attention on the webs of social relations in which issues of dependence arise.[48] In particular, she argues that '[w]e need to shift our attention on dependency away from the social, political, economic, and moral registers that Fraser and Gordon explicate. For there is another deployment of the term that gets lost and that we can retrieve in the acronym AFDC—Aid to Families with *Dependent* Children.'[49] And she goes on, 'The welfare "dependency" that so exercises the critics of welfare is not the dependency of the children, but that of their mothers. Yet those two dependencies are linked.'[50]

Pointing to the links between 'inevitable' dependencies on the one hand (e.g. of children upon parents, or disabled people upon carers) and 'constructed' dependencies on the other (e.g. of women on men), this kind of social relations approach anchors feminist critique in the specificity of the care relation.[51] For many people in society, their primary responsibility is to care for someone, and this care places them (the carer) in a vulnerable position. Kittay describes such people a 'dependency workers' and argues that by caring for others, they themselves often become dependent in important ways (e.g. on the state). In short, certain forms of dependency are *derived* from other forms. If we take the time to follow these chains of dependence, we will find that different people have vastly different real possibilities for taking on the paradigmatic 'independent' role of wage earner. What we need to abandon is a contractarian worldview in which we imagine people as blank slates and all social relations as qualitatively equivalent to one another. By contrast, an approach that takes real social relationships seriously makes us ask about the *vulnerabilities* that characterise different people's positions in society. It is this idea of a 'vulnerable subject' that Martha Fineman has taken forward as she picked up the threads of these dependency debates in the 2000s.[52]

From the vantage point provided by feminist political theory, then, Mead's idea that welfare reform should force people out into formal employment, and that this will be a boost to family cohesion, appears to have gotten everything backwards.

Feminist Lessons About Dependency: 'Interdependence' as a New Key Concept?

Feminist political theorists, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, have made profound contributions to understanding the home and the family unit as an integrated part of the economic and political arrangements that we know as welfare state capitalism, a part that remains practically invisible in most political debate and policy making. They have also directly challenged the idea of 'welfare dependency' as it has become used in academic commentaries and political rhetoric since the 1980s. Increases in women's formal employment and in men's reproductive work (caregiving and domestic work) are, of course, important to note when interpreting these feminist arguments, and should caution us not to simplify the message here by claiming that the divide between paid and unpaid work maps neatly onto gender divisions. However, these contributions remain profoundly important for at least two reasons.

First of all, the project of women's emancipation is clearly not complete: gender pay-gaps, unequal representation in national politics and unequal burdens of care work remain across most of the world. Second, and more important for the purposes of the present argument, feminist views of economic dependence distil, in a particularly concise way, an important critical point: looking at different social actors' *vulnerabilities* (to coercion, to poverty, to abuse) tells us more about the state of social justice than looking at the formal rights that they have. This lesson is not exclusively a feminist one, but it has been feminists who have most clearly linked this perspective on social justice to the problems of hostile 'dependency' rhetoric and welfare reform. The feminist political theories reviewed here give us *context* (in Fraser and Gordon's genealogy), *analytical clarity* (in Federici and Pateman's political economy) and a *moral foothold* (in Kittay's social relations) for confronting 'welfare dependency' rhetoric.

From these discussions, 'interdependence' emerges as a key idea that is implicit, but also often explicit, in the arguments. Kittay, for example, suggests that 'we need a new concept of interdependence' that can help us to see the chains of dependence (or 'nested dependencies'), such as children on caregivers, caregivers upon wage earners, wage earners upon employers and employers upon the global economy.[53]

Reorienting theory and rhetoric about economic justice around 'interdependence' can be descriptively helpful and ethically appealing. It is a concept that prompts us to follow the links between various spheres of social life, and to approach issues of social and economic justice with this multiplicity in mind. Interdependence—in the broadest sense—is a fact about our world of economic practices, and recognising this fact helps us to see why we need to reform our social institutions and practices such that serious vulnerability does not fall only on one social group within these networks of relations (e.g. upon single mothers and their children). Thus, as a description of the nature of socio-economic organisation, recognising 'interdependence' is a crucial step in our thinking.

However, the idea of interdependence it is less useful for understanding the qualitative differences between different forms of social, political and economic organisation: interdependence is a fact within socialist societies as much as capitalist ones or imagined anarchist ones, but the forms of dependence in each of these are (or would be) radically different from one another. While the concept of 'interdependence' dissolves the clear moral fault lines that, for example, made dependence on the state appear *obviously* worse than dependence on the family structure, it also risks inadvertently *depoliticising* dependence by treating it as a universal human condition, not a political one that comes in very different varieties. 'Interdependence' is a concept that can suggest a 'flat' social world, in which we just need to *recognise* everyone's contributions in order to provide the necessary moral gestalt shift.[54] Emphasising interdependence is thus an important reminder about the complex webs of relationships in any society, but it is not an *answer* to the political problems that people struggle over.

My suggestion, then, is that the most important lesson of Kittay's work, and one that Fineman has developed, is not that people are interdependent, but that there are real political choices to be made about the social organisation of *vulnerability* in society.[55] My criticism of 'interdependence' as a new key concept, then, is not that it mis-describes the world, but that it suggests a *permanence* to dependency relations, on the one hand, and a *malleability* to the political solutions that address this dependence, on the other. By contrast, I think that the *creation* and *destruction* of *specific forms of dependence* through the reform of economic institutions cannot be adequately described with the idea of 'interdependence.'

Gøsta Esping-Andersen captured this process of creation and destruction extremely clearly when he identified the welfare state as both an emancipatory project and one that *creates* dependence. On the one hand, 'The social democratic regime's policy of emancipation addresses both the market and the traditional family…The ideal is not to maximize dependence on the family, but capacities for individual independence.'[56] On the other hand, the model of the social democratic welfare state 'crowds out the market, and consequently constructs an essentially universal solidarity in favour of the welfare state. All benefit; *all are dependent*; and all will presumably feel obliged to pay.'[57] Similar to Pateman, then,[58] we here meet the view, with which I fully agree, that dependence on the state's protection is still dependence; it's just that the world is full of forms of dependence that may be worse.

Building on Feminist Critique: Two Lines of Development

Social and political theorising about economic dependence needs to be developed further in at least two ways: the first *deepens* our view of economic dependence, and the second *widens* our view of economic dependence. Let us look at these challenges in turn.

By 'deepening our view,' I mean exploring the range of things that we can plausibly mean by 'economic dependence.' Gordon and Fraser's conceptual history of the idea shows how we got to welfare dependency rhetoric, but can political theory reconstruct a sense of dependence that can be put to progressive use? The feminist discussions summarised above already suggest that there is something distorted about welfare dependency rhetoric, but there remains work to be done on showing exactly what kind of distortion this is. To show this, it may be helpful to imagine four points on a compass that we can use to navigate the possible meanings of economic dependence. The north–south axis marks the difference between 'practical' and 'structural' senses of the term: a difference in *descriptive* framing. The east–west axis marks the difference between 'vulnerability' and 'parasitism': a difference in *normative* connotations.

As I outlined in the Introduction and began to discuss above, my contrast between practical and structural senses of dependence is an attempt to capture what is going on where feminist political theorists turn the dependency problem on its head. At its most radical, the debate highlights the contrast between *dependence as a product of power* and *dependence as a right of the powerful*. It contrasts the dependence of welfare recipients with the dependence of those who benefit from unpaid housework (whether that is men in generally, or capitalists more specifically). It contrasts the *personal* characteristics of individuals and their interpersonal relations with the *impersonal* relationships amongst actors in an economy. The contrast is, broadly speaking, between practical and structural senses of dependence. And with this contrast on the table, we have radically new points of reference around which arguments can be built: for example, the contrast between practical and structural dependence allows us to describe gendered power relations in a way that has been missed by the individual-focussed welfare dependency rhetoric.

On the normative ('east-west') axis, we have the contrast between a critical sense of economic dependence as unfair gain at the expense of others (parasitism) and a sympathetic sense of economic dependence as a condition of vulnerability. The feminist arguments looked at above made us think about how the practical dependence of unpaid women is actually a form of vulnerability. Their structural dependence on the state may make them look parasitical momentarily—but only as long as the structural dependence of men and the monetary economy on the unpaid work of women remains invisible.

By contrast, the welfare dependency rhetoric voiced in public debate by politicians only focusses on the parasitic sense of dependence and makes this charge with little attention to parasitic dependence elsewhere in the economy. Furthermore, with ideas like a 'culture of dependency' this rhetoric also oscillates between the structural and practical senses of dependence without clearly grasping the contrast between them. Sometimes, the individuals are in focus and sometimes the institutions that channel resources to them. What this discursive framing has no means of expressing is the possibility that those who are practically dependent may be the very people upon whom other key capitalist institutions (e.g. the labour market) are structurally dependent. It is this possibility that I will look at in Chapter 3, with Marxist feminist views of domestic labour.

I suggest that this 'dependence compass,' which differentiates different senses of dependence, can help to show up the harmful vagueness of some critiques of dependence and to unpack the importance and force of the theoretical arguments that have confronted them.

The second line of development in political theorising about economic dependence means widening our view of the range of social relations and institutions that structure our dependence in society. Welfare dependency rhetoric tried to limit the problem of dependence to a question about the relations between individuals and the welfare state, on the one hand, and the labour market, on the other. But the question of whether we work at a job or receive our income as payments from a state administration does not even scratch the surface of the multitude of ways in which people depend on one another in society. Feminist critics have gone a long way in pointing this out in their critiques of patriarchy and their refocus on relationships of care in families. Nonetheless, our view can be broadened further. For example, capitalist welfare states today have not even come close to eradicating inheritance as the primary mechanism for the reproduction of privilege in society. In other words (put in dependency terms), people who end up dependent upon the state are highly unlikely to have inherited much wealth; those who are not dependent on the state are so largely because they have been economically dependent on someone else: their parents. While peddlers of 'welfare dependency' rhetoric are happy to talk about the inheritance of a 'culture of dependency' over generations, they seem less enthusiastic about talking about the inheritance of wealth.

Two of the most important institutions that structure dependence relationships in society are money and property. How we institute these is crucial for dependence in all four senses outlined above. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the political stakes involved in these institutions from the point of view of how they do and could structure relations of dependence.

Conclusion: 'Welfare Dependency' Revisited

The simple conclusion of this chapter is that welfare dependency is *one* form of economic dependence. It can only appear as *the one and only* form of economic dependence when we imagine that our economic lives are exhausted by a relation to the state on the one hand, and the market on the other. This is, as I will try to show in the rest of the book, an extremely limited socio-economic ontology with which to begin thinking about social and economic justice. By taking market participation as paradigmatic of economic independence, it is a view that conveniently causes a number of power relationships and economic institutions to vanish: these are the relations of power structured through the family, the ownership of property, the money we use and the rights of wealth (to rent and to transfer across generations). The subtraction of these relationships and institutions from our worldview has distorted the problem of economic dependence to such an extent that authors like Mead think that the solution to economic dependence lies in 'Telling the Poor What to Do.'

The present argument is not normative in the sense of suggesting that those receiving state support make a legitimate choice, if it is true that some have adopted dependence upon the welfare state as a form of life. It does not even deny the possibility that this form of dependence might produce life-modes and habits that are damaging to individuals and society in the long run. We do, of course, need most people to do paid or unpaid work if society is going to carry on, as any political economist would point out. Rather differently, though, the *cultural* critique of welfare dependence reveals not economic realities but mere prejudice: for example, the conservative focus in the USA on the supposed links between welfare receipt and pregnancy out of wedlock is both empirically weak and morally disgraceful.[59]

So while I am not defending any particular economic life-mode here, I *am* arguing that so-called 'welfare dependency' must always be judged in relation to the other forms of dependence against which we can compare it. If critics of welfare dependency truly believe that dependence on the state is more problematic than dependence on family networks, then they need to argue their case in these terms. If they believe that dependence on the welfare state is worse than dependence on unstable global markets that determine the distribution of jobs, then they need to argue their case in these terms. If they believe that dependence on the state is less legitimate than dependence on inheritance, then they need to say why. Rather than assuming that it is possible to legislate 'dependence' away, what we really should be asking is: Is *this* the distribution of gains and vulnerabilities that we want to institute in our societies, and if not, how should they be redistributed so that gains and vulnerabilities fall to different actors and practices?

By starting with the dichotomy between economic dependence and economic independence, we may be unwittingly accepting a broader view of socio-economic order that makes certain social relationships and certain practices invisible, sacrificed to the need for rhetorical simplicity. It is, at the very least, stunningly arrogant for politicians and commentators to describe a whole section of society as 'dependent' without examining either the dependencies of the wealthier classes (on inherited wealth, on rent, on government subsidy) or the other forms of dependency that welfare states seemed to offer an alternative to (dependency on family, on the moods of labour markets, on privately organised charity). *These* are the choices that critics of the welfare state need to squarely confront. Feminist political theory made the need for this reframing obvious, but I have suggested that there are limitations to forms of political theory anchored in the concept of 'interdependence.' We must choose our dependencies, since these are qualitatively different from one another, and the contours of social, economic and political organisation depend in important ways on which forms of dependence we deem preferable to others.

Notes

1. In the following, I use 'dependence' and 'dependency' interchangeably. While one *might* attach different meanings to the two terms (perhaps, e.g., suggesting that 'dependency' is a normative concept while 'dependence' is a descriptive one), I am not aware of a well-established philosophical or ordinary-language precedent for doing so. While there is no space to argue the point here, I would further suggest that despite being a common technique within philosophical method, the exploitation of linguistic nuances usually begs more questions than it solves.
2. In the US contest, the contrast between the political commentaries of Charles Murray (largely in the 1980s) and of Lawrence Mead (largely in the 1990s) illustrates this contrast well. Their positions are discussed in what follows.
3. Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson, eds. *Property Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

4. Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 22.
5. Ann Shola Orloff, "Gendering the Comparative Analysis of Welfare States: An Unfinished Agenda," *Sociological Theory* 27(3) (2009): 320.
6. Jeff Grogger and Lynn A. Karoly, *Welfare Reform: Effects of a Decade of Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
7. Brendon O'Connor, *A Political History of the American Welfare System: When Ideas Have Consequences* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).
8. Quoted in Jeff Grogger and Lynn A. Karoly, *Welfare Reform: Effects of a Decade of Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 10–11.
9. 'All of the policy and program changes of the 1990s were motivated by the desire to change the behavior of families on welfare or at risk of entering welfare. Reduced dependency would be reflected in lower caseloads, and economic self-sufficiency would translate into greater work effort and perhaps even higher earnings and income.' Grogger and Karoly, *Welfare Reform*, 34.
10. Mike Brewer, "Welfare Reform in the UK: 1997–2007" (Report, Institute for Fiscal Studies, UK, 2007).
11. TUC, "Say No to Workfare: A TUC Charter on Work Experience" (Online Article at the TUC Website, 2012), accessed 10 November 2016, https://www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/labour-market/say-no-workfare-tuc-charter-work-experience.
12. Paul Treloar, "Rights (and Wrongs) of Sanctions" (Online Article at Child Poverty Action Group Website [Blog Section], 2014), accessed 20 November 2016, http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/rights-and-wrongs-sanctions.
13. Simon Duffy, "Workfare Is Modernised Slavery," *The Huffington Post, Huffpost Politics, the Blog*, 27 February 2013, accessed 15 October 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-simon-duffy/workfare-is-modernised-slavery_b_2773051.html.
14. Bill Clinton, "A Plan to End Welfare as We Know It" (Television Broadcast, 1992), https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/bill-clinton-in-1992-ad-a-plan-to-end-welfare-as-we-know-it/2016/08/30/9e6350f8-6ee0-11e6-993f-73c693a89820_video.html.
15. George W. Bush, "Remarks at West Ashley High School in Charleston" (Speech, South Carolina, 29 July 2002), accessed 16 November 2016. Transcript available at: http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=63040.
16. Donald J. Trump, *Time to Get Tough: Making America Great Again* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2011), 107.

17. David Cameron, "Prime Minister's Speech on Welfare Reform Bill" (Speech, Westminster, 17 February 2011), accessed 15 December 2016. Transcript available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-on-welfare-reform-bill.
18. David Green, *Benefit Dependency: How Welfare Undermines Independence* (London: Civitas, 1998); David Green, *Individualists Who Cooperate: Education and Welfare Reform Befitting a Free People* (London: Civitas, 2009); Ben Cackett and David Green, "Work and Benefit Dependency Since 1997" (Report, Civitas, UK, 2005), accessed 6 January 2016, http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/workDependencyBriefingApr05.pdf.
19. Brendon O'Connor, "The Intellectual Origins of 'Welfare Dependency'," *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 36(3) (2001).
20. Quoted in O'Connor, "Welfare Dependency," 223.
21. Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965). The title of the paper also illustrates the racial dimension of dependency discourses in the US context of the time.
22. Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Politics of Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan* (New York: Random House, 1973).
23. O'Connor, *A Political History*, 98–99.
24. Charles Murray, "The Two Wars Against Poverty," *The Public Interest* 69 (1982).
25. Lawrence Mead, "Telling the Poor What to Do," *The Public Interest* 132 (1998).
26. "…today 'welfare reform' largely means that the government seeks to supervise poor citizens." Ibid., 97.
27. See title of Mead's article above.
28. Ibid., 109.
29. Ibid., 111.
30. For an example of this rhetoric from a prominent UK politician, see Iain Duncan Smith, "Labour Only Stands for Welfare Dependency," *The Telegraph*, Online Edition, 15 February 2015, accessed 5 November 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/comment/11413813/Iain-Duncan-Smith-Labour-only-stands-for-welfare-dependency.html.
31. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds*, 31.
32. O'Connor, *A Political History*, 8.
33. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 [1792]).
34. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 131.

35. While the participation of women in the labour market has grown dramatically over time, and men's share of housework and care work has increased (in the US at least), in families where only one parent is formally employed is still overwhelmingly more likely that this is the father rather than the mother (see Council of Economic Advisors, "The Economics of Fatherhood and Work" [Report, 2014a], https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/working_fathers_presentation.pdf). More than 40% of mothers are now the sole or primary source of income in their family (see Council of Economic Advisors, "Nine Facts About American Families and Work" [Report, 2014b], 4, accessed 5 January 2016, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nine_facts_about_family_and_work_real_final.pdf. While mothers' labour force participation averaged at about 69.9% in the US in 2015, married mothers were less likely to be seeking work or in work than unmarried mothers (there was about a 7% difference between the two groups in 2015). This shows that the patriarchal breadwinner family structure is not the statistical norm, although it may well remain a valued cultural model that explains the lower rates of labour market participation amongst married women who are more likely to have the option of leaving the labour market and actively living outside of this model (see Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Characteristics of Families Survey" [Report, 2016], accessed 15 December 2016, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.nr0.htm.
36. Orloff, "Gendering," 325.
37. Ann Shola Orloff, "Remaking Power and Politics," *Social Science History* 36(1) (2012).
38. Ann Shola Orloff, "Gendering," 334.
39. Nancy Fraser, "The Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100 (2016): 117.
40. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 93–96.
41. Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 8.
42. '…[capital] has also disciplined the male worker, by making 'his' woman dependent on his work and his wage, and trapped him in this discipline by giving him a servant after he himself has done so much serving at the factory or the office.' (Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 17).
43. Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 203.
44. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 199–200.
45. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of *Dependency*: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19(2) (1994): 309.
46. Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of *Dependency*," 331.

47. Ibid., 328.
48. Eva Feder Kittay, "Welfare, Dependency, and a Public Ethic of Care," *Social Justice* 25(1) (1998); Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen F. Feder, "Introduction," in *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, ed. Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen F. Feder (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
49. Kittay, "Welfare, Dependency," 129.
50. Ibid.
51. For a range of contributions to feminist political theory focused on the care relation see Kittay and Feder, *The Subject of Care*.
52. Martha Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2004); Martha Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20(1) (2008).
53. Kittay, "Welfare, Dependency," 133.
54. Kittay avoids this pitfall, by explicitly noting that her interest in interdependency is not in relations of reciprocity (see Kittay, "Welfare Dependency", 133).
55. 'The appropriate contrast between a dependency worker and other workers is not between those who are self-reliant and those who are dependent, but between those whose labor results in some sorts of vulnerabilities rather than others [i.e. vulnerabilities to market failure rather than family break-down]' (see Kittay, "Welfare Dependency," 136).
56. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds*, 28.
57. Ibid. (my emphasis).
58. See note 44.
59. For an empirical study of the effects of the 1996 reforms in these terms, see Lingxin Hao and Andrew J. Cherlin, "Welfare Reform and Teenage Pregnancy, Childbirth, and School Dropout," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(1) (2004).

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CHAPTER 3

Unproductive People

In a study of the economic categories used in the collection of census data in the UK and the USA during the nineteenth century, Nancy Folbre notes that 'By 1900, the notion that married women without paying jobs outside the home were "dependents" had acquired the status of scientific fact.'[1] Continuously repositioned within a shifting set of census categories, such as 'productive' and 'unproductive,' 'occupied' and 'not occupied,' 'gainfully employed' and 'not gainfully employed,' and 'dependent,' women performing unpaid housework, usually as wives to men working for a wage, was gradually pushed into the same categories as such figures as children and retirees.[2]

The shift can be explained by the conjunction of theoretical dogma and moral bias. On the one hand, the production of exchange values—values that become visible as prices in market exchanges—had come to be so paradigmatic of what economic activity consists in that the production of use values and essential services outside of the market economy had become invisible to the developing science of economics; on the other hand, this dovetailed with a moral ideal of family life that was highly gendered, and entailed a separation of socio-economic roles for a 'bread-winner' husband and a 'supported' wife. What Folbre brilliantly illustrates is the link here between supposedly value-neutral theoretical and bureaucratic concepts ('unproductive') and implicitly moral categories (such as 'dependent') that carry political and social consequences.

Across history, a colourful array of figures has been suspected of being unproductive. Adam Smith pointed to soldiers, priests, lawyers, doctors,

P. J. L. Cockburn, *The Politics of Dependence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8_3

puppeteers, buffoons, musicians, singers, dancers and even sovereigns[3]; Marxists have debated a great deal about the unproductivity of merchants, retailers, housewives, state workers, supervisors and more. Folbre finds, in her survey of nineteenth-century censuses (in addition to housewives) paupers, homeless children, prisoners and convicts.[4] Several of these figures—especially state workers, service workers and housewives—find themselves shifted back and forth across the line between 'productive' and 'unproductive.' Thus, behind this array of figures, we find not only different ways of identifying 'unproductive labour,' but different reasons for doing so, and different perspectives on economic practice.

This chapter continues to build on feminist analyses of women's social and economic roles within patriarchal capitalist economies. But rather than focus on the political discourse of welfare dependency and the feminist responses to that discourse, it delves into a theoretical debate about so-called unproductive labour and the applicability of that label to unpaid domestic work. While the concept of 'dependence' is not centre stage here, debates about unproductive labour do touch upon issues of dependence in significant ways.

First of all, many feminists have emphasised the subordination of women by men in patriarchal households within the capitalist economy, and drawn on the senses of dependence that focus on practical (daily, individual) dependence and vulnerability. But they have also tried to show that capitalism (at least as it functioned in the mid-twentieth century) was parasitical upon unpaid labour and, in my terms, structurally dependent upon it. Unpaid housework was not, they argued, incidental, but integral, to the status quo of capitalist production. In my terms, the practical dependence of individual unpaid domestic workers belied the structural dependence of the monetary economy on their work as a whole.

Second, the debates about unproductive labour illustrate an important point about *perspective* and economic categories; a point which applies to both the concept of 'unproductive labour' and the concept of 'dependence.' The point is this: the meaning of 'unproductive,' like the meaning of 'dependence,' will vary depending on whether we are describing social roles and relationships from a perspective within capitalism and the monetary economy, or from a perspective outside of this historically specific mode of production and exchange. There is no normatively neutral ground from which to pin down the meanings of these terms.

Third, the two towering figures referred to in debates about unproductive labour, Adam Smith and Karl Marx, both suggested—if only in passing—that unproductive workers were essentially dependent upon the efforts of productive workers in an economy. While later Marxists have stressed that we cannot map the distinction between productive and unproductive labour onto the class structure of capitalist societies,[5] it is hard to ignore the way in which Marx's and Smith's comments set up a hierarchy of economic functions in which some are more dispensable than others.

The idea of 'unproductive labour' is not alive today in public debate or theory in the sense that the idea of 'welfare dependency' certainly is. The distinction between productive and unproductive labour lost its importance for the mainstream of economic theorising with the rise of marginal utility theory and the decline of labour theories of value towards the end of the nineteenth century. It lived on, however, in Marxist political economy, and was a focal point for important debates in this field in the 1960s and 1970s. The sense that some people's work was essentially 'empty' was also evident in political discourse in the 1970s. For example, one prominent political commentator worried in a UK national newspaper that 'As our economy contracts, there are fewer and fewer "real" jobs, and more and more phoney ones…Britain is in danger of becoming a Parasite State, where more and more ghost workers are supported by fewer and fewer active, productive workers.'[6] I would suggest that this kind of worry has not left us, even if the theoretical and normative language has changed since then. While we may not hear a great deal about 'unproductive labour' or the 'parasite state' from economists or politicians today, many of the questions that prompted the use of these terms remain important in public life: Are all sectors of an economy equally important in the process of value creation within society? Is it true, as some politicians like to suggest,[7] that the provision of essential public services (e.g. publically funded health care) is *dependent upon* value creation in the private sector? Do some forms of labour contribute *directly* to value creation, while others contribute only *indirectly*? Could societies *do without* some forms of labour (finance), but could *not do without* others (farming)?

For modern economists, these questions will appear confused; value, they will tell you, is not determined by the nature of the good, or by how and where it was made, but simply by how much people want that thing—and hence how much they are willing to pay for it under conditions of scarcity. This chapter is not an attempt to dispute that claim. But it will argue that the questions listed above, which modern economics has washed its hands of, still matter in our normative and political thinking about economic practices; we have just (most of us) stopped making 'theories' about them. Instead of being an explicit part of economic theory and political rhetoric today, the idea of unproductive labour has now taken on a ghostly existence—one that emerges out of the mist at opportune moments of political scapegoating, usually where the public sector is slashed.

Theoretical debates about the unpaid domestic work of women are an important anchor for the present discussion because they help us to see the social and political stakes connected with an ostensibly dry and technical economic issue. When Rosa Luxemburg condemned bourgeois women as the 'parasites of the parasites of the social body,' she made an exception for those who had 'jobs or professions.'[8] What she went on to say about productive and unproductive work is worth quoting at length because it illustrates both her commitment to labelling domestic work as 'unproductive' and her acute awareness of the historical specificity—the capital-centric logic—of this label.

> Economically and socially, the women of the exploiting classes are not an independent segment of the population. Their only social function is to be tools of the natural propagation of the ruling classes. By contrast, the women of the proletariat are economically independent. They are productive for society like the men. By this I do not mean their bringing up children or their housework which helps men support their families on scanty wages. This kind of work is not productive *in the sense of the present capitalist economy* no matter how enormous an achievement the sacrifices and energies spent, the thousand little efforts add up to. But this is the private affair of the worker, his happiness and blessing, and for this reason nonexistent for our present society. As long as capitalism and the wage system rule, *only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit. From this point of view*, the music-hall dancer whose legs sweep profit into her employer's pocket is a productive worker, whereas all the toil of the proletarian women and mothers in the four walls of their homes is considered unproductive. This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy.[9] (emphasis added)

Despite its eloquence (and also harshness), there is significant ambiguity in Luxemburg's attitude towards housework expressed here. On the one hand, Luxemburg implies that when women work for a wage, they become economically independent like men. But by this, she must mean 'independent' in the very limited sense in which one can be independent as a wage worker being exploited by capital. She also talks of being productive for 'society,' but then quickly goes on to narrow this down to being productive for 'capitalist profit.' This, again, is problematic: to state that unpaid domestic work does not produce profit for a capitalist is controversial in itself, as we will see below, while to state that it is not productive for 'society' just seems to entirely miss the point that the interests of capital do not coincide with the interests of society. This is a strange omission for a socialist. Clearly, Luxemburg has some respect for the 'unproductive' work that goes on with 'the four walls' of the home—or at least if this work is carried out by 'the women of the proletariat' rather than 'the women of the bourgeoisie'—but as long as this work remains meaningless for capital, it also remains meaningless in our economic theorisation of capitalist society. As I have tried to highlight with the emphases that I have added, Luxemburg, like Marx (most of the time), reconstructs the logic of capitalist economy 'from within,' while signalling the inadequacy of this logic with phrases like 'in the sense of the present capitalist economy' and 'from this point of view.' What she does not do is to use concepts like 'productive' and 'independent' in ways that cut against the capital-centric point of view.

Later left-wing feminists, by contrast, did just this. Mariarosa Dalla Costa sparked what has become known as the 'domestic labour debate'[10] by writing that '…housework as work is *productive* in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value.'[11] She also emphasised the shallowness of the idea of economic independence as applied to the wage-earning women of the proletariat: 'The independence of the wage earner means only being a "free individual" for capital, no less for women than for men. Those who advocate that the liberation of the working class woman lies in her getting a job outside the home are part of the problem, not the solution.'[12]

The gap between Luxemburg and Dalla Costa here is probably a political one about what revolutionary road leads towards emancipation from patriarchal and capitalist oppression. But the more important point for the present purposes is that there is an *epistemological* gap here too: Luxemburg reconstructs what the world looks like 'for capital' as it were; Dalla Costa reconstructs what the world looks like from the kitchen. Dalla Costa's argument thus suggests that just because capital cannot 'see' domestic work (i.e. that bourgeois political economy does not theorise about its contribution to the capitalist economy), this does not mean that it is not already a functioning part of capitalist production.

This chapter tries to sharpen our view of the epistemological standpoints from which we talk about unproductivity and dependence. It shows that the distinction between productive and unproductive economic activity can only ever be made from a specific perspective on society as a whole. This might be the perspective of a capitalist or an unpaid worker; in each case, the lack implied in the idea of being *un*productive will be a different lack. There is no epistemologically neutral ground from which to describe economic practices: we do so always with a specific set of processes and practices as anchor points for our description. Our view of economic dependence is a result of the anchors that we passively accept or actively choose.

In what follows I focus on Marxist debates about unproductive labour and why these mattered for feminists. This is not because we should all be Marxist when it comes to understanding the meaning of 'productivity,' but because these debates concisely illustrate how our views of dependency relations in capitalist societies can turn on our descriptive starting points.

Unproductive Labour: Background in Smith and Marx

The search for a distinction between productive and unproductive labour stretches back before Adam Smith to the work of the French school of political economy, the Physiocrats (who found productivity only in agriculture), and stretches forward via Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo to Karl Marx (who found productivity in the creation of surplus value in the wage relation).[13] Marx summarised and criticised the views of his predecessors in his unfinished volume on *Theories of Surplus Value*, and Marxist political economists in the twentieth century spent significant time and energy on sifting through Marx's commentaries (both there, in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*) in order to pin down exactly what Marx meant with his version of the distinction.[14] In what follows I will look only at the contrast between Smith and Marx on the meaning of unproductive labour, noting in particular the range of different purposes to which Marx put the concept.

What Adam Smith wanted from the distinction between productive and unproductive labour was a way to understand how economies grow: how both individual capitalists and whole nations become richer by investing in certain kinds of production. Productive labour is labour that 'adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed,'[15] and thus increases 'the exchangeable value of the annual produce of the land and labour of the country.'[16] Smith's paradigmatic example of this is manufacture.[17] He thus places particular emphasis on the production of *material commodities*. By producing material things, '[productive labour] is, as it were, a certain quantity of labour stocked and stored up to be employed, if necessary, upon some other occasion.'[18] This contrasted with labour that left no lasting valuable thing behind it. The labour of menial servants 'does not fix or realise itself in any particular subject or vendible commodity. His services generally perish at the very instant of their performance,'[19] and we should therefore think of this labour as unproductive. Looking at this contrast from the point of view of an employer, Smith writes: 'A man grows rich by employing a multitude of manufacturers; he grows poor by maintaining a multitude of menial servants….'[20] He goes on, however, in conciliatory tone, to say the 'The labour of some of the most respectable orders in society is, like that of menial servants, unproductive of any value…The sovereign, for example, and all the officers both of justice and of war who serve under him…are unproductive labourers….'[21] The labour of such people is unproductive because '[t]he protection, security, and defence of the commonwealth, the effect of their labour this year [the labour of the sovereign and of the officers of justice and war], will not purchase its protection, security, and defence for the year to come.'[22]

What Smith wanted with the distinction between productive and unproductive labour was a way to think about an *economy of growth*. He attached moralistic points to this distinction along the way, suggesting, for example, that productive labour made for a sober and thriving a population, while unproductive labour was associated with idleness and poverty.[23] However, his real concern is with investment: he wants to draw a distinction between that labour in the economy that produces things that will support *future* production and that labour that will not. And there is obviously some intuitive sense to this distinction: to make cloth that will be worn on the backs of tomorrow's workers is different from performing a puppet show which can only live on as a faint pleasant memory. The one product supports further production; the other does not.

However, there is an ambiguity here too. We can focus on two different things in Smith's arguments about productive and unproductive labour: either on the idea of *adding value*, or on the idea of producing *material things* that do not disappear as the labour is spent. What this shows is that Smith's view of unproductive labour oscillates between two perspectives on economic practices, which he treats as though they were one. On the one hand is the viewpoint of the individual capitalist, out to make a profit on other people's labour. From this perspective, we would expect the capitalist only to care about surplus value creation, and to be completely unconcerned about whether this surplus value came from the production of material things or from the capitalistic organisation of immaterial services. On the other hand is the viewpoint of the economic observer concerned for the wealth of nations in general. From this perspective, the materiality of the products might indeed matter because they 'store value' in a way that immaterial services do not (I won't consider the soundness of this claim here—I simply note that Smith believed this).

That these two viewpoints in fact are different from one another would have been difficult for Smith to see because in the economy that he observed around him it was indeed manufacture (of material things) that was beginning to be organised capitalistically, while services that did not create material commodities were not yet organised by capitalists. It was workers in manufacture who were often paid out of *capital*, while it was service workers who were paid out of *revenue* (i.e. income). In other words, the point of view of the economic observer concerned with an economy of growth coincided (for historical reasons) with the point of view of the capitalist employing manufacturing workers.

Splitting Our View: The Logic of Bourgeois Political Economy, the Logic of Capital and the Logic of History

Like Smith, Marx's economic analyses also moved back and forth between different viewpoints on the same set of economic practices and relationships, but these shifts were often deliberate. Marx took up a critical position not only on the society and economy of his time, but also on the science that had hitherto investigated capitalist society and economy, the science of political economy. Of Smith, Marx writes 'A. Smith was *essentially* correct with his *productive* and *unproductive* labour, correct from the standpoint of bourgeois economy.'[24]

For Marx, modern political economy could be divided up into the following: 'vulgar economists' who just systematised the bourgeois capitalists' view of the economy, adopting wholesale the biases and distortions that this class-perspective entailed; the 'classical political economists,' who, like Smith and Ricardo, investigated the 'real framework of bourgeois relations of production' but only within the historical horizon of capitalism[25]; and finally his own 'critique of political economy,' which did a number of things: it identified and worked through the inconsistencies of classical political economy from the 'inside,' it placed *both* modern capitalism *and* classical political economy within a world-historical context, and it argued that the economic world that bourgeois and classical political economy have imagined as natural and eternal will, if fact, collapse under the weight of internal contradictions.

Marx was thus interested in *both* the internal logic of capitalism *and* what that logic meant within the horizon of world-history in which economic modes of production could rise and fall, and political struggle could help them to do so. This meant that his concern with productive and unproductive labour was also multi-sided and epistemologically complex. He wanted a number of things from the distinction.

First of all, for Marx, 'productive labour' was a theoretical category that could be used to explain the specific nature of capitalist exploitation: exploitation organised in the wage relation in which labourers were paid less than the value of their products. Unproductive labour was labour that was not exploited in this way. Second, Marx was concerned with the question of exactly *where* in a capitalist economy value is produced and what that value is used for. This was relevant for understanding the allocation of capital in different sectors of the economy,[26] and for understanding the changing composition of capital within given sectors,[27] both of which are relevant to predicting the death throes of capitalism. Third, Marx occasionally suggested that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour might have something to do with class relations—a link that later Marxists have tended to reject as theoretically inconsistent.

These different ambitions for the productive/unproductive distinction do not always align well.[28] This has meant that the collection of workers labelled as 'unproductive' has altered many times in the course of subsequent Marxist debates on the topic.

The next sections briefly expand on these three different uses of the conceptual distinction between productive and unproductive labour, as a background for understanding the stakes involved in Marxist debates about domestic labour, which I return to shortly.

Productivity in the Abstract Under Capitalism

Human labour is organised differently across societies and across history, but its essence, for Marx, was the creation of use values which involved the transformation of nature into things that humans want and need.[29] From this ahistorical perspective, all labour that satisfied human wants and needs was productive. On the other hand, however, this view of productivity *is not* what will help us to understand capitalism from the 'inside' as it were.[30] What makes labour productive *within* the framework of capitalism, and within the science that rationalises this framework (political economy), is not that it produces useful things, but that it produces *surplus value* for a capitalist. We therefore need to leave the ahistorical perspective behind in order to see what 'productivity' means *within* capitalism.

Smith muddled this point in his definition of productive labour by considering *both* the materiality of the products *and* the creation of surplus value, and hence being unclear about what perspective he was taking on the early industrial economy. Marx argued, on the contrary, that only the latter criterion (surplus value creation) helped us to understand what was specific about a capitalist economic system (it was *this* that Smith got 'essentially right' about the productive/unproductive distinction). To understand capitalism from the inside in this way required that we take what we might call a capital-centric view of production. If we limit ourselves to this capital-centric view (which Smith failed to do) then it becomes clear that a teacher, an actor or a clown are all engaged in productive labour if this labour generates a surplus value for a capitalist who has invested in it; a tailor, on the other hand, even though he makes such material things as suits, is unproductive if he does not generate a surplus value for the person who pays for the labour (i.e. if he is paid out of revenue).[31] What this implies is that the *content* of the labour—whether what it produces is 'material' and lasting or not—has become irrelevant to whether we should regard that labour as unproductive: What matters is the *economic relation* within which it is performed. '[T]he true definition of a productive worker,' writes Marx, 'consists in this: A person who needs and demands exactly as much as, and no more than, is required to enable him to gain the greatest possible benefit for his capitalist.'[32] This explains the idea of productive labour from the capital-centric viewpoint concerned specifically with capital accumulation.

From this viewpoint alone, then, those who are 'productive' include our paradigmatic example of exploited factory workers, but also anyone else whose labour is invested in by capital, including sales assistants, marketers, those working in transport and storage, the employees of banks, teachers and clowns employed by capital and more. Those left to be labelled as 'unproductive' include everyone else who is *not* paid out of capital: whether state employees (like teachers and nurses in contemporary welfare states) or those selling their labour on a private basis (e.g. figures like our travelling tailor).

By splitting Smith's insights into two different ideas, and then only building on one of these (surplus value creation), Marx managed to distinguish two viewpoints on the meaning of 'productivity': an ahistorical meaning and a capital-centric meaning. If matters stopped here, then there would perhaps be little for Marxist political economists to argue about on the point. Unfortunately, matters do not quite stop here.

Productivity in Actual Economies

The abstract capital-centric viewpoint is useful for examining a basic process within capitalism—exploitation of wage labour—but it does not use the distinction between productive and unproductive labour to understand the broader dynamics of capitalism and its historical trajectory. For this purpose, a description of the generic relation between a capitalist and wage worker under capitalism is insufficient. What we need is to look at the relationships amongst different parts of the capitalist system, and show how they interact to create chronic instability and necessitate an eventual collapse.

Marx divided the economy into different spheres (the sphere of production and the sphere of circulation), divided it again into various productive sectors (where different kinds of things are produced) and divided each sector into different forms of capital (constant and variable). Thus, the generic worker and the generic capitalist are replaced, in our theoretical view, by *various* kinds of labour and *various* kinds of capital. Now we can ask: Who is really 'creating' value? And who is just 'moving it around'? And who, without producing anything themselves, is *enforcing* the social and legal order that keeps capitalism turning over? To answer these questions, the capital-centric viewpoint alone is both too general (it captures too much) and too abstract (it does not differentiate with enough detail).

Marx argued that 'in the process of circulation [as opposed to production], no value is produced, and thus no surplus value.'[33] And since no value is produced in 'circulation' activities (buying and selling), Marxist commentators have argued that 'Workers employed by capital working in the sphere of circulation are unproductive as is their labour.'[34] Following this line of argument, all that such workers do is to transform value from one form into another (from commodities into money). So, for example, the merchant and his employees that guard and manage his warehouses and shops have not been productive by first withholding the merchant's stock of things from consumers, and then selling it to them. The implication of this reasoning is that a worker (e.g. employed in retail) can be exploited by capital, but still not be productive. What it means to be 'productive' has now been narrowed to include only workers who make commodities that have use values *and* are paid out of capital; those now excluded from being called 'productive' include those who make exchange values that are, essentially, empty of use value (like the merchant in the example above).

To make matters even more complicated, Marxists involved in debates about unproductive labour also had to work out whether people doing useful work, but not paid directly out of capital (i.e. the opposite situation from our jealous merchants) could be considered productive or not. Essential state employees such as nurses provide a case in point: Were they unproductive because they were not being paid out of capital or were they *indirectly* productive because they were maintaining the labour power of others, which labour power *was* exploited by capital?[35] This latter line of argument was crucially important in the domestic labour debate (to which we return below) because on it hinges the question of whether a person can be productive *for* capital without being paid *by* capital.

Where there does seem to be some consensus (amongst Marxists)[36] is on the unproductivity of state employees whose function is to maintain social order: police officers, the military, judges, prison wardens, supervisors and more.[37] But even here there remain difficult questions. Are these figures unproductive because they are not exploited by capital? Or because they do not produce wage goods that re-enter the cycle of industrial production, and hence recreate labour power, which can be exploited by capital? Or because their work would be unnecessary in a rationally ordered society that was not riven by class conflict?[38]

While dry and technical in themselves, on these differences of interpretation hinge the question of who is being exploited in capitalist society.

An Issue Left Unresolved: The Relation Between Unproductivity and Dependence

A further question *not* raised above, but important for this book is the following: what does the distinction between productive and unproductive labour have to do with the dependence of some sections of society upon others? Marx gave no clear answer to this.

Marx occasionally used the idea of productive labour in ways that suggest the beginnings of a class analysis that frames unproductive workers as dependent upon productive workers, and suggests also that this dependence is not mutual. 'Productive labourers' he writes, 'produce the material basis of the subsistence, and consequently, the existence, of the unproductive labourers'[39]; or again 'A larger proportion of the surplus product, consisting of means of subsistence, is consumed by unproductive workers, or idlers or exchanged for luxuries.'[40] Adam Smith, too, had looked at unproductive labourers in this way: as being ultimately maintained by the produce of others.[41] Neither Smith nor Marx equate unproductive labour with idleness, but they do both sometimes regard these unproductive labourers and the idle as equally dependent upon wealth creation *elsewhere* in the economy. Marx even suggested that the *interests* of the unproductive worker sometimes aligned with those of the bourgeoisie. Thus, he writes sarcastically,

> For the worker it is equally consoling that because of the growth in the net product, more spheres are opened up for unproductive workers, who live on his product and whose interest in his exploitation coincides more or less with that of the directly exploiting classes.[42]

Despite these few remarks, however, mapping the distinction between productive and unproductive labour onto social classes caused too many theoretical and political problems to be attractive to those involved in later debates on the unproductive labour. Some suggested dropping the distinction between productive and unproductive labour precisely because it failed as a tool of class analysis.[43] Others condemned such suggestions as atrocious 'reformism,' arguing that the distinction was never meant to be a class distinction to begin with. In fact, this argument went on, it was the bourgeoisie, 'this parasitical excrescence of the labour of others,'[44] that was trying to scapegoat the unproductive labourer to distract from the injustices of bourgeois rule.

There are a number of reasons that Marx's more political suggestions about productive and unproductive labour as class categories were going to be problematic for Marxists trying to make his work on unproductive labour consistent.

In the quotations above, he seems to have returned to a focus on *material* goods. Not only do we thus return to Smith's assumption that capitalist production involved only material goods, but we also make the symmetrical error of assuming that material goods necessarily involve capitalist production. This latter assumption clearly does not fit with the realities of modern capitalist societies. It is not a necessary feature of capitalist economies that the most important material goods (i.e. food and shelter) are produced capitalistically at all: housing, for example, has a long history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries of non-capitalist production (provisioned by states and housing associations). Labourers working for a nonprofit housing association to make housing are unproductive from a capital-centric view of productivity (they do not produce surplus value for a capitalist), but their product clearly supports the lives of many people.

Furthermore, 'the material basis of subsistence' and the 'means of subsistence' are ambiguous terms. Do they include the work of care? Do they include the work of turning vegetables into soups, and mops into clean floors? Women's work in the home clearly provides the material basis for subsistence more directly than does the production of luxury consumer goods (which the worker will never see again) within the factory gates, but from the capital-centric view, it is still the women's work that appears to be unproductive—or if anything, only indirectly productive.

As a question of *dependence* the idea of 'unproductivity' becomes a badge that is much more difficult to pin to specific economic roles without running into contradiction and controversy. Some Marxists commentators on unproductive labour have tried to avoid the question completely by suggested that the *political* stakes of drawing the productive/unproductive distinction across economic practices can simply be neutralised: thus we can simply 'leave aside the complex debate concerning the relationship between social science and so-called value judgements…',[45] because '[…]the distinction between [productive and unproductive labour] has nothing normative, evaluative, or moralistic about it any more than the prior distinction between production and circulation.'[46] But this is clearly wrong. The authors are led to this conclusion because their own view of the *purpose* of the productive/unproductive distinction is determined in advance and clearly distinct from the problem of dependence. But concepts, both theoretical and in public debate, cannot simply be tamed in this way: disagreement about the purpose and implications of the productive/unproductive distinction is exactly what led to the lengthy debates outlined above.

The Marxist feminist debate on domestic labour returned a clear sense of the political stakes involved in defining and applying the idea of unproductive labour, illustrating why it was worth running up against the conceptual frameworks left by Marx and questioning whether they were focussing on the right processes and relationships within society and economy.

The View from the Kitchen: The Domestic Labour Debate

Marxist feminists in the 1960s and 1970s pointed out that the concept of unproductive labour could have serious implications for analysing the social and economic roles of women in capitalist societies, and thus also have serious implications for thinking about their mobilisation in class and gender struggle.

Women's unpaid work in the home has been intermittently a blind spot and a problem for the Marxist tradition of economic and political theory. Marx himself wrote little about unpaid work in the home (noting simply that the home was the site of social reproduction), or about the position of women within capitalism. Friedrich Engels and August Bebel both wrote books that explicitly discussed women's place in society and economy (Engel's *Origins of the Family Private Property and the State*, and Bebel's *Woman under Socialism*), but neither devoted a great deal of attention to domestic work. Both assumed that the development of capitalism and then socialism would eventually make domestic work disappear—at least insofar as it was a private women's affair.[47] Later, Vladimir Lenin argued that women's work in the home reflected their oppression and even 'slavery' in capitalist society,[48] and as we have seen in the introduction to this chapter Rosa Luxemburg viewed proletarian housewives with sympathy but held fast in the view that their work was essentially extrinsic to the capitalist mode of production, and so not 'productive' on its terms.

However, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Marxist feminists squarely addressed the ambiguities in the Marxist tradition by claiming that unpaid labour in the home not only illustrated women's oppression, but also their *exploitation*. While not the first to make this claim, Mariarosa Dalla Costa's article on 'Women and the Subversion of Community' from 1972[49] became a focal point for the subsequent debate on the topic amongst Marxists.[50] Domestic work, she claimed, was *productive* in the Marxian sense of producing surplus value; the women who did this work were not merely oppressed by men, but *exploited* by capital; and the patriarchal nuclear family was the institutional structure that maintained and concealed this social production.[51]

Dalla Costa's text became a classic of Marxist feminist literature, but also a focal point for replies from other Marxist political economists who saw her arguments as misunderstandings of the Marxist concepts that they employed. The domestic labour debate (or at least this Marxist strand of debates about domestic labour) helps us to see clearly why the distinction between productive and unproductive labour is more than a dry theoretical matter of classifications and accounting. For Marxist feminists like Dalla Costa, such distinctions were of immediate relevance in political mobilisation and in setting an agenda for women's liberation.

Why, then, were Dalla Costa's arguments about productivity and exploitation controversial for 'orthodox' Marxists, who continued to argue that women working in the home for no wage were no doubt *oppressed*, but not exploited?[52] It was clear that unpaid domestic work contributed to the *reproduction* of social order, for example by raising children who could be the next generation of workers. It was also clear that unpaid domestic work created use values that society could not do without, for example, the preparation of food (from raw and inedible to cooked and edible). What was controversial, however, was the question of whether unpaid housework contributed to the production of *surplus value*.

In arguing against this last point, 'orthodox' Marxists wanted to hold onto a number of basic claims. First, exploitation is the extraction of surplus value. Second, only some kinds of labour produce surplus value—these kinds of labour are what we should call 'productive' labour. Third, any work that was done outside of the labour market was not abstract, social labour, but rather private, individualised labour. This was an important claim because it suggests that the *value* of labour within the capitalist production process (in the labour market) must be looked at in a fundamentally different way to the value of the labour carried out by private individuals; the former is systematically 'ruled' by the 'law' of value (which is to say that it is a function of the *socially necessary* labour time that goes into any specific productive process), while the latter cannot even be calculated accurately and is not systematically linked to the rest of the economy at all.[53]

Unpaid domestic work does not easily fit these criteria for productive and exploited labour. First of all, the wage relationship, which is so central to Marxist analysis of exploitation, does not obviously include the unpaid housewife: she does not sell her labour power directly to a capitalist (or, to put the point more carefully, it is not her name that appears on the wage rolls of the company). And if she does not sell her labour power to the capitalist, then how can the latter extract surplus value from something that (s)he does not possess? Surely, it was also true that the housewife did not make commodities that were for sale on the market, and therefore there was no universal measure for the value of her labour: she kept working through booms (high employment) and busts (high unemployment). Such booms and busts would cause the value of the labour power of commodity producers to fluctuate, but her detachment from these capitalist dynamics seems to be illustrated by the fact that demand for her labour neither rises nor falls. If the housewife 'produced' anything it was use values (things that the family needed and consumed) and bodies capable of living and working (of her children and husband).

These arguments present the difficulties faced by feminists who wanted to analyse women's work as productive and exploited.

However, there were a number of ways to try to insist that unpaid housework nonetheless produced value for capital, and to support Dalla Costa's claim that 'the wage commanded a larger amount of labor than appeared in factory bargaining.'[54] One way was to argue that unpaid work in the home made labour power cheaper for capital (otherwise capital would have to pay also for all the work that it takes to feed, clothe and care for workers); another way was to argue that unpaid work in the home *raises* the use value of labour power for capital: a worker who is healthy enough (because fed and cared for at home) to stand up and work for 10 hours a day is *more exploitable* than a worker who can only stand for 8 hours a day: what the capitalist reaps, then, is partly the value of work done by women in the home.[55] Both arguments suggest a kind of *indirect* productivity: productivity outside the factory gates that affects the productivity of workers within the factory gates.

These solutions, however, raised their own problems. On the one hand, they could be, once again, excluded from the debate by restating definitions: productive labour was simply labour directly paid for by capital; and women's domestic work did not neatly fit that description. On the other hand, such solutions were also inadequate for specifically feminist reasons: they may explain something about the relation between the nuclear family and wage labour, but they say nothing about *why* it is *women* who do the unpaid part of this social arrangement.[56]

Instead of taking these tortured routes through the productive/unproductive distinction as formulated by Marx, what Marxist feminists should have done, according to Diemut Bubeck (on whom I am drawing extensively here) was to decouple the analysis of exploitation from the technical analysis of productive and unproductive labour (which trapped them with a view of unpaid domestic work as unproductive), and to insist that it was not only *capitalistic* exploitation that feminists were concerned with—they were also concerned with *non-capitalistic* exploitation (e.g. patriarchal exploitation).

This seems broadly correct. Those who, like Dalla Costa, wanted to show that capital lived, in part, off the unpaid work of women could have avoided the narrow orthodox view of productivity but insisted nonetheless on the indispensability of women's work to capitalist production as it existed. While this would not have won exactly that argument that Dalla Costa wanted to have, it would have kept women's *economic* roles in view and resisted the orthodox Marxists' exclusive focus on women's *political* 'oppression.' If rather than asking 'whose work is productive under capitalism?', we asked 'whose work can capitalism as it currently exists in actual societies *do without?*', then unpaid housework would never have been pushed back and forth between the camp of buffoons and opera singers, on the one hand, and the camp of factory workers and agricultural labourers, on the other.

Structural and Practical Dependence Once More

This focus on *indispensability* can be captured with the idea of 'structural dependence.' Women's *subordination* in patriarchal households can be captured with the idea of 'practical dependence.' Thus, as unpaid housewives women were deeply *practically* dependent upon men: 'The new autonomy of the free wage slave was denied her, and she remained in a pre-capitalist stage of personal dependence.'[57] But as unpaid workers in a capitalist economy, housewives did the labour upon which the current institutions of capitalist economies were *structurally* dependent. '[The] family' writes Dalla Costa 'is the very pillar of the capitalist organization of work.' Whether or not their labour was productive in the narrow capital-centric sense may be important for making technical calculations about the falling rate of profit that will lead to capitalism's collapse, but it is not necessary for fleshing out an essentially sociological claim about how the economy is organised. If we want to show that 'the economy' *includes* a great deal of labour that is invisible from the point of view of capital, and the subtraction of which would wreak chaos, then the idea of 'structural dependence' may be more helpful than either of the concepts that the opposing sides in the debate put centre stage: the concept of 'oppression' which politicises women's social status, but fails to emphasise the economic role of their labour; and the concept of 'exploitation,' which focusses on economic relations but is difficult to apply in a consistent way to both wage labour and unpaid domestic work. Perhaps what Dalla Costa should have emphasised was not the analogy of domestic work with wage labour, but the gap between how capitalist production appears to work in theory, and how it actually works in existing societies.

Marx was perhaps not at his most eloquent when he wrote that 'the modern economists have turned themselves into such sycophants of the bourgeois that they want to demonstrate to the latter that it is productive labour when somebody picks the lice out of his hair, or strokes his tail, because for example the latter activity will make his fat head – his blockhead – clearer the next day in the office.'[58] But he did, no doubt, have a serious point to make about overextending the concept of 'productivity' to a point of absurdity. As we have seen, Marxist political economists have wanted to do diverse and specific things with the productive/unproductive distinction that would be muddled by letting the likes of lice-pickers into the category of productive labour. But I hope that this chapter has shown that placing certain activities 'inside' and 'outside' of the capitalist mode of production involves an epistemological problem: Can we understand a capitalist economy while restricting ourselves to the logic of capitalism? Following Bubeck, I suggest that the answer here should be 'no.' Departing from Bubeck and the original feminist debate, I would further suggest that the contrast between practical and structural dependence captures much of what should still concern us from these discussions, namely the hidden indispensability of certain social roles and practices that we fail to adequately conceptualise in public life and theoretical models.

The step from Smith to Marx on productive labour meant specifying the perspective from which we were thinking about value creation: we would be focussing only on value in a capitalistic sense, only on surplus value in the sense of something appropriated by capital. From that point onwards the meaning of 'productivity' was defined by its meaning, as it were, *for* capital. But Dalla Costa's attack on the orthodox Marxist position (that women were oppressed, but housework was not productive) tried to grasp a connection between what capital could 'see' (the wage) and what capital could not 'see' but benefitted from (unpaid domestic labour). She positioned both of these 'seen' and 'unseen' parts of the economy within the capitalist mode of production. Now, we can doubt whether capitalism in *all its possible* forms, or its 'pure' form (if such an idea makes sense), needs unpaid domestic work, but we can hardly doubt that *as they were organised when and where Dalla Costa wrote her critique* capitalist societies could not have continued to function upon the withdrawal of unpaid domestic labour. This broader claim about social structure can, I have suggested, be captured with the idea of 'structural dependence.'

Since the 1970s, the gendered division of labour that made the question of domestic work into a question of women's emancipation has become less extreme, at least in Europe and North America where these debates were argued out. Nonetheless, it does not seem likely that the basic political and epistemological problems that fuelled these debates have disappeared. Are there no contemporary equivalents to unpaid domestic work in modern capitalist welfare states? Are there no people who remain practically dependent, while the formal economy is structurally dependent upon their activity? The work of the unemployed in seeking jobs seems like a possible candidate for the kind of analytical re-description that domestic work underwent in the debates examined in this chapter. While we might struggle to think of this activity as 'productive,' it is surely not so difficult to imagine that labour markets as they currently operate *could not continue upon its withdrawal*. While I cannot develop this analysis here, I would like to suggest that it might give us pause to consider cultural and policy attitudes towards the unemployed (and others) who are, in a sense, already *in* the economy without being *of* the economy. What I mean by that contrast is something that I develop in the next chapter.

Notes

1. Nancy Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought," *Signs* 16(3) (1991): 482.
2. Folbre illustrates this particular categorisation with reference to the Massachusetts census of 1905, which had previously clearly separated women engaged in unpaid domestic work from the category of 'dependent.' See Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife," 479.
3. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books I–III* (London: Penguin, 1986 [1776]), 431–432.
4. Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife," 479.
5. See, for example, Peter Howell, "Once Again on Productive and Unproductive Labour," *Revolutionary Communist* 1(3/4) (1975): 57; Peter Meiksins, "Productive and Unproductive Labor and Marx Theory of Value," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 13(3) (1981): 41.
6. Paul Johnson writing in *The News of the World*, quoted in Howell, "Once Again," 46.
7. While usually a tacit assumption, politicians do sometimes express this explicitly. The Danish Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, in his opening address to parliament in 2015 claimed that: '…when not enough private jobs are created, the economy doesn't hang together either…[T]he money for welfare can only come from one place: our businesses.' Lars Løkke Rasmussen, "Statsminister Lars Løkke Rasmussens Tale Ved Folketingets Åbning" ["First Minister's Speech at the Parliament's Opening"] (Speech, 6 October 2015, author's translation). Accessed 20 November 2016, http://stm.dk/_p_14250.html. Rasmussen seems here to either be suggesting that workers in the public sector do not pay taxes, or that the wealth generated in the private sector is somehow qualitatively different from that generated in the public sector. Neither proposition is true.
8. Rosa Luxemburg, "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle," in *Socialism and Barbarism: The Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott (London and New York, NY: Pluto Press, 2010), 170.
9. Luxemburg, "Women's Suffrage," 170–171.
10. Diemut Elisabet Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 45–82.
11. Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, ed. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1973), Fn 12, p. 52.
12. Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," 33.

13. See V. W. Bladen, "Adam Smith on Productive and Unproductive Labour: A Theory of Full Development," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science/Revue canadienne d'Economique et de Science politique* 26(4) (1960); Robert Chernomas, "Productive and Unproductive Labour and the Rate of Profit in Malthus, Ricardo, and Marx," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 12 (Spring 1990).
14. In what follows I draw principally on the following review articles: Sungar Savran and E. Ahmet Tonak, "Productive and Unproductive Labour: An Attempt at Clarification and Classification," *Capital and Class* 68 (1999); Ian Gough, "Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour," *New Left Review* 1/76 (1972); Ian Gough and John Harrison, "Unproductive Labour and Housework Again," *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists* 4(1) (1975); Howell, "Once Again"; Meiksins, "Productive and Unproductive Labor."
15. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 429.
16. Ibid., 449.
17. Ibid., 430.
18. Ibid., 430.
19. Ibid., 430.
20. Ibid., 430.
21. Ibid., 430.
22. Ibid., 431.
23. Ibid., 435.
24. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 273.
25. Karl Marx, *Capital: Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 174–175, n. 34.
26. E.g. the production of wage goods compared to the production luxury goods.
27. How much constant capital (machines, etc.) and how much variable capital (labour power).
28. Which led some of those involved in the debates in the 1970s to call for the abandonment of the categories of productive and unproductive labour in favour of more precise analytical distinctions: see Gough and Harrison, "Unproductive Labour and Housework," 7.
29. Marx, *Capital: Vol. 1*, 133.
30. Marx, *Capital: Vol. 1*, 287.
31. Gough, "Marx's Theory," 52–53.
32. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 273.
33. Karl Marx, *Capital: Vol. III*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1991), 392.
34. Savran and Tonak, "Productive and Unproductive Labour," 129.

35. For opposing answers see Howell, "Once Again," 54 (arguing for indirect productivity); Savran and Tonak, "Productive and Unproductive Labour," 139–140 (arguing for complete unproductivity of state employees). The problem of state employees is complicated even further by the fact that some state enterprises, such as a railway network, may in fact have to produce surplus values that can be paid to the state's creditors who own state-issued obligations. This is true insofar as state expenditure is based on government debt.
36. John Stuart Mill *did* regard such workers as productive, although indirectly so. See John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy: Book 1* (London: Longman, 1909 [1848]), 48–49.
37. Savran and Tonak, "Productive and Unproductive Labour," 138; Howell, "Once Again," 63.
38. For a review of these positions, see Gough, "Marx's Theory," 67–68.
39. Quoted in ibid., 66.
40. Quoted in ibid., 66.
41. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 436. Smith (p. 432) also claims that: 'Unproductive labourers, and those who do not labour at all, are all maintained by revenue….' Furthermore, 'The rent of land and the profits of stock are everywhere, therefore, the principal sources from which unproductive hands derive their subsistence. These are the two sorts of revenue of which the owners have generally most to spare. They might both maintain indifferently either productive or unproductive hands. They seem, however, to have some predilection for the latter. The expense of a great lord feeds generally more idle than industrious people.' (Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 433).
42. Marx quoted in Gough, "Marx's Theory," 70.
43. Gough and Harrison, "Unproductive Labour and Housework Again," 7; Meiksins, "Productive and Unproductive Labor," 42.
44. Howell, "Once Again," 57.
45. Savran and Tonak, "Productive and Unproductive Labour," 143.
46. Savran and Tonak, "Productive and Unproductive Labour," 144.
47. Therese Jefferson and John E. King, "'Never Intended to be a Theory of Everything': Domestic Labor in Neoclassical and Marxian Economics," *Feminist Economics* 7(3) (2001): 83.
48. In what follows I draw on the excellent summary of the 'domestic labour debate' provided in Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 45–82. Bubeck outlines Engels and Lenin's positions on the issue at: 48–51.
49. Revised in 1973. I refer to the 1973 edition in what follows: Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of Community."
50. Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 51.

51. For the claims about productivity see pp. 31 and 52; on exploitation see pp. 26 and 29; on the family structure see pp. 31–32, in Dalla Costa, "Women and the subversion of the community."
52. Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 52. The claim is found for example in Howell "Once Again," 63.
53. Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 54–55.
54. Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," 26.
55. Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 68–74.
56. Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 77.
57. Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," 27.
58. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 273.

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CHAPTER 4

The Empty Economy

'The economy' is an extraordinarily strange and slippery object of analysis. Does it…*exist*? And if so, where? And what is it comprised of? It has been claimed, rather dramatically, that '[t]he economy came into being between the 1930s and 1950s as the field of operation for new powers of planning, regulation, statistical enumeration and representation.'[1] Timothy Mitchel's point, when he wrote this, was that 'the economy' was not a well-defined and self-evident 'part' of human life before economists and policy makers began to represent it as such, and when they did, it was their own contingent concerns, methods and agendas that defined what we saw as 'inside' and 'outside' this new sphere. Importantly for his story, what this new thing called 'the economy' *excluded* was the state and the household.

Mitchel's point is probably overdrawn; the meaning of 'economy' has certainly changed a great deal over time since the Ancient Greeks concerned themselves with the art of organising the *oikos*, the extended household, but the transformation of 'economy' from a set of *practices* to a *thing* was probably not so clear-cut and sudden. Nonetheless, in public discourse and economic theory today, the economy is indeed often spoken of a 'thing' that might be 'healthy' or 'unhealthy,' 'growing' or 'contracting' and so on. Historians of economic thought have argued that in developing a view of this 'thing,' classical political economists took the analogy between the circulation of blood and the circulation of wealth from medicine,[2] while later neoclassical economists drew on the concepts of physics to imagine the properties of an economic

P. J. L. Cockburn, *The Politics of Dependence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8_4

system.[3] What they saw, and we see, as 'the economy' is loaded with this conceptual history.[4] What we see as 'the economy' today is also the result of historical developments in the institutions and practices through which human societies meet their needs and wishes.

In this chapter, I would like to introduce the idea of 'the empty economy' as a metaphor that can help us to speak about a particular attitude that we can have towards human practices that have a shadowy and uncertain existence within 'the economy' as we know it. Domestic work is one such practice, the work of the unemployed in finding jobs is another, and the street paper selling discussed in this chapter is third. The uncertainty about these activities stems from the fact that the networks of people and practices through which we meet our wants and needs are always more complex than any model we can make, or story we can tell, about 'the economy.' This was already suggested in the previous chapter, and as Mitchel points out, imagining the economy as a sphere of activity distinct from the household or the state has the effect of singling out the market as the paradigmatic institution of economic interaction. Thus, market interaction becomes the mark of what it means to act 'economically,' and sets up a series of contrasts to 'non-economic' forms of social interaction that do not display the characteristics of market behaviour. As social science and political discourse cast an ever brighter and more penetrating light on the market, the surrounding social practices and institutions recede into the shadows beyond the sphere of our concerns with 'the economy': they become 'emptied' of economic importance and, sometimes, also legitimacy.

But if this is right, where and how is it happening? I think that we can single out three aspects of this process. First of all, we have social scientific *methods.* In the last chapter, we saw how Marxist terminology, and particularly the idea of 'unproductive labour' left unpaid domestic work with an ambiguous status—half in and half out of the capitalist economy. But this ambiguity is not only an issue for Marxists. Neoclassical economists would say that they model rationally calculated means-ends decision-making wherever that appears in human life, and they have not shied away from, for example, examining the household as an economic unit, or a 'small factory,' as one prominent economist put it.[5] But the important point here is that market behaviours remain the model through which this and other areas of social life are interpreted, anchoring our understanding of what it means act 'economically' more firmly than ever in the paradigmatic economic institution of the market.

Secondly, the economy is constantly being defined by various processes of *government*. When Mitchel suggests that the 'invention' of the economy involved the exclusion of the household and the state from our view of this new 'thing' (the economy), he is looking at matters from a political point of view: the view of administrators who want to divide the world up into manageable spheres and systems. The economy as an object of government is managed through the production of statistics and policies and the delegation of powers to various social bodies (such as banks).

Thirdly, I would suggest that alongside both of these 'official' ways of boundary-making (methods and governmental policy areas) social actors go about the everyday *normative* work of distinguishing valuable and legitimate economic activities from 'false' or 'corrupt' ones. This is the boundary-making expressed, for example, in the phrases 'a *real* job,' '*real* work,' '*real* money,' '*real* value,' and 'the *real* economy' all of which imply a contrast with something false that simply resembles these things (e.g. the contrast made with the 'real economy' is the 'financial economy'—a suspect place where bubbles are made).

These three forms of boundary-making are not the same. Economists draw methodological boundaries so they know what to include in their science. Administrators draw institutional boundaries in order to delimit policy areas. Everyday social actors draw boundaries in order to critique and justify specific practices with respect to these practices' public legitimacy. These processes are different; in particular, it appears that the first two kinds of boundary-making are analytical (making categories), while the third is normative (making value judgements). But the analytical and normative are not, I think, so cleanly separable as one might imagine. Not only have markets become paradigmatic of what an economy essentially *is* (the analytical point), but to take part in markets has also become paradigmatic of *legitimate* and *independent* economic action (the normative point).

'The empty economy' is a phrase that is supposed to capture the situations in which a social practice fails to look 'economic' in the right way: whether analytically or normatively. These are practices that are somehow *in* but not *of* the economy. *In* it because they are part of the network in which needs are met and wealth is managed, but not *of* it because they fall too far from the paradigmatic example of market exchange as a form of economic interaction. They are not blessed with the economic 'reality' that they would enjoy as exchanges within markets.

But what does this metaphor, the 'empty economy,' have to do with dependence? In this chapter, I will argue that the ideological association of market exchange with economic independence has contributed to the invisibility, and sometimes stigmatisation, of economic practices characterised by interpersonal dependency relationships. In Chapters 2 and 3, I outlined the way in which feminist political economists have demanded that unpaid work in the household be included in our view of how modern capitalist economies work: without the care of children, the preparation of food, the cleaning of living spaces and so on, there would be no wage labourers, no labour markets, no contracts, no profits. These things would not exist because society would already have collapsed in a pile of hungry men, unwashed children and dirty clothes. And yet despite being, as it were, *in* the economy, this unpaid work was rarely regarded (e.g. in censuses) as being *of* the economy. To take on the solidity of 'real' economic activity, markets and money would have to bless this work with true economic existence. The Wages for Housework campaign was an attempt both to parody and to force this dubious blessing. Scientific, political and popular norms that withheld visibility and status from housework simultaneously upheld a vision of dependency relations in which independence became synonymous with working in the formal economy and dependence became synonymous with being (working) outside it. The extremes of this social vision were evident in the welfare dependency rhetoric discussed in Chapter 2. With the metaphor of the 'empty economy,' this chapter extends the ideas expressed in my discussion of housework. But rather than the contrast between structural and practical dependence, the most important senses of dependence here are captured in the normative contrast between vulnerability and parasitism. My central example illustrates the stigma that can attach the failure to be 'economic' in the right way. What is at stake in the difference between being *in* and *of* the economy is the *legitimacy* connected with a social status as an *independent* economic actor.

This chapter develops this idea in two steps. First, I will try to illustrate how the sorting of dependent from independent economic roles happens in public life. My example for pursuing this thought is the contemporary phenomenon of 'street papers': publications produced to be sold by disadvantaged (usually) homeless people as a means of legitimate income. I regard street papers as part of the empty economy, not because I have normative or analytical reasons for regarding them as different from other ways of generating and transferring valuable things, but because, at least in some societies, sections of the public have had a critical response to them. By presenting a 'business solution to a social problem,'[6] street papers have secured a degree of social legitimacy and praise; but by failing to look quite 'market-like' *enough*, street papers have also attracted a great deal of attention and hostility. They show us a boundary in-the-making: between markets and charity; between legitimacy and stigma; and ultimately between social statuses as independent and dependent.

In the second part of the chapter, I develop the idea that market exchange and formal employment form the centre of common understandings of what the economy *is* and *should be* like, but that these understandings may often be out of sync with the actual economic relationships with which we live in contemporary societies. Not only do we often overestimate how rational and productive formal employment is, but we also often overlook how much of our economic lives have nothing to do with markets.

In order to make these points, I introduce the work of economic historian and social theorist Karl Polanyi who, in the mid-twentieth century, left a profound mark on debates about the nature of the economy and how it should be studied. He provided a broad definition of the 'human economy' that emphasised the fact that across history people have met their material needs through diverse institutions and practices. Market behaviours, and markets themselves, are just one form of such practices, but they enjoy a privileged position in the practice and thought of contemporary capitalist societies. Thus, with Polanyi, we don't have to ask whether people are acting 'inside' or 'outside' the economy; we need to ask instead how the jigsaw puzzle of social institutions and practices in which we meet our wishes and needs actually works in practice. For most people in capitalist welfare states, the answer will be a combination of engagement with markets, support in family units and (willing or unwilling) participation in redistributive mechanisms through taxation and public spending. This weave of institutions and practices makes up our economic lives. My own point will be that in our political thought we have the tendency to unpick this weave and single out the strong 'independent' threads from the weak 'dependent' ones in a way that overemphasises the contrasts between economic roles within society.

Street Papers: Experimenting at the Margins of Economic Legitimacy

> This is a social experiment. A very powerful social experiment, but until what we've learned is taken up by the Government and local authorities, it remains an experiment.[7]

This quotation is about *The Big Issue* street paper in the UK and comes from John Bird its co-founder. Street papers like *The Big Issue* are publications produced specifically for sale by the homeless and other vulnerable people in many countries around the world. The 'social businesses' that produce street papers generally sell them to these vendors, who sell the papers in public spaces at a small profit.

Although newspapers produced by or for homeless people are not unique to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries,[8] it is only since the late 1980s that they have spread rapidly around the world. The International Network of Street Papers (encompassing 122 street papers in 40 countries, with a combined readership estimated by the network at almost six million[9]) is evidence for the fact that, despite some differences, many of these organisations consider themselves part of a global movement with general shared goals.

Street papers are a useful example through which to think about the politics of dependence because they show the cultural association of market exchange with economic independence, and the efforts of various social actors to utilise and police that association. This happens in a number of ways. In public *discourse*, street papers are commented on in newspapers, campaign and advertising material, the statements of politicians, the reasoning of courts and the linguistic exchanges of the general public in everyday life. In public *spaces*, street paper vendors have the task of managing their social performances in ways that attract business rather than aggression. In both discourse and public performance, what are at stake are the associations through which the wider public interprets this economic activity.

The first association to consider is the relation between street papers and the *welfare state*: Does street paper selling really give vendors a form of economic independence that stands in contrast to the dependence often associated with welfare state entitlements?

The second association concerns the relationship between street paper vending and *begging*: Is this just begging with magazines involved as a kind of prop? Is it a 'real' job?

What makes these questions challenging is the fact that, as I outline below, street papers are bought and sold in exchanges in which the identity of the seller—and that person's need—cannot be disentangled from the product being bought or the meaning of the social interaction of exchange. Paradoxically, the relationship between street paper sellers and the wider public is both built on this communication of need and, at the same time, destabilised by it.

In what follows, I outline the public profile of a major street paper publication, The Big Issue (UK), and discuss some of the conflicts that have surrounded it and other street papers.

The Public Identity of Street Papers

The Big Issue was founded in London in 1991 emulating the New York-based publication *Street News*, which was sold on the streets of the city by homeless people. The founders were aiming at establishing an alternative form of institutional support for homeless people who did not want to depend on receiving whatever services the charity sector could offer them at a given time. As their website states: 'The Big Issue is a business. But it is a different kind of business, a social business, which provides a "business solution to a social problem."'[10] The notion of a social business is thus premised on the idea that business goals and ethical goals can coincide with a single organisational structure. With this distinctive business structure, '[t]he paper would re-energize the work ethic in people's lives' by providing them with an income. This turn to business as a way of helping homeless people was a move that 'flew in the face of the philosophy of many of the other organizations working with homeless people.'[11] The central vision was to generate a form of business activity that would be a new kind of link between homeless people, social institutions (like the police) and the rest of the public.

Since its establishment, The Big Issue has grown and (despite difficult periods) has been successful. The magazine now has a significant circulation (currently 82,294 copies a week counting the various editions together, although the figure reached 294,000 in 1997[12]), and its vendors have become a recognisable feature of most UK towns and cities. The vendors are not waged and therefore rely on the profit made through each sale.

In February 2011, then Prime Minister David Cameron named The Big Issue as a role model in a speech on the government's controversial policy agenda that promoted the idea of 'Big Society,'[13] and in July 2011, he acted as guest editor to an edition of the magazine, stating

> First and foremost… it's a great magazine and it's a great honour to be asked [to be guest editor]. It (The Big Issue) has given homeless people a way of taking back control over their lives and is a fantastic example of how we can reduce dependence on state hand-outs. This is entirely in keeping with my political philosophy, so it's quite a natural fit.[14]

As suggested in the quotation from Cameron here, the relation between street paper sales and welfare state redistributions ('state hand-outs') is symbolically significant and pregnant with the issue of economic dependence. It is also legally controversial. In 2011, a vendor of The Big Issue won a case against her local council in which the court recognised that selling the magazine should be classed as a form self-employment. As an immigrant to the UK from another EU country, the vendor's rights to claim some forms of welfare benefits depended on her status as self-employed, which was disputed by the local council. In judging the case, the courts reasoned that 'For someone to be regarded as a worker [for the present purposes] the work must be genuine and effective and not marginal or ancillary' and went on to compare The Big Issue vendor's work to other examples of court decisions that had categorised persons as self-employed (or not) on the basis of the hours worked, the period of employment, the regularity of the employment and the levels of remuneration. As the Upper Tribunal (i.e. appeal court) judge summed up in his decision that upheld the vendor's claim: 'The tribunal considered that the work [w]as genuine and effective. The hours worked of 16–24, the level of remuneration between £45 and £150 a week depending on which period was used and the regularity of the work all led to the conclusion that the work was genuine and effective.'[15]

Unsurprisingly, the mixture of themes raised in the case—immigration and rights to welfare payments—was taken up in the popular media, often with much nationalistic indignation. While the first response to the decision from The Big Issue was enthusiastic, within days spokespersons for The Big Issue were attempting to distance the organisation from the association with the welfare system that the story had produced: 'We sincerely hope that this story does not have negative consequences for any of our Big Issue vendors, all of whom are working, not begging, and are therefore a lesser burden to the state than those who are solely dependent on benefits.'[16] The quotation comes from an online press release called 'Leading the Way in Reducing Benefit Dependency.'

Thus, while giving legal recognition to *Big Issue* vending, the case also prompted commentaries that questioned the relationships between street paper selling, migrant populations in the UK and the welfare system. In these and other reports from the popular media,[17] it seems that street paper selling is now a topic through which other polemics are being waged, including nationalist and anti-welfare state agendas.

The disagreement here over the relationship between street papers and the welfare state is only one side of the symbolic struggle to escape the stigma of dependence. On the other side, and more important in day-to-day public life, is the relationship between street papers and begging.

Aggression towards street paper sellers has often taken the form of a supposed de-masking of the truth: 'Get a job!' is a commonly reported insult received by those who sell the *The Big Issue*.[18] This is countered by other assertions of socio-economic truth in the slogans of street paper organisations, such as 'Working not Begging,' which have appeared on vendors' clothing, in print and in online literature. Different editions of *The Big Issue* magazine cover have also borne messages such as 'Street Trade, Not Street Aid' and 'A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out.'

Two clauses in the code of conduct signed by all vendors of The Big Issue provide perhaps the sharpest illustration of the attempt to project a public image of street paper vending that stands in contrast to begging. The characteristic social repertoires for soliciting charity (i.e. methods of begging) pose a threat to the market relations that street papers aim at cultivating, and so vendors are not free to sell the magazine in any way they choose. They must agree not to:

- Beg or busk while wearing *The Big Issue* badge/uniform or holding a copy of *The Big Issue* magazine.
- Sell in any way associated with begging, including sitting or lying down, or using a cup or bowl to collect money.[19]

This caution is not surprising given the levels of aggression that have been directed towards vendors. The organisation estimates that over a third of its vendors have faced violence while selling the magazine,[20] and a majority of vendors have experienced verbal abuse in relation to their activity.[21]

However, the strategy of dissociating street paper sales from begging is not universal amongst street papers. As a writer at the San Francisco-based *Street Sheet* argued: 'Poor people have an opportunity to express themselves through writing, artwork, and poetry. The vendors can panhandle [beg] with their dignity intact.'[22] Ethnographic work on street paper vendors selling *Street Sheet* also shows just how fluid the line can be between selling papers and begging.[23] Unlike *The Big Issue* in the UK, *Street Sheet* is given to the vendors free of charge, who then sell it on to a buying public. This circumstance accentuates the ambiguity of the vendors' selling activity, since it means that the seller can accept any price for the paper and still make a profit. *Street Sheet* vendors often blended their selling activity with behaviour more characteristic of begging: using a cup to collect coins, asking for donations and being careful not to contradict the public's stereotypes about homeless people by looking too well-dressed or clean for the role. Thus, what is presented to the audience of potential buyers/donors is an activity that shades from an appearance of work—holding a paper for sale—into an appearance of begging. Vendors regularly received donations without people buying a copy of *Street Sheet*, but they also sometimes accepted less than the $1 for the magazine which was the official price.

The market relations in which magazines are sold are as delicate as these interactions and appearances.

Is This Market Exchange?

What emerges from these observations about street papers is that 'the market' is not something that vendors simply step into and take up a clear role within. Rather, market relations are established between people by the application of certain rules (codes of conduct), repertoires of behaviour (sales pitches, and techniques) and rhetorical interventions in public interaction (slogans and self-explanations). Persons, objects and acts can be linked in market-like relationships, but these relationships can also be attacked (by insults) or modified (in the direction of charity).

The symbolic stakes here concern the attribution and deflection of stigmatised dependence. As the author of a history of The Big Issue put it: 'In a sense, homeless people would be decriminalized by their legitimate activities of selling a paper.'[24] In other words, street paper organisations use the socio-economic legitimacy of market exchange to draw street paper sellers into wider patterns of social interaction regarded as good for them and good for society. John Bird (co-founder) put the point starkly when he said 'In a matter of months after the launch, I was talking to coppers on the beat who were saying that people who were incredibly badly behaved in public before were now being disciplined by the market place.'[25]

This image of a disciplining marketplace is powerful one, but as I have emphasised this marketplace is also something that is created by sellers and buyers and which is as fragile and malleable as their ongoing social relationship. The process of configuring a scene of social interaction as market exchange may be piecemeal and the practice arrived at uncertain. In street paper sales, buyers meet sellers and exchange a commodity for a money price. In this sense, at least, they constitute market exchanges involving symmetrical social roles for buyer and seller who exchange valuables in opposite directions. But the knowledge—disseminated by street papers themselves—that this is a form of business with explicit social goals to help marginalised members of society adds an element to the situation that is destabilising, and provokes both critique and justifications from the social actors involved. The commodity sold has not been entirely 'disentangled'[26] from the identity of the organisation that stands behind it and the vendors who sell it, but rather carries these with it through the exchange. Street paper vendors do not become anonymous market actors in these exchanges, but symbols of a 'different kind of business,' in which market exchange and social identity are integrally connected. Its social visibility lies in the fact that it exposes people's lives, and their need, under the spotlight of market exchange.

Although this communication of need can make the exchanges socially ambiguous, many social actors do accept the 'experimental' combination of business and social responsibility, and as has been suggested, this acceptance is won by street papers' strategic cultivation and rejection of associations. The social legitimacy of the selling activity itself is central to the whole process. Street papers' economic value (their money price) depends on the social value attributed to the selling activity as a 'legitimate' form of economic conduct (it is worth remembering that street papers cannot be bought in shops). The social value of the latter is carried into the economic value of the former.

We might say of street paper sales that the activity's qualitative cultural value (the legitimate economic identity that it cultivates) establishes a framework for interaction within which the regular flows of quantifiable values can move in the form of money and magazines with prices.

Street papers translate a vague social debt felt by the public towards the poorest in society into a definite exchange opportunity. But the stigma of dependence has not been decisively shed by street paper sellers. In the minds of some sections of the public, their identity remains entangled with the welfare state and begging in ways that complicate the attempt to be a market actor and to claim the legitimacy that goes with this role. Street paper vendors are certainly *in* the economy, but they only partially manage to be recognised as being *of* the economy in just the right way. They have not entirely escaped the empty economy, and their cultural status as economically independent is not secure.

Empty Labour in the Formal Economy

The example of street papers shows organisations and individuals involved in a complex and extended struggle for recognition as economically independent. It also shows the fragility of a practice that blurs the boundaries between market exchange and charity. *The New York Times* does not have to run editorials that remind its readers that its vendors are 'working, not begging, so if you pay for the magazine please take it.'[27]

But while some members of the public have tried to reveal the supposed emptiness of street paper selling and to punish sellers (with verbal and sometimes physical abuse) for this emptiness, it is not common at all that we ask for the 'truth' of more standard forms of work, like office jobs. There appears to be little social appetite for inquiring into the extent to which various job titles in the labour market in fact conceal activities of little to no value whatsoever. This is probably because most of us accept and assume that capitalist economies are competitive places where unnecessary job roles are progressively eliminated. But this is not quite true.

Sociologist Roland Paulsen has used the concept of 'empty labour' to study the time people spend *at work* but *not working*: hours spent on social media, sending private emails or doing other non-work-related things. His interviews and examples are drawn from both the public and private sectors, and there is no indication that the former involves more empty labour than the latter. Nonetheless, one of his most impressive examples does come from public-sector work: employees from the Swedish Aviation Authority were fired after it was discovered that they had spent up to 75% of their working hours visiting pornographic websites.[28] His pointed comment on such cases is that while we may be most outraged by the fact that it was *pornography* that was taking up their well-paid time, isn't the more interesting side of the example the very fact that *it was possible* for employees in a modern and supposedly rationalised economy to spend so much time not working on the job? Aren't contemporary economies surprisingly full of empty labour, given the common narrative, both in theory and popular media, of overworked and burned out employees? Of course, the point is not that very many people are not overworked (exploited even), and Paulsen's study is on wealthy post-industrial economies dominated by office work, and his conclusions would probably not apply so neatly to other contexts of production; the point is that there appears to be a mismatch between a dominant image of modern economies (as rational, productive, efficient, highly managed) and the things many people actually *do* if we go out and look.

In a sense, Paulsen's 'empty labour' is the opposite of the idea of the 'empty economy' that this chapter has developed. Paulsen is looking at wasted time at work, and I am looking at (potentially) valuable activities that are rendered invisible or illegitimate in public life. But both arguments draw attention to the *mismatch* between economic ideology and real-world economic practices that can give us a distorted view of our economic lives. Both arguments suggest that what goes on in the formal economy of contracts and salaries has become so central to our common understandings of economic activity that we use that institutional formality as a normative guide to judgements about *legitimacy* and *productive contribution*. This may be right some of the time, but it is still amazing how easily the mantle of independence falls on the shoulders of someone with a job title and amazing how heavily the chain of dependence weighs on people who work all day without a contract.

Karl Polanyi's View of the 'Human Economy'

In order to understand how market exchange became synonymous with the 'formal economy' and how participation in the formal economy became the easiest cultural proxy for economic independence, we can turn to the work of Karl Polanyi, who aimed to both broaden our view of economic activity and to narrate the ideological and practical rise of markets.

Mitchel's idea that we can in fact date the emergence of 'the economy' as a discreet 'sphere' of human interaction is an echo of Polanyi's view that for most of human history what we now call ‘the economy’ was *embedded* in ‘non-economic’ institutions such as kinship relations, marriage, public rituals and the general social order of ‘status’: identities that defined people’s social roles. Markets, which now form the core of our idea of what an economy is, have only had a *central* place in human societies since the development of modern capitalism. In most societies across history, markets have been an institution that did not organise economic interaction *within* a society, but instead organised economic interaction *between* societies: *long distance* trade concluded in markets is something very different from, and prior to, competitive markets within societies.[29] Building on these historical claims, Polanyi argues that it was first in the nineteenth century that great minds such as G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Henry Maine and Ferdinand Tönnies began to *think* of the economy as a distinctive sphere of economic activity distinct from surrounding social practices (religious, political, familial, etc.). What they were beginning to conceptualise was an economy *disembedded* from the rest of human life.[30]

The history of the ‘disembedding’ of the economy (in the narrow sense of market institutions) was what Polanyi set out to narrate in his masterwork *The Great Transformation*, published in 1944. What *The Great Transformation* is best remembered for is the story of how, with the industrial revolution and the development of modern capitalism, markets came to dominate the organisation of economic practices and also the ways that we think about these practices. The economy became ‘disembedded’ from the social relations in which it had so long been thoroughly submerged. In the new society, he wrote, ‘Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system.’[31] With the development of ‘separate’ economic institutions, not bound by norms and customs, the logic of which might frustrate market behaviours, society submitted itself to the demands of these institutions: mass migrations following the market demand for labour are perhaps the best example of this.

Alongside this powerful historical narrative, Polanyi also plants the normative idea that there remains something artificial about this market economy. He calls land, labour and money the ‘fictitious’ commodities,[32] and suggests that while we can *imagine* these three components of industrial production to be commodities and thus organise them in markets, we can never really *treat them* or *experience them* entirely as such. This is because land is nothing other than nature itself, labour is simply the effort of human bodies, and money is but a token of purchasing power. 'Undoubtedly, labor, land, and money markets *are* essential to a market economy' wrote Polanyi, '[b]ut no society could stand the effects of such a system of crude fictions even for the shortest stretch of time unless its human and natural substance as well as its business organization was protected against the ravages of this satanic mill.'[33] It was not a coincidence that Polanyi published *The Great Transformation* just before the end of the Second World War. He was writing at a time when the liberal dream of self-regulating markets had been eclipsed in much of the world by fascism and communism, and governments were going to have to decide on the new economic world order that would be built on the ruins left by the war. Polanyi's diagnosis (as summarised by Fred Block) was that 'The second "great transformation"—the rise of fascism—[was] a result of the first one—the rise of market liberalism.'[34] This meant that hope for the future depended on not repeating this pattern of free market utopianism followed by violent political reactions to this.[35]

Already in *The Great Transformation* Polanyi had begun to develop a theoretical framework for studying economic history that contrasted markets with other forms of economic organisation and hence made it possible for him to narrate the rise of markets as a qualitative transformation in economic institutions and practices. The most important set of concepts in this framework were what he first referred to as four 'principles' of economic organisation and later called 'forms of integration.'[36] His claim was that if we take a birds-eye view of the institutional structures that make up a human economy, what we will see in different societies across history are different patterns of economic activity through which a society meets the material needs of its members. These patterns, or forms of integration, included reciprocity, redistribution, house-holding,[37] and exchange. Reciprocity occurs between social units (like clans or families) that have well-defined obligations with respect to one another; redistribution involves gathering goods to a centre (e.g. a tribal leader, or a state administration) and then distributing these goods according to customs or rules; house-holding is based on the organisation of production and consumption within an extended household unit, such as an Ancient Greek *oikos*; and finally exchange is the two-way swapping of goods, which may or may not involve bargaining and price-setting. These four patterns were never to be found complete in reality: every society combines them in different ways, but one pattern is often dominant, fitting with the organisational structure of the society in question (redistribution, e.g., needs a society with centralised administrative power). By making market exchange a mere subset of one of these forms of integration, it is clear that Polanyi was trying to emphasise the marginality of market institutions and behaviours to most human economies across history.

While Polanyi had put these distinctions to work in his historical narrative in *The Great Transformation*, he later integrated them into a theoretical framework under the heading of a 'substantive concept' of the 'economic'; a view of economic life that he believed might be adequate to the study of past and present human economies.

Polanyi thus defined 'the economy' as 'an instituted process of interaction between man and his environment, which results in a continuous supply of want satisfying material means.'[38] 'The substantive meaning of economic' he wrote 'derives from man's dependence for his living upon nature and his fellows.'[39] The four forms of economic integration were thus alternative institutional patterns that structured how this dependence on nature and other people would be organised. Although he did not call them this, for the present purposes we might think of them as alternative regimes of economic dependence.

The key point of the 'substantive' definition is to be found in the contrast with another meaning of 'economic,' which, by the time Polanyi published these words in 1957, had assumed importance in defining the field of economics, and was influencing the way in which economic history and anthropology were being studied.[40] This was the 'formal' meaning of 'economic' and referred to the rational decision-making that humans engaged in 'a situation of choice that arises out of an insufficiency of means.'[41] The underlying point here is that the formal meaning gave itself primarily to the study of markets and other similar situations of choice within constrained conditions. While it did not directly imply that 'economy' simply meant 'markets,' this formal sense of the 'economic' did encourage this association, or at the very least, it encouraged us to think of all economic practice *by analogy* to markets. When we talk about the 'formal' *economy* today (in an administrative sense), we refer to those market exchanges, transfers and monetary gains that are visible to the state and are thus taxable. No one would argue that all markets are visible to the state in this way (that's why we have the term 'black market'), and so the formal meaning of 'economic' (for economic science) does not coincide with the 'formal economy' (for state administrators). However, Polanyi's disciplinary sense of 'formal' and the administrative sense of 'formal' do share a common focus on exchange, which is paradigmatically organised in markets and where values become visible as prices. Both the idea of the 'formal economy' and the formal meaning of 'economic' stand in stark contrast to the substantive meaning of 'economic,' which refers to all human practices that contribute to satisfying needs through activities including resource production, allocation and social reproduction. The latter meaning takes in an enormous sweep of human interaction and institutions that social science cannot afford to ignore.

Polanyi developed his contrast between the 'substantive' and the 'formal' meanings of 'economic' because he believed that by confusing these two meanings, modern social science had tended to conflate 'the economy' with 'markets' (i.e. with the place where rational calculation regarding scarce resources takes place). In turn, the effect of this conflation had been to mislead social scientists and historians into a crude fallacy: they reasoned that since every society needs an economy of some kind, and economies are made up of human behaviours typical of markets such as bargaining, then economic history and anthropology should be able to trace a line from man's basic primitive propensity to truck and barter (Adam Smith's premise in *The Wealth of Nations*) to modern capitalist markets. The problem here is that one of the premises is false: every human society *does* need an economy (in the sense of practices that supply material needs), but *not* all economies (not even a small fraction of economies) across history have involved market-like behaviours in organising the satisfaction of material needs. In short, the fallacious argument left us with the impression that history is, in a sense, markets all the way down. In actual fact, for the individual in pre-industrial society, 'his emotions fail to convey any experience that he could identify as "economic."'[42]

The alternative history that Polanyi wrote in *The Great Transformation* and elsewhere was a complex one that tracked more than one process of transformation. On the one hand, Polanyi gives us a history of institutional change: this is the radical transformation of the laws and practices through which human economies are organised as we move from the pre-industrial to the industrial world. On the other hand, Polanyi gives us a history of conceptual and experiential change: great thinkers found words and methods to describe, analyse and prescribe what does and should go on in 'the economy,' and ordinary people had to change their understanding of, and motives for engaging in, economic practices.

Capturing these two strands of history in one sentence, he writes: 'While in imagination the nineteenth century was engaged in constructing the liberal utopia [of self-regulating markets], in reality it was handing over things to a definite number of concrete institutions the mechanisms of which ruled the day.'[43] In short, both economic ideas and economic practices were in transformation—but they did not always march in step.

Using Polanyi Today

Polanyi's work left at least two powerful lessons to later social theories of economic life.

The first was that any economy is comprised of a patchwork of economic practices that are qualitatively different from one another and yet co-exist in people's lives. If we look at how people actually meet their needs as they care, produce, consume, distribute and exchange, then we will realise that markets are only a part of a broader process, the totality of which comprises 'the economy.' It was this idea that he captured with the 'substantive' meaning of 'economic.'

The second lesson was that, since the industrial revolution, capitalist societies have lived through unprecedented times, where markets stand at the practical and ideological centre of these societies' economies and have somehow disengaged themselves from the broader patchwork referred to above. Self-regulating markets, not bound by custom or politics, became a dream and—to a certain extent—a reality that reorganised societies across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and came crashing down with the rise of communism and fascism. Unbeknownst to Polanyi, the dream would be revived from the 1970s and onwards under the banner of 'neoliberalism.'

While not directly contradictory, these two lessons do stand in a certain tension with one another. For one thing, we are left asking how separate, detached or 'disembedded' markets can really become, given that they too are institutions that need a complex assemblage of social conditions—from property laws to technology to social habits—in order function.[44] We are also left wondering about those practices and institutions—from the household to religious organisation to governments—that the market overshadowed. Has their actual importance diminished? Or only their social legitimacy? Or neither? And finally, what current importance shall we give to the other patterns of integration—reciprocity, redistribution and house-holding—that market exchange stands in contrast too?

Answers to these questions return us to the metaphor of the 'empty economy.' Elements of economic practice that do not belong in the market have not disappeared from our societies, but they have been pushed to the margins of our economic ideology where, in social science, politics and everyday life, they appear as *adjuncts* to the *real* economy. For example, state redistributions through taxation and public spending are, according to political critics, only necessary because of market failure (failure to produce basic infrastructure, failure to provide full employment and so on). Or again: when economists calculate the value of unpaid work in the home by estimating what the same labour power could earn for a person on the labour market, they are simply imagining domestic work as an extension of work in the monetary economy.[45] In both cases, the home and the state are imagined as adjuncts to markets: *in* but not quite *of* the economy. An economic ideology dominated by market behaviour as the paradigmatic example of economic action will thus struggle to imagine economic practices except through the analogy with markets, leaving us with the sense of lack that I have here called 'the empty economy.'

How this sense of lack manifests itself in social practice is exactly what I have tried to illustrate with the case of street papers. Commentators on street papers appear to be asking: Does this activity generate value *in the right sense*? Is street paper selling a veiled form of *dependence* or a genuine expression of *independence*? Is this exchange or charity? With Polanyi's broad view of the human economy in mind, we can see how powerfully the market has become the centre of many people's understanding of what it means to be economically independent, leaving other transfers of value—in this case welfare payments and charity—as symbols of stigmatised dependence.

Real economic lives are lived within patchworks of institutions that embody what I (building on Polanyi) have called regimes of economic dependence. Contrary to common associations of markets with independence, I regard the *necessity* to engage in markets as a particular form of dependence that we, as a society, have normalised and come to value. This is market dependence, and it is qualitatively distinct from the dependence characteristic of the family household and the status-based dependence characteristic of redistributive systems like welfare states. The problem is that in normative reasoning—whether academic or everyday—dichotomies between practices 'full' of value and practices 'empty' of value fit more easily into moral arguments aimed at dividing 'bad' from 'good.' By contrast, the complex jigsaws of exchange, reciprocity, redistribution and house-holding are easier to relegate to the background of our pictures of economy and society (or our 'socio-economic ontology'). While street papers do not look like a paradox or a problem when viewed as part of that jigsaw puzzle, they have certainly crashed head-on into the simple dichotomy between dependence and independence that a market-centred view of economic life poses for us.

Notes

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32. Ibid., 76.
33. Ibid., 76–77.
34. Fred Block, "Introduction," in *The Great Transformation*. By Karl Polanyi (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), xviii.
35. Polanyi saw, for example, great potential in Franklin D. Roosevelt's vision of a New Deal for the US society and economy. See Block, "Introduction," xxxv.
36. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 39–58; Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry Pearson (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957), 250.
37. Polanyi originally discusses four such patterns in *The Great Transformation*, later dropping house-holding from his influential essay "The Economy as Instituted Process." For a discussion of the shift see: Chris Gregory, "Whatever Happened to Householding," in *Market and Society*, ed. Chris Hann and Keith Hart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 133–159.
38. Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry Pearson (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957), 248.
39. Ibid., 239.

40. A classic defence of the view that economics did and should study choice and exchange under conditions of scarcity (i.e. the *opposite* of Polanyi's view of the 'substantive economy') is found in Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1932).
41. Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," 246.
42. Polanyi, "Aristotle Discovers the Economy," 70.
43. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 220.
44. For a theoretical and historical discussion of the embeddedness problem see John Lie, "Embedding Polanyi's Market Society," *Sociological Perspectives* 34(2) (1991). For an influential use of the concept of 'embeddedness' that cuts against Polanyi's claims about the market, see Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *The American Journal of Sociology* 91(3) (November 1985), 481–510.
45. Therese Jefferson and John E. King, "'Never Intended to be a Theory of Everything': Domestic Labor in Neoclassical and Marxian Economics," *Feminist Economics* 7(3) (2001): 75

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PART II

Instituting the Economy

Summary of Part I, Introduction to Part II

Who is Dependent? Summary of Part I

Who, in society, is benefitting without producing? Whose activity is economically 'empty,' 'unproductive' or without 'value'? These are the questions that Part I has been concerned with. The examples in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 have illustrated how the charge of economic dependence is made in public life and how it is replied to. My repeated emphasis has been on shifts between senses of dependence; between structural and practical dependence, and between parasitic and vulnerable dependence. Taken together, I imagined these senses as points on a 'dependence compass' that maps out some of the analytical and normative potentials of this powerful and ambiguous idea. In this first half of the book, beggars and the sellers of street newspapers joined company with housewives, buffoons and puppeteers in the shadow of the market economy—whatever else their differences, their failure to produce and exchange in the right way makes them all a part of the 'empty economy.' They are *in* but not quite *of* the economy. The aim of Part I was thus to reconstruct the sense of lack that accompanies social roles that are suspected of economic dependence, and to show the ways in which theoretical arguments and public rhetoric have been used to displace social stigma or show valuable work where it went unseen before.

If I have managed to show that charges of dependence usually come with serious blind spots, it has been by significantly expanding the range of things that seem worth thinking about under the concept of 'dependence.' The dependence of women on the welfare state was distracting us from issues concerning the dependence of children on mothers (Chapter 2). The practical dependence of women upon men in traditional nuclear families was distracting us from the structural dependence of the formal economy on the informal economy (Chapter 3). The struggle over whether street paper selling was 'real work' was distracting from the fact that markets are one way *amongst others* to structure our dependence upon our contemporaries (Chapter 4). The aim has been to expand our concerns with dependence in a way that makes previous narrow polemical uses appear arbitrary or, indeed, politically motivated.

Instituting the Economy. Summary of Part II

In Part II, we shift focus from social groups and economic roles (welfare claimants, domestic labourers, street paper vendors) to the basic economic and political institutions that structure relationships of dependence in modern societies. By 'institutions' I do not mean the likes of the IMF or the World Bank; I mean the basic symbolic fabric of everyday economic life: money, property and the rights of wealth. These features of our economic lives have receded so far into the background of our practices (they are so taken for granted) that we can sometimes fail to grasp what is specific about the forms of power, and the distributions of power, that they entail. In the next two Chapters (5 and 6), I will ask not how money and property secure *independence*, but what kinds of *dependence* both institutions create amongst social actors in society. Thus, one key argument of Part II is that, however natural it now seems to us, by organising much of our economic practices through money made by banks and states, and through private property, we are in fact instituting a particular regime of vulnerability. While I do not often use the term in what follows, I would like to suggest here that these discussions are largely about what we can call 'market dependence.' Market dependence does not, of course, make us all equally vulnerable. As we will see in Chapter 7, those who inherit wealth, and those who have a stream of unearned income through ownership of assets, enjoy an underlying security not shared by all.

Part II is thus about 'instituting' the economy. As Karl Polanyi strenuously argued in *The Great Transformation*, there is nothing natural or spontaneous about market exchange as a form of economic interaction. Markets are *made*. And for markets in their modern form, private property and money constitute the institutional preconditions of their operation. Similarly, there is nothing natural or inevitable about unearned income or inheritance; we choose how to institute these parts of our economic lives, and looking at current laws, it is hard to resist the conclusion that we often choose badly.

CHAPTER 5

Currencies and Scales of Dependence

On the 23 of June 2016, UK citizens voted to leave the European Union, and by the 24 of June, the value of the British pound had sunk to a 30-year low against the US Dollar.[1] In the months that followed the value of the pound fluctuated, taking downwards turns every time the UK government announced policies that suggested a 'hard Brexit': Britain leaving the European Union in a way that would decisively sever the country's ties to the European single market.[2] On a world-historical scale, these falls in the value of a currency are not particularly extreme: many people across history have experienced the value seeping out of their notes, coins and account balances denominated in a currency. But like other more extreme cases of devaluation, the slump in the value of the pound exposes money as a crucial link in the chain of our dependence on others.

While money is often associated with *independence*, looking at money through the lens of *dependence* throws up a different set of issues. Where money has become the dominant store of value and means of exchange and payment (i.e. in all but a fraction of human societies today), access to resources is increasingly determined by the amounts of money we have and the markets in which we can use it. Money and markets now structure, to a great extent, the *ways* in which we are dependent upon both other individuals and on impersonal institutions beyond our daily experience. These relations of dependence have different dimensions.

P. J. L. Cockburn, *The Politics of Dependence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8_5

On the one hand, in societies characterised by a complex division of labour, we depend upon others for goods and services acquired in market exchange. This enormously complex system of markets is made possible (or at least greatly facilitated) by money. Given that very few people in modern societies could provide for their needs through their own material resources and skills alone, we basically all accept a fundamental dependence on others that might be characterised as 'horizontal': it is an anonymous interdependence amongst all of the economic actors trading with one another in a monetary economy.

On the other hand, as users of a *specific currency*, people are dependent in another way: they depend on the decisions of the political community that controls the sovereign territory in which this currency is used and on the global financial institutions that judge and value that currency. In this way, the currencies that we use make us vulnerable to the actions and decisions of others: our real powers to command resources and buy the services of others can evaporate as the currency that we own devalues. But this vulnerability can be configured in very different ways. The Greek sovereign debt crisis (from 2009 onwards, leaving headline news around 2015) certainly produced a great deal of finger-pointing at the 'lazy Greeks,' portrayed in both the popular media and by prominent politicians as parasitical upon the supposedly hard-working populations of northern Europe.[3] But the crisis also revealed both the vulnerability of the whole Eurozone to the political decisions of one EU member state and conversely the vulnerability of the Greek population to decisions taken amongst political leaders and financial institutions outside of Greece. We might characterise this dependence relation as 'vertical' because it concerns the power of either democratic or non-democratic authorities to shape a fundamental social institution that structures people's effective capabilities (e.g. whether they can buy anything with the money in their pocket).

The relation between this horizontal dependence and this vertical dependence is at the centre of this chapter's concern with money. We can use it to begin to think about the relationship between economic networks and political communities, and about the relationship between economic power and political power. The crucial questions are: in what sense are economic networks and political communities decoupled from one another in societies where we use modern money produced by banks and states? What promise do monetary reformers see in a recoupling of political communities with economic networks at a scale smaller or greater than nation states? And what problems are faced by such attempts to master money for social change face?

As the Eurozone crisis clearly exposed, a common economic network (in this case a monetary space) encompassing a number of distinct political communities can produce extreme strains on both the network and these communities. Conversely, however, every political community hosts a number of economic networks (or 'circuits') that overlap and cut across one another. Some of these networks are even deliberatively developed on a scale that produces a set of qualitatively different dependence relations. Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) operate on a micro-scale within societies and are embedded within intentional communities: that is, social networks organised according to chosen and agreed upon principles. They represent not a *scaling up* of relations of dependence, but a *scaling down* of these relations.

In this chapter, I will claim, following others,[4] that money structures the *scale* of our relations of dependence, and that this scale determines the *quality* of these relations of dependence. There is a sociological point here and a political point.

First of all, developing the sociological point, we need to look at the idea that money affects the quality of our social relations, and that vice versa our social relations affect the quality of our money (or at least the quality of our uses of money). To explore these ideas, I will contrast two social scientific stories about money and society. The 'big' story about money is the story told by classical social theorists, and which forms the backdrop to many academic and popular views of money and markets today. This big story about money, which I will tell through the words of Karl Marx and Georg Simmel, focusses on the effects of money on society. More specifically, for the present purposes, we are interested in what this story has to say about the *new kind of dependence* that monetary economies bring into our lives. However, this 'big' story about money has gradually come under attack by sociologists and anthropologists who are unhappy with the way that this narrative neglects human agency in the creation, control and use of money. These critics counter, then, with 'small' stories about currencies that show not how money has changed society, but how people in societies *change money*. The contrast here can be posed as a question: Does money introduce a cold logic of calculation into the midst of personal relations, or do people, in their daily lives, give money a 'social life'?[5] By focusing on specific currencies, rather than money in general, these small stories show us how different social groups engage actively in the politics of money creation and control. They show the importance of the question: Who benefits and who loses from different ways of instituting money? I will suggest that these 'small' stories about money (or rather currency) prompt us to look at the vertical axis of dependence described above: our dependence as users of money on a *structure of authority* supporting the value of the money.

The contrast between the big and the small stories about money will, I hope, be helpful for understanding the *politics* of money discussed in the second half of the chapter.

There, I introduce a number of theoretical and practical attempts to reform money in ways that would reorganise our horizontal relations of dependence, our vertical relations of dependence or both simultaneously. Alternative non-state currencies such as those used in LETS, or, on a much larger scale, like Bitcoin, illustrate that monetary reform is often, at least in part, about decoupling or recoupling economic networks and political communities in order to rearrange the power relationships in a society.

In the final section of the chapter, I will develop the problem of the mismatch between the scales of political communities and the scales of economic networks. This point has been made by sociologists and human geographers studying the politics of money.[6] What this chapter adds to that work is a republican view of this problem of 'fit' between political community and economic network. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's criticisms of the ills of a monetary economy are extremely helpful for thinking through the different ways in which money structures forms of dependence: from dependence on one another within a society to dependence of one society on another. The republican ideal, although unattractive in many ways, is all about *choosing* those relations of dependence that maintain the independence of the republic as a whole, and so avoid *unchosen* forms of dependence (on powers outside the republic).

My general claim will be that while the politics of money are clearly about a lot more than dependence, the institutional structures of money creation and control and the geopolitics of the economic networks clearly do help to shape both the *who* and the *how* of relations of dependence: who depends upon who, and in what ways. I will argue that as users of money in modern societies, we should be aware of what forms of dependence we tacitly accept, which forms we might choose, and which forms we might want to actively resist.

The Big Story About Money and Dependence

One of the powerful and enduring sociological narratives about modernity describes how money has transformed social relations over time. Where once personal and political relationships tied people together into networks of duty and responsibility, privilege and debt, money has gradually intervened, leaving us with impersonal economic relationships, where my rights to resources depend on how fat my wallet is, and my duties to others (not least the state) can be discharged in monetary payments (rather than military service or labour). While such a narrative is clearly incomplete, neglecting as it does the continued importance of the family in intergenerational transfers of wealth, unpaid care work and a multitude of other relations of dependence, it does clearly capture something important about the reality of capitalist societies. It certainly reflects, too, a widespread *view* of these societies that form the backdrop both to social critiques (society has become cold and impersonal) and to political defences (society has liberated itself from arbitrary power structures).

Underpinning this big story about money is the idea that money has the power to transform qualities into quantities (things become prices), and that this has a deep impact upon the moral structure of society: how we relate to things, institutions and one another.[7] Probably, two of the most influential figures to have developed this view of money and modernity were Karl Marx and Georg Simmel, who are now considered founding figures of sociology (alongside Max Weber and Emile Durkheim). Marx's impact on political and economic thought, as well as revolutionary practice, needs little introduction; but for such a radical critic of classical political economy, his views on the nature of money remained surprisingly close to the tradition that he criticised: money, for Marx, was essentially a *commodity* that had gradually developed from being a thing with a use (a precious metal) to the *measure* of usefulness in general (as money).[8] The effect of this assumption was that Marx tended to focus on the role of money in exchange and the circulation of commodities, rather than on the interests at stake in the production and control of money as such. While moving away from a commodity view of money, Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* is also much more about the nature and effects of money in general than about the politics of particular currencies. But whatever their limitations, there is no doubt that Marx's and Simmel's work on money laid important foundations for subsequent diagnoses of the modern human condition, developed in sociology, philosophy and anthropology and popularised in political narratives about money, freedom, individualism and alienation.

Marx, Simmel and a whole tradition of political economy stemming from Adam Smith's work saw the development of money as integrally connected with the development of markets, which in turn was integrally connected with the division of labour in complex economies. With his critique of economic science discussed in the previous chapter, Karl Polanyi would later challenge the assumption that the division of labour is *integrally* connected to markets; he and others would also challenge the idea that money has its origins in, and derives its function from, market exchange.[9] But in what I am calling the 'big' story about money, the rise of money as a form of wealth neatly dovetails with the historical development of societies in which large-scale industry and markets have replaced subsistence farming and traditional patterns of rights and responsibilities. As Marx put it: 'Patriarchal as well as ancient conditions (feudal also) thus disintegrate with the development of commerce, of luxury, of *money*, of *exchange value*, while modern society arises and grows in the same measure.'[10] In a world in which people are not self-sufficient, but rather specialised in a field of production (or a service), money and markets are a society's way of making efficient exchange possible. This is exchange in which, instead of barter or reciprocal give-and-take, money prices show the exchange value of all of the things brought into the market. Money is the universal equivalent that makes this comparison between the multitudes of different commodities possible. It has the power to transform qualities into quantities: things that serve completely different wants and needs, things that are as different from one another as slaves and nails, can be compared along a single scale of value denominated in a currency.

Both Marx and Simmel identified similar transformations in our relations of dependence associated with the development from pre-market to market societies. The very meaning of 'independence' in modern market economies, and the subjective experience of freedom therein, needed, they argued, to be understood not in contrast to 'dependence' as such, but in contrast to the forms of *personal* dependence that economies based on monetised exchange had undermined.

Let us look at their views in turn.

In Marx's diagnosis of the achievements and ills of industrial capitalismw,[11] he constantly sharpens our view of the specificities of this social era by making contrasts to ancient and (more often) feudal social and economic arrangements. He constantly asks: What is *new* about industrial capitalism? One of the answers here is that in a society in which resources are organised through a 'developed system of exchange' using money, '[…]the ties of personal dependence, of distinctions of blood, education, etc. are in fact exploded, ripped up […] and individuals *seem* independent.'[12] He goes on to note that this 'independence' is really an 'illusion' more correctly characterised as 'indifference.'[13] The independence of people as they stand in market relations is only apparent because '[t]hese external relations [of people in markets] are very far from being an abolition of "relations of dependence"; they are rather the dissolution of these relations into a general form […].'[14]

Marx refers here to 'external relations,' and in other places to 'objective dependency relations,' both of which he contrasts with relations of '*personal* dependence.'[15] There are two important points here. On the one hand, we often literally don't know and don't care much about the people from whom we get our bread and nails; unlike patriarchal distribution structures within an extended family, or the relation of a peasant to a feudal landowner, people exchanging in markets can, in principle, mean nothing for one another except as holders of money and goods (they have no added political or personal power relations—they just exchange or they don't). On the other hand, Marx is making the different, but connected claim, that '[…] individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on one another.'[16] This point is not only about the quality of social relationships, but the quality of the *ideas* that structure people's view of the world: in a monetary economy, we *see* the world through exchange value. All things can be substituted for one another, and all people can be substituted for one another. The power of money to transform the qualities of things into quantities is thus also a power to transform human relationships from particular (and diverse) to generic, through the value systems that come to dominate our lives. We now have power to direct the distribution of things and the activity of other people not because of who we are but because we own quantities of exchange value—money: 'The individual' Marx writes, 'carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket.'[17]

Perhaps the most important thing about this striking formulation is that money is said to constitute the bond between the *individual* and *society*: all social units in between, from the household to the family to the guild, have diminished in relevance.

In the work quoted above, Marx is quick to emphasise that the experience of independence in a market economy is illusory. While strikingly similar to Marx in his view on the relation between of dependence and independence, Simmel produced a more sustained analysis of the experience of individual freedom made possible by the widespread use of money.[18]

Again, for Simmel, the first thing that money does, in a well-developed market economy, is to make us utterly dependent upon others in our daily lives. Or rather, this is not so much a direct effect of the money, as an effect of the immense division of labour in society that money makes possible: 'consider' Simmel marvels 'how many 'delivery men' alone we are dependent upon in a money economy!' But this is only the first step in the story. While the *extent* of our dependence has greatly increased, the *quality* of this dependence has also changed in important ways. No longer am I dependent upon specific people to work and consume, but on countless others with whom I have a purely impersonal relation and who could all be substituted for one another: again, as Marx pointed out, one smith or baker is as good as another for getting my nails and bread.[19] Money has allowed personalities to withdraw, as it were, behind economic roles: nothing determines exactly who I will work for or buy from. And this, Simmel thinks, 'is the most favourable situation for bringing about inner independence, the feeling of individual self-sufficiency' (298). To not care about the personalities behind these roles 'discloses that indifference to subjective elements of dependence that characterises *the experience of freedom*' (299, emphasis added). While in non-monetary economies, the claims that a person had to sustenance or access to resources were claims addressed to specific other people arranged in social structures and hierarchies, 'today [in the monetary economy] everyone carries around with him, in a condensed latent form, his claim to the achievements of others.' (342) Money is that claim.

Simmel does not doubt that the modern wage worker in a monetary economy remains deeply dependent upon others in order to produce and consume; in this, he is only relatively different from the medieval peasant. What *is* very different is the fact that along with this general dependence comes *choice* about who to work for and trade with. Despite the objective dependence, then, the subjective experience of freedom can thrive. Furthermore, this experience of freedom that money ushers into individuals' lives is not only based on new possibilities for choosing between *people* with whom to do business. As a form of wealth, money also liberates people from the restrictions that other forms of property had put on their modes of life. Thus, while ownership of land, for example, may give very real powers to the owner, those powers are limited by the nature of land as a form of property. The life of a feudal lord is not for everyone. Money, by contrast, is infinitely flexible in its uses, it 'adjusts with equal ease to every form and every purpose that the will wishes to imprint it with,' it 'obeys us without reservation' (325). On the subjective level, people experience this as a growing distinction between 'being' and 'owning': I am no longer defined by my property (e.g. land) and hence my social role tied to that property (e.g. feudal landowner) (321).

Thus, when we compare with non-monetary economies, we can see that money has done two things to our dependencies. First, money has allowed for an immense division of labour that, while making us more dependent on society as a whole, makes us less dependent on any specific personalities within this society. Our 'claim to the achievements of others' is no longer a claim on specific other people, but a general claim crystallised into symbolic form. Second, money has allowed us to overcome the restrictions that other forms of property had for our modes of life and conduct (354).

Both Marx's and Simmel's accounts of what money does to relations of dependence are compelling and problematic. They are compelling because they push us to focus on money as a key to understanding many aspects of our contemporary lives that we take for granted: the division of labour, the separation of economic roles from specific personalities and the experience of freedom in the midst of fundamental dependence. Both force us to think about what we might call 'market dependence': the form of society and economy in which people's dependence on one another is structured by the institutions of markets and money. This big story about money helps us to see that this form of dependence is not inevitable or a constant in human history. However, the story that Marx and Simmel both tell is problematic because, as such a very *big* story about money in general, it inevitably runs a theoretical stream-roller over empirical detail and suggests a one-way development in the history of money: as if money itself had an inbuilt logic. Put more specifically, while interesting as a story about money, both Marx and Simmel clearly make concerns about specific *currencies* secondary to the analysis of the dynamics of money in general. The debate about how to think about the relation between money and currency still runs today in disagreements between those who want to grasp the underlying logic of money and markets and those who want to focus in on the many different ways that individuals and groups control various currencies.[20]

The key idea that Marx and Simmel bequeathed to twentieth- and twenty-first-century social and political theories of money was that the essence of money is the translation of qualities into quantities. This grand narrative has, for example, served as the backdrop for the work of recent moral philosophers, who take on the task of finding the limits to quantification (what shouldn't be for sale).[21] It is a narrative in which the spectre of qualities being ceaselessly transformed (through monetary transactions) into quantities raises fears of social values being 'corrupted' into economic values[22] and of the colonisation of our social practices, and indeed our minds, by the logic of exchange and equivalence.[23] Under the influence of money, it seems that we are all becoming little calculators who have lost touch with the art of moral judgement.

While sometimes a good antidote to free market ideology, these philosophical critiques tend to show little concern for how money is actually created, used or controlled. For the last 30 years, sociologists and anthropologists of money have become increasingly dissatisfied with the 'big' story of money that regards it as a quantifying steamroller flattening the diversity of social life and relationships. First of all, it is naïve to imagine that we can talk about 'money' in general without paying any attention to the considerable diversity in the forms of money and currency that have existed across history and coexist in economic networks today. Second, the big story about money risks inadvertently *depoliticising* money: if we accept the idea that money develops according to a 'logic' of its own, then there doesn't seem like much to do about it, and the winners and losers of the story are just lucky or unlucky, respectively.

What are these small stories about money that dispute the big story of money? To tell them, we must zoom in from the general topic of money, to the more specific topic of *currencies*.

Small Stories About Currencies

Marx and Simmel were, of course, aware that money 'as such' is an abstraction. In practice, most people encounter and use money denominated in a national currency, and Marx captured the point saying that money 'wears different national uniforms.'[24] However, as Nigel Dodd points out, while national currencies occupy centre stage in most people's understanding of money, there has never been a period of history in which currencies mapped neatly onto nation state territories, and this is certainly not the case today, where both euros and Bitcoins, and a variety of other currencies, move in economic networks across the boundaries of nation states.[25] Alternative currencies also move in circuits that can be much smaller than the nation state, as is illustrated by local currencies tied to specific cities, villages or small regions.

Across history shells, brass rods, Bitcoins, credit notes, accounting systems denominated in 'hours' of work and more have all been used as money. They have existed variously before, after and alongside national currencies in the ongoing organisation of economic interactions. These currencies don't resemble Simmel's money that 'adjusts with equal ease to every form and every purpose that the will wishes to imprint it with'[26]; rather, they operate within social and technological structures that limit their 'life.' Or put the other way around, it is only within specific social and technological structures that these currencies have a life at all. Of course, this is true of any currency, including a national currency produced and controlled by banks and states. But what makes 'alternative' currencies *alternative*, and 'primitive' currencies *primitive*, is precisely the fact that their 'life' (their efficacy as a technology of social organisation) appears fragile in comparison with the money that we are most familiar with: produced largely by banks and controlled (to some degree) by states. What, then, are the differences between these kinds of money, and what are their similarities?

To pin this down a bit more closely, we can turn to the contrast (coined by Karl Polanyi) between 'special purpose' money and 'general purpose' money, and look at how that contrast has been used in the social scientific study of money. General purpose money is the kind of money that most of us associate with national currencies today: money that can be used to make exchanges, to store value, to denote credits and debts, to pay taxes, and which can serve all of these functions across a wide range of social contexts. Special purpose money, on the other hand, usually associated with societies of the past in which market exchange was peripheral to the economy, is money that can only be used to fulfil a function specific to that money form: this might be blood money (paying off the relatives of a victim in order to end a feud), money used in contracting marriages or money used in the purchase of a specific range of things (e.g. of religious or political importance).

This distinction can be put to very different uses in constructing social scientific analyses of the relation between money and social practice.

On the one hand, we can see the contrast being used to diagnose the trajectory of modernity, with money at the cutting edge of these social transformations. Thus, in a classic study of the Tiv of northern Nigeria, Paul Bohannan used Polanyi's ideas to illustrate how general purpose money undermines and drives out special purpose money, where the two forms meet in social practice.[27] Bohannan examined the distinct 'spheres of exchange' that had once structured Tiv social and economic relationships: one sphere for the exchange of women (in marriage), one for the exchange of cattle and brass rods, and one for the exchange of mundane objects of daily consumption. When general purpose money (national currency) enters the scene, these compartmentalised spheres of exchange collapse as the general equivalent makes all of these things measurable and exchangeable against one another: women may now be bought in marriage, not only against other women, or against high status currencies like cattle or brass rods (exchanges that did bridge the spheres before, but in a highly structured way), but for the paper currency with which people also buy their groceries.[28] Marx and Simmel's big story is close to the surface here: qualitative distinctions in social practice look like they are corroding under the acid of general purpose money.

Sociologist Viviana Zelizer, on the other hand, has used Polanyi's distinction to develop exactly the opposite line of argumentation about the link between social practice and money. Zelizer's critical strategy is to show that even those forms of 'market money,' like national currencies, that we usually think of as most generic, most general purpose, most likely to transform qualities into quantities, are often, in fact, converted into special purpose money in the course of social practices. In these social practices, actors differentiate between different pools of money and use these pools in different ways, even where the money object (the dollar bills) is uniform. Where Simmel claimed that our experience of money was 'eminently ahistorical' (310) and that in itself money was completely meaningless to us in a way that no other form of property could be (325), Zelizer shows how across history people have indeed treated money as having a history that directly affected its meanings for us: from the point of view of real people who use money, it matters a great deal whether that money came in the form of a pay cheque, a gift or an inheritance. And it is not just that individuals attribute such meaningful differences to different pools of money; whole social groups do too. Women's money in nineteenth-century America, for example, may have looked like the same dollars and cents as men's money, but was in very practical terms policed according to very different rules: it *was not*, in and of itself, a liberation from personal ties of dependence or usable for any purpose (without real practical restrictions).[29]

Zelizer's work on money is to a large extent a reply to the now canonical 'big story' about money developed by Marx and Simmel and still at work today, notably in normative arguments about alienation in contemporary capitalism and about setting necessary limits to market logics. Her work resists attributing historical necessity to developments in money and returns a sense of human agency to the processes of making and using money. By arguing that the most generic dollar bills actually become qualitatively distinct currencies in the hands of their users, Zelizer is tackling the most difficult case for the argument that 'special purpose monies' have social significance today. In her terms, even within the great monolithic structures of 'capitalism' there exist small 'circuits of commerce' that do not follow the 'cold' logic of money that Simmel and Marx were occupied with.[30]

While not explicitly about dependence, Zelizer's push back against the big story about money suggests that insufficient attention has been paid not only to the vertical dimension of monetary dependence, but to the multiple structures of authority that shape the money we use. Chartalist theories of money are very much concerned with authority, but only with the authority of states: they have focussed on the role of states in forming modern money by demanding payment of taxes in a specific currency which creates demand for that currency and thereby makes it valuable as a means of exchange. Other economic and historical theories of money account for the value of money in other ways: the classical economic story, shared by Marx, is that money grows out of market exchange—it is simply the commodity with the qualities most suited to becoming a universal equivalent (divisibility, scarcity, durability, etc.). Credit and debt theories of money focus on the ability of various institutions (primarily both banks and states acting in coordination and conflict) to issue transferable signs of debt, which can then circulate as currency. None of these approaches, however, captures the micropolitics of money that Zelizer examines in her work. For her, patriarchal authority structures within families *create new currencies* just as much as the structure of authority that we call 'the state' does.

While it would be a diversion to enter into the extensive debates about the nature of money that exist in economic sociology today, the point for the present purposes is that already germinating in Zelizer's work is the 'republican' problem that this chapter is working towards: How are forms of money linked to forms of authority structure? Or, phrased in the language of political philosophy: How are economic networks linked to political communities, and can we form an ideal model of how that link could, or even should, look?

The Politics of Money

Historically, political movements agitating for the reform of money have seen money as the institutional cornerstone of social justice and injustice. Nineteenth-century radicals such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Robert Owen imagined and experimented with alternative currencies and alternative forms of banking, which promised to release society from the grip of capitalists who could use money to make money. The nineteenth-century Populist movement in the USA and the twentieth-century 'Social Credit' movement in several countries around the world were large-scale political mobilisations around the call for a more equitable form of money.[31]

Such theoretical and practical reformers have seen monetary reform as a remedy to a whole host of different ills: the unequal value of different people's labour; the hoarding of money in ways that slow economic interaction; the use of money as capital to extract unjust rent; the lack of spending power amongst workers; the excessive power of states over those who use state-denominated currency; financial instability; ecological devastation resulting from economies based on perpetual growth; social control through control of money; and simply inefficiency of national currencies.[32] These goals are, of course, not all in harmony with one another.

Some proposals aim to weaken the power of states to control money and to control people through money: this is true of Proudhon's proposal for mutual credit (non-profit bearing credit) and a Bank of the People; it is true also of Satoshi Nakamoto, the individual or group that developed the idea and codes for the electronic currency Bitcoin, and who explicitly suggested that the currency could serve libertarian political goals.[33] Other proposals suggest that publics of various scales could reclaim control of the money supply, although to the extent that such proposals link rights to a basic income to national citizenship, it seems that they ultimately reaffirm the centrality of nation states in this process.[34] Yet other plans for monetary reform, such as those proposed by Friedrich Hayek[35] or Edwin Riegal,[36] proposed that private people (individuals) or institutions (banks) should be able to issue their own money, and the market will determine which forms of money economic actors actually trust and value most highly; such an arrangement would remove the power to meddle with the value of currencies from the hands of governments.

Most of us still live today with money denominated in a national currency and largely produced by banks for the purposes of reaping interest. The grand scale reforms envisaged by money visionaries have not overturned the capitalist money produced in conjunction with state authority that we accept as so natural today. But alternative currencies do exist today and are fascinating experiments that reveal much about the relation between political authority and economic organisation—or in terms of this chapter, about the vertical and horizontal dimensions of our dependence.

Perhaps the most important alternative currency in recent years, in terms of its novelty and reach, has been Bitcoin, the Internet-based currency launched in 2009. It is worth taking a moment to compare Bitcoin and the currencies of LETS as two kinds of non-state money that alter economic relationships and are sometimes linked to political ideals about *how money should work* as a social institution.

Bitcoin

Bitcoin is a digital currency, and transactions with the currency are stored in an online accounting system (the 'blockchain'). It is usable to buy everyday things like food, or more exotic things like illegal substances. Its usefulness for the latter kind of trade comes from the fact that as a non-state currency, and one for which transactions are not recorded by banks but in the online ledger where transactions can remain anonymous, its uses and users are very difficult to trace for the public authorities.[37] It is certainly not alone as a non-state digital currency, but it has been the most widely used and discussed to date, and in the first 4 years of its existence its value increased by two hundred thousand times its initial worth: from €0.0005 in 2009 to €100 in 2013.[38] At the time of writing, 1 Bitcoin was worth €13,728.[39] While new Bitcoins are being produced all the time, the currency is limited in supply by two mechanisms. First of all, new coins enter circulation when computers, owned by Bitcoin users, solve increasingly difficult mathematical problems; this process is called 'mining' and is designed to operate in a similar way to the gradual increasing gold supplies of the world economy which are determined by the rate of actual physical metal extraction from the earth. Importantly, it is this computing power that is used to verify transactions in the online ledger (the blockchain) ensuring that each coin is only spent once by each user (avoiding 'double spending'). Bitcoin 'mining' has now reached a stage where the mathematical problems limiting the supply are so difficult that the needed calculating capacity requires extensive computer systems ('rigs'), which, of course, means investment, not only in the computers themselves, but in significant amounts of electricity. Bitcoin mining is now far beyond the reach of 'ordinary' Bitcoin users.[40] Secondly, the supply of Bitcoin has an inbuilt limit: 'reserves' are set to run out around when 21 million Bitcoins have been created.

The currency and the coding and technology that support it are interesting for a number of reasons.[41] Perhaps the most important, though, is what Bitcoin means for the relationship between economic networks, political communities and the role of currency in this relationship. By bypassing both states and private banks in the creation and control of money and the recording of information about transactions between economic actors, Bitcoin (and the blockchain in which transactions are recorded) has the potential to appeal to left-wing anarchists critical of the power of economic and political elites. However, its primary appeal has, rather, been to conservative libertarians critical primarily of central banks, 'government' and regulation of economic affairs.[42] There are a number of dimensions to this. For one thing, the privacy of anonymous transactions is valued by those critical of state control. For another, the value of the currency depends not (or at least not directly) on the decisions of banks and governments that might wield their power in an arbitrary or corrupt fashion. Finally, the enforcement of the rules structuring economic transactions has been removed from the hands of individuals and institutions who need to enforce contracts and consult records of ownership, and so on. Now the computations and rules of the system stand in for the work of fallible bankers and unreliable legal systems. However, while Bitcoin can put some of these ideals into practice, it is certainly doubtful whether Bitcoin and the blockchain manage to decouple users of the currency from more traditional economic and political power structures. As an Internet-based system, it relies on infrastructure owned and controlled by states and private corporations; and to the extent that the system relies on massive computational capacity, electricity, computers, space and a whole host of other resources need to be bought with more conventional currency, just to keep the system going.

Nonetheless, the appeal of Bitcoin is not trivial. The figure behind the system—who published the code and the ideas behind Bitcoin in 2008 and is known by the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto—explicitly noted that Bitcoin could serve libertarian goals.[43] Its proponents argue that it bypasses the need for trust in a central political authority and relies simply on confidence in the properties of the network. As Brett Scott puts it: 'This is essentially the vision of the Internet *techno-leviathan*, a deified crypto-sovereign whose rules we can contract to.'[44] This is the radical decoupling of territorially organised political communities (particularly states) from economic networks. If there is a political community that underpins the operation of Bitcoin, it is a community held together by an ideology that values individualised market relationships over collective organisation. In dependence terms, the users of Bitcoin may not have severed the vertical axis of dependence upon others (someone still owns the mining rigs, and someone still makes the codes that structure the system, etc.) but they have managed to carve out an economic space in which states and banks *do not* occupy the apex of the authority structures that hold the network together. As Scott explains, more critically: '… the "empowerment" here does not stem from building community ties. Rather it is imagined to come from retreating from trust and taking refuge in a defensive individualism mediated via mathematical contractual law.'[45]

The alternative currencies in LETS provide a strikingly different illustration of an experiment in the use of currency to reorganise the relationship between political community and economic networks.

LETS

Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) create currencies (units of account) and sometimes also put those currencies into circulation (as notes). These are quite obviously 'special money' (I can't pay my taxes in them or use them as money outside of the local network[46]) but equally obviously they are not just remnants of pre-market society: they are conscious reactions to the economic practices and relationships supported by national currencies controlled by states and banks. The contemporary wave of LETS began in 1983 in British Columbia, Canada, and spread rapidly throughout the world. During the 1990s, there was a veritable explosion in LETS in many countries including the UK, where numbers of such economic networks went from 5 in 1992 to 350 in 1995.[47]

LETS are not uniform. Some operate with a currency that has a value pegged to the national currency (1:1). What this means is that people can convert their money into the local currency, and perhaps pay similar prices for various goods and services, but know that this money will continue to circulate in the *local* economy because it has no value anywhere else. Rather more radically, other alternative currencies have an inbuilt egalitarian logic that makes the value of one hour of a person's time equal to the value of one hour of another person's time. The aim of this is to eradicate the difference in value between different forms of labour (a difference that we would normally be acutely aware of when comparing the monetary value of a lawyer's time with the monetary value of a domestic cleaner's time). In practice, these hour-for-hour exchanges often become distorted and gravitate back towards the price differences that are generated in the 'normal' market.[48] LETS vary from one another in many other ways too that reflect different ideas about what an alternative currency can and should do.[49]

In the present context, the first important point to note is that when someone using an alternative community currency (as in some LETS) carries a credit note in their pocket, they do not thereby carry around their *social power* or bond with *society*, as Marx claimed of money. Neither do they carry around a 'claim to the achievement of others' in general, as Simmel summarised the nature of money. That person carries around, instead, a power within a specific local trading network that is not coextensive with society, but rather with a small section of a community. Alternative currencies are not a claim on the achievements of others in general, but on the achievements of a limited range of other people, who have decided to organise their economic relationships within the structures of the LET system. LETS are, to use anthropologist Keith Hart's term, an 'instrument of collective memory' with which a community gives external form to the debts and rights of its members.[50] National currency is also an instrument of collective memory, but one in which users have little control over exactly what debts and rights will be 'remembered': Will the care work of mothers for their own or others' children be recorded in this instrument of collective memory? Perhaps not. But LETS can be designed precisely to ensure that such labour *is* remembered.

Peter North's comparison of different alternative currencies—from a LETS in Manchester in the UK, Hungary and New Zealand to barter networks in Argentina during the economic collapse of the early twenty-first century—shows not only that different alternative currencies have different functions and social effects, but also that there can be disagreement amongst those who share an alternative currency over the purpose and structure of the economic network.[51] Some networks, such as the barter networks in Argentina described by North, simply operated as survival strategies where the national currency had become immensely unstable and inaccessible as a means of exchange for many people. At least for some users of LETS, however, the ideal of creating non-capitalistic spaces of exchange was important and consciously pursued as an alternative to the wider market economy and the use of national currency. In LETS, goods and services can in principle be valued at a 'fair' price and not just a market price, and personal relationships between traders can in principle replace the kind of anonymous market society described by Marx and Simmel. Both North and others[52] have pointed out that these ideals often don't translate into realities, and that LETS can be unstable and often short-lived. Particularly problematic is the fact that in a world with an intensely developed division of labour, it is unlikely that members of a *local* trading network will have all of the goods and services *within* that network that they need for their daily lives: if everyone in the network can offer similar services like cleaning, care or repair work, but no one can produce food, then users of alternative currencies will still need to get hold of money denominated in a national currency in order to link into the economic networks in which they can obtain these goods (i.e. the national and international economy).

While confident that alternative currencies *can* provide an important institutional framework for more just economic organisation, North also points out that '[…] there is an inherent flaw in a strategy of building independence from capitalism while relying on it or, worse, being dependent on it.'[53] Put in terms of the present chapter, we might say that existing LETS have failed to radically reform the relations of dependence that constitute the economic networks in which people are embedded. Of course, *radical* reform is not everything, and moderate reorganisation of our economic practices may also be very important. But LETS certainly seem to harbour a lesson about the relationship between political and economic power. In the rest of this chapter, I will try to develop that lesson by thinking about the *authority* behind money, about what that authority has to do with *scale*, and then by using republican political theory to frame a view of *the link* between scale and authority. My aim is to show that through a republican lens, the politics of money is, in important ways, a dimension of the politics of dependence.

Money and Two Axes of Dependence

For some critics of money, as Nigel Dodd points out, 'Most key problems with money and credit systems as constituted during the modern era […] derive from dependence arrangements that place core institutions (e.g. the state and/or banks) at the top of a hierarchy, responsible for issuing and regulating money.'[54] Such critics advocate what Dodd calls 'a horizontal arrangement.' It remains an open question whether Bitcoin and LETS achieve such a horizontal arrangement.

According to sociologist Geoffrey Ingham, the currencies produced and circulating in LETS do not constitute 'full money.' While alternative currencies can operate as a medium of exchange, they do not work as 'stores of abstract value' or 'means of unilateral settlement.'[55] What does Ingham mean by these claims? His point is about the authority structures that underpin the value of money. The value of an alternative currency depends on all of its users trusting and expecting that other users in the network will accept the notes or credits in payment for goods and services; as long as people have this 'horizontal' trust (that other traders like them will accept the currency), then the currency can continue to be used as a means of payment within the local network. According to Ingham, what is lacking in LETS is what we might call 'vertical' trust (or confidence) in a powerful third party that guarantees the value of the currency no matter how strong or weak the horizontal ties of confidence and trust within local economic contexts. Put more abstractly, '[t]he extension of monetary relations across time and space requires *impersonal trust and legitimacy*,'[56] and this kind of trust and legitimacy has historically been provided by states that demand payment of taxes in the currency (and hence make that currency something that everyone within the territory of that state *needs*).

Only where the strong vertical political relation exists can the value of money be detached from personal relations and local context and operate as a stable store of value and means of unilateral settlement (payment of taxes). Ingham's point is interesting, but it is overdrawn. He confuses matters by assuming that LETS require *interpersonal* trust which contrasts with the *impersonal* trust characteristic of 'full money' (e.g. national currencies). In 1999 (when a large survey was done of LETS worldwide), Auckland Green Dollars in New Zealand had over 2000 members, and we cannot, therefore, assume that traders within such a large network had *personal* trust in one another; the same is true for the non-state currencies that Peter North studied in Argentina. What large LETS require is trust in the *community* of traders, and this kind of trust is indeed different from the confidence that we can have in the power of states—their power to enforce the payment of taxes, for example. Ingham is, of course, aware that those who take part in LETS are precisely *trying* to detach themselves—at least to some degree—from the vertical political relation that he draws our attention to, from the form of money that it generates (national currency) and from the form of economic practices and relationships that this money sustains. But his point seems to be, if we state it in political terms, that money in a 'full' sense requires a certain kind of *government*: not a small republic of equals, who all have a say and a role in controlling money, but a hierarchical structure in which the authority that guarantees the value of money is *remote* from all local contexts of its use.

But by focussing on the categorical distinction between 'full' (general purpose state-denominated) money and alternative currencies that remain limited in their uses, Ingham's point diverts attention from the 'vertical' authority structures that alternative currencies do, in fact, entail. We might, following Ingham, choose to think of Bitcoin or LETS as categorically different from state-denominated currencies, because, *in the end*, only an authority structure as massive as the state, and controlling the legitimate means of violence (as Max Weber put it), can set a unit of account that can make a currency *powerful* and *generally useful*: a means of payment of taxes, a store of value across time and a means of exchange across extensive geographical areas. But this 'in the end' thinking tempts us to overlook the authority structures that made LETS and

Bitcoin something other than 'horizontal' networks to begin with. It is not that there are *no* authority structures in place that underpin the value of a currency circulating in a LETS, or Bitcoin and its blockchain. The point is that they operate under authority structures qualitatively different from the state, and hence, the currencies have qualitatively different properties to state-denominated currencies. Political community has not disappeared from the equation; it has just shifted its form and location. For Bitcoin, the political community is not territorially organised, but many of its users do share a broad ideological commitment to the anarchist/libertarian *political choices* built into the system. For LETS, local decision-making structures constitute the authority (and the basis for trust) behind the currencies that are used in the economic transactions that take place in LETS. In sum, what has changed is not that political power and economic power have been decoupled from one another, but that their relationship has been reshaped and, importantly, *rescaled*.

Scale and Authority: A Republican View of Money and Dependence

When he compares the operation of a LETS in Manchester and a huge barter network in Argentina, Peter North draws attention to a number of important points about how a currency is underpinned by, but also can help to create, a particular *scale* of social organisation. More specifically, he points out that the 'moral scale' valued by the users of an alternative currency is connected in direct and important ways to the economic scale on which that currency can successfully operate.[57] If users are highly concerned with keeping control of a local currency, and with cultivating the personal relationships that help it to function, then the number of people involved in the network and the pool of resources existing in the network (both material things and skills) will remain limited. On the other hand, geographically and socially extensive alternative trading networks (like those North studied in Argentina) tend to detach the alternative currency from the control, and hence ideals, of the founders of the network: the currency becomes more and more like the impersonal and 'thing-like' money that we are accustomed to when we use national currencies. Impersonal confidence replaces personal trust, and the social relations between people using the currency change in step with the changing quality of people's relation to and understanding of the currency. In this final section, I will build on, and I hope also simplify, North's insight about scale. Republican political theory can help us to develop an idealised account of the relation between political community and economic networks, and what money has to do with this relation.

Dependence has been a central concern of republican thought throughout its history. Parliamentarians in early modern England, harking back to republican Rome, argued that as long as their rights and liberties depended on—that is, could be taken away by—a powerful monarch they did not enjoy true liberty. Intellectual historian Quentin Skinner has given us a historical reconstruction this early modern view of liberty.[58] Different from both simple 'negative' liberty, highlighting freedom from interference, and simple 'positive' liberty, highlighting the ability to shape one's life in conformity with a conception of the good,[59] this republican concept of liberty stresses the independence of the political community from the authority of a despotic ruler or an external power. This fear of dependence on a *political authority above the rest of society* has also been closely connected in republican thought to the fear of *economic dependence within and beyond a society*. This economic dependence might be *internal* to a society, meaning that some social groups are unjustly dependent upon others within a society for access to resources, but it might also be *external* to a society, meaning that the whole society depends in a problematical way on an economic network that stretches beyond the limits of the political community, and thus beyond the control of the republic.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 'Plan for a Constitution for Corsica' from 1765 is a case study in republican democratic fears of dependence, and how those fears are connected to fretting about the role of money in society. It is worth looking at Rousseau's proposals and arguments, not because they provide a realistic model of economic and political order, but because they provide an *ideal*—and in many ways an unattractive ideal—against which to measure the real world. Rousseau's concern with dependence and his critique of commerce (with money) help us to see exactly what kinds of political trade-offs we make with particular forms of economy, and what economic trade-offs we make with particular forms of government. In short, Rousseau gives us a model in miniature that can help us to understand the interrelation of economy and politics—a relation that the social institution of money affects profoundly.

The foundation of Rousseau's proposals is the idea that Corsica should develop a self-sufficient agricultural economy. This agricultural economy would not only relieve the country of dependence on its neighbours, but would cultivate important virtues in the population and minimise the need for money. In contrast to the solid foundation of a self-sufficient agricultural economy, a money economy has a number of problems. First of all, and internal to the society, money can easily become a form of power that is beyond public oversight: public officials may appear to have power, but the real power lies with the wealthy.[60] Rousseau thought that whatever trade needed to be done on Corsica could be carried out in a kind of centrally planned exchange, whereby *regions* (his focus is on geographical units not on individuals) could exchange with one another according to rates of exchange determined by a public authority. For this purpose, a kind of 'ideal' money could replace 'real' money, acting merely as a unit of value rather than a store of wealth or means of exchange.[61] Furthermore, taxes could, principally, be paid in labour rather than money, thus reducing the need for agricultural labourers to sell their produce and enter the monetary economy at all.[62]

But if money causes inequality and injustice *internally*, it is also a stepping stone to subjugation by *external* powers. Relying on money as a store of wealth makes a society vulnerable: 'Your neighbors can give your money whatever value they please because they can wait; but the bread that we need has an indisputable value for us.'[63] The dependence of the political community on other powers is the great fear here: 'Even if you have all the wealth in the world, if you do not have anything with which to nourish yourself you are dependent on others.'[64] Going hand in hand with this fear of dependence on the outside world is an unattractive distrust of foreign influence. Rousseau warns against the grip that foreigners might get on the polity through the economy,[65] and he warns too against the erosion of the republic's values and morals through outside influence. The best thing about the geographical position of the capital city is that 'It is far from the sea which will preserve the morals, the simplicity, the uprightness, the national character of its inhabitants for longer than if it were subject to the influx of foreigners.'[66] Of course, coming from Switzerland, this does not reflect Rousseau's own national pride or xenophobia, but his ideal of what a small republican democratic nation—any nation—could aspire to. Still, there is surely something troubling about Rousseau's link between money and foreigners, which he states so bluntly: 'If Corsica needed foreigners it would need money, but being able to be self-sufficient, it does not need it.'[67] Rousseau is well aware that his proposal for a constitution for Corsica is not a model for most countries. He says explicitly that his ideals for the economy would fit neither with a big country nor with a monarchy, and would therefore be unsuitable for either France or England.[68]

Rousseau's imagined small island state buys economic and political coherence at the expense of a simple sacrifice: connection to the outside world. His discussion of the way that money creates inequality within a society and vulnerability to the outside world is compelling. His vision of a society in which wealth cannot become a form of power that is beyond public accountability—hidden in bank accounts—is in many ways inspiring for democratic egalitarian politics. The beautiful *fit* between political and economic order that he imagines in this island republic is achieved by perfectly scaling these two forms of social network to one another, leaving no threads extending out into the outside world that outsiders might pull on in order to unravel the internal order of society. The cost of this economic and political independence is a nationalism that celebrates immobility over mobility and continuity over change. Rousseau imagines *one* foreigner every *fifty years* being given 'the right of the city.'[69]

The value of Rousseau's model for the current purposes is the way in which it so clearly illustrates the problem of linking the different *scales* of economic and political organisation, and the role of money in this link. For Rousseau, money was what would *decouple* the economic and the political order of the republic from one another, because it would produce internal inequality and would inevitably open the society as a whole to connections with the outside world. Through this republican lens, the Euro, Bitcoin and alternative currencies in LETS all configure the link between political authority and economic networks in interestingly different ways.

The Euro, as I noted in the introduction to this chapter, is a currency that links the economies of several distinct political communities. The European Union is also an area with a very high degree of mobility of European citizens who can live and work in counties in which they are not national citizens. Needless to say, troublesome foreigners are everywhere. The withdrawal of countries, like the UK, from the EU endangers the rights of millions of people now living in countries where they do not have national citizenship (British people in the EU and EU nationals in the UK). These foreigners cannot be imagined away as easily as in draft constitutions.

It is difficult to imagine an arrangement further from Rousseau's ideal of an independent republic in which self-sufficiency makes money practically dispensable. 'Since the euro crisis began in 2008-9,' writes Dodd, 'much has been made by [the currency's] critics of the lack of fit between the Eurozone as a *political* and *social* community, as opposed to an *economic* and *monetary* space.'[70] The European Union's series of pacts (from the late 1990s onwards) designed to set limits on the public deficit in member states are perhaps the clearest symbol of the EU as an economic network, supported by transnational governmental institutions, setting limits to the democratic national politics of the member states: an easy case, perhaps, for Rousseau's critique of economic dependence and its consequences for political independence.

Meanwhile, the alternative currencies of LETS and Bitcoin show a different side of the story (Rousseau's story) of money decoupling economic and political order. From the perspective of the users of these alternative currencies, it is in fact a good thing, and a politically defensible thing, to decouple economic networks from the authority structures of state capitalism in which the power of banks and states is interlinked in the production of modern capitalist money circuits. The difference from Rousseau is that these money activists imagine (and may to some degree achieve) a *re*coupling of politics and economy at a scale that is either smaller than the territory of the nation state or indeed territorially undefined (in the case of Bitcoin). For LETS, the local community, or city, is the social scale at which alternative currencies might help to build relationships that are both economic and political. The users of Bitcoin are not concerned with building local economic and political communities, but some of them certainly do imagine a new political and economic order beyond the nation state: a techno-leviathan, as Brett put it.

Applied to these examples, Rousseau's republican fears of money help us to see the way in which the use of money is as much about *vulnerability* as about independence. This is the vulnerability of the poor to the pressures of the rich, of the individual to the pressures of powerful institutions and the vulnerability of the whole of society to powers outside it: for Rousseau, this was probably neighbouring states; today, it is also financial institutions that lend to governments. Amongst other things, alternative currencies are attempts to mitigate the vulnerabilities of their users to either the abuse of power (crypto-currencies like Bitcoin) or the unfair forms of valuation (especially of different forms of labour) that traditional markets generate. In the cases of *both* national currencies *and* alternative currencies, money is a sign of our fundamental dependence on others, as both Marx and Simmel observed. What these great social theorists did not capture, but which small stories about currencies have put on the table, was the sense that social actors might have some agency with respect to the currency they use. Finally, examples of alternative currencies analysed through the lens of republicanism show both the attractive and unattractive sides of this agency, which in principle has serious consequences for the forms of political community to which we are committed. When Marx wrote that 'The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket,' he was not specific about the scale of this 'society': Was it fellow residents in a nation state? Or whole population of a world increasingly linked together by global capitalism? The *creation* of currencies (whether 'alternative' or not) means that this problem of scale has to be confronted. As Rousseau's republicanism illustrated, answers to these questions about scale are not always easy or attractive. Dodd writes that 'Though money surely is a source of our vulnerability in society, it is also a practical means of rendering the impersonal world more meaningful.'[71] This meaningfulness is not harmless and innocent sense-making; it is, in the end, our sense of the legitimacy or naturalness of the power relations that we live with, accept, and sometimes push back against in society.[72]

Notes

1. Roger Blitz and Leo Lewis, "Pound Tumbles to 30-Year Low as Britain Votes Brexit," *Financial Times*, 24 June 2016, accessed 28 February 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/8d8a100e-38c2-11e6-a780-b48ed7b6126f.
2. "How Has Economy Fared Since Brexit Vote?" BBC News Online, 17 January 2017, accessed 28 February 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/business-36956418.
3. Jasmine Coleman, "Greek Bailout Talks: Are Stereotypes of Lazy Greeks True?" BBC News Online, 10 March 2015, accessed 15 March 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31803814.
4. Peter North, "Scaling Alternative Economic Practices? Some Lessons from Alternative Currencies," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30 (2005).
5. Nigel Dodd, *The Social Life of Money* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).
6. See North, "Scaling Alternative Economic Practices"; Dodd, *The Social Life of Money*, 211–268.

7. Nigel Dodd comments on the legacy of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century philosophy and sociology (especially Marx, Simmel, and Nietzsche): 'These thinkers portray money as a *quantifying* force, in opposition to the *qualitative* features of those social relations it comes into contact with. Money is seen as an alien and *alienating* presence in social life, bringing people together simply by rendering them as tools for each other.' Dodd, *The Social Life of Money*, 273.
8. Geoffrey Ingham, *The Nature of Money* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 61–63.
9. On the division of labour, see, Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 45. On non-market money, see, Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry Pearson (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957), 264.
10. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 158 (emphasis in original).
11. For the present purposes, I draw on the chapter on money in the *Grundrisse*. The discussion of dependence here is strikingly similar to that developed by Simmel, in its qualification of the nature and meaning of 'independence' in a capitalist society and economy.
12. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 163.
13. Ibid., 163.
14. Ibid., 164.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 157.
18. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978 [1900]).
19. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 298.
20. A series of articles in *Economy and Society* clearly illustrate the clash. See, Ben Fine and Costas Lapavitsas, "Markets and Money in Social Theory: What Role for Economics?" *Economy and Society* 29(3) (2000); Viviana Zelizer, "Fine Tuning the Zelizer View," *Economy and Society* 29(3) (2000); Geoffrey Ingham, "Fundamentals of a Theory of Money: Untangling Fine, Lapavitsas and Zelizer," *Economy and Society* 30(3) (2001); Nigel Dodd, "Reinventing Monies in Europe," *Economy and Society* 43(4) (2005).
21. Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (London: Allen Lane, 2012); Deborah Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010); Serena Olsaretti, *Liberty, Desert, and the Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

22. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy*. For a review and critique of Sandel, see, Christian Olaf Christiansen and Patrick J. L. Cockburn, "The Road to Market Society," *European Journal of Social Theory* 17(4) (2014).
23. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas A. McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987).
24. Karl Marx, quoted in Dodd, *The Social Life of Money*, 211.
25. Dodd, *The Social Life of Money*, 212–213.
26. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 325.
27. Paul Bohannan, "Some Principles of Exchange and Investment Among the Tiv," *American Anthropologist* 57(1) (1955).
28. Bohannan's narrative has been both challenged and defended by historians and anthropologists. For a summary of criticisms and a partial defence, see, Christopher A. Gregory, "Cowries and Conquest: Towards a Subaltern Quality Theory of Money," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38(2) (1996).
29. Viviana Zelizer, "The Social Meaning of Money: 'Special Monies'," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 95(2) (1989).
30. 'Although some enthusiasts for these local arrangements imagine they are doing away with money entirely, in fact they are creating new forms of money devoted to distinctive circuits.' Viviana Zelizer, "Circuits Within Capitalism," in *The Economic Sociology of Capitalism*, ed. Victor Nee and Richard Swedberg (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005): 298.
31. Peter North, *Money and Liberation: The Micropolitics of Alternative Currency Movements* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 41–77.
32. This list is made by sociologist Nigel Dodd in his summary of utopian money projects from John Ruskin's labour money to Bitcoin to the Euro: Nigel Dodd, "Utopianism and the Future of Money," in *Re-imagining Economic Sociology*, ed. Patrik Aspers and Nigel Dodd (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2015), 5.
33. Henrik Karlstrøm, "Do Libertarians Dream of Electric Coins? The Material Embeddedness of Bitcoin," *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 15(1) (2014): 29.
34. Mary Mellor, *Debt or Democracy* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 81–89.
35. Friedrich Hayek, *Denationalization of Money: The Argument Refined* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1976).
36. Edwin Riegel, *Private Enterprise Money: A Non-political Money System* (New York: Harbinger House, 1944).
37. Nigel Dodd, "Utopianism and the Future of Money," 19.
38. Karlstrøm, "Do Libertarians Dream of Electric Coins?" 23.

39. 9 December 2017. At the time of writing the first draft of this chapter 8 months previously, Bitcoin was worth less than a tenth of this (€1078 on 6 April 2017). By December, the massive increase in the value of Bitcoin was reaching headline international news and causing fears of a Bitcoin crash.
40. Karlstrøm, "Do Libertarians Dream of Electric Coins?" 24.
41. For a good overview, see Brett Scott, "Visions of a Techno-Leviathan: The Politics of the Bitcoin Blockchain," *E-International Relations*, 1 June 2014, accessed 6 April 2017, http://www.e-ir.info/2014/06/01/visions-of-a-techno-leviathan-the-politics-of-the-bitcoin-blockchain/.
42. Ibid.
43. Karlstrøm, "Do Libertarians Dream of Electric Coins?" 29.
44. Scott, "Visions of a Techno-Leviathan," 5.
45. Ibid., 4.
46. Some alternative currencies have, however, become so well integrated in the local economy that government actors also use them. Zelizer notes that this is the case for Ithica Hours (in New York State). See, Zelizer, "Circuits Within Capitalism," 301.
47. Mark Peacock, "The Moral Economy of Parallel Currencies: An Analysis of Local Exchange Trading Systems," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 65(5) (2006): 1062.
48. Ibid., 1078.
49. For an extensive overview, see North, *Money and Liberation*.
50. Keith Hart, "Money in an Unequal World," *Anthropological Theory* 1(3) (2001): 326.
51. On the multiple agendas and commitments internal to one LETS, see North, *Money and Liberation*, 79–101.
52. Peacock, "The Moral Economy of Parallel Currencies," 1059–1084.
53. North, *Money and Liberation*, 182.
54. Dodd, "Utopianism and the Future of Money," 11.
55. Ingham, *The Nature of Money*, 185.
56. Ingham, *The Nature of Money*, 187.
57. North, "Scaling Alternative Economic Practices?" 222. Others have also been concerned with the geopolitics of money and its various scales of use. Emily Gilbert, for example, writes '[…] that money functions on so many scales clearly contributes to its "indeterminacy" and to our "puzzlement" with it.' Emily Gilbert, "Common Cents: Situating Money in Time and Place," *Economy and Society* 34(3) (2005): 381.
58. Quentin Skinner, "A Third Concept of Liberty," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117 (2002).
59. For the most famous and powerful articulation of the distinction between positive and negative liberty, see, Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concept of

Liberty," in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

60. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Plan for a Constitution of Corsica," in *The Plan for Perpetual Peace, on the Government of Poland, and Other Writings on History and Politics*, trans. Christopher Kelly and Judith Bush, ed. Christopher Kelly (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2005), 134.
61. Ibid., 125–126.
62. Ibid., 124.
63. Ibid., 114.
64. Ibid., 114.
65. Ibid., 141.
66. Ibid., 119.
67. Ibid., 124.
68. Ibid., 132.
69. It is unclear from the context of this remark whether this amounts to citizenship proper. Ibid., 137.
70. Dodd, "Utopianism and the Future of Money," 26.
71. Nigel Dodd summarising the claims of Keith Hart. Dodd, *The Social Life of Money*, 308.
72. For a radical republican reading of social institutions that would apply to this view of money, see, Michael J. Thompson, "The Two Faces of Domination in Republican Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* (2015) (available online ahead of print).

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CHAPTER 6

How Property Structures Dependence

It would be a great exaggeration to say that the institution of private property is in serious crisis in capitalist democracies today. But there is no doubt that there is increasing political attention focussed on the social injustices that private property regimes generate in some areas of social life. Housing, in particular, has become a focal point for scholarly and public debate about how private property works within the political economy of countries and cities.[1] In the financial and economic crisis that burst into public view in 2008, spreading from the USA to many other parts of the world, it was the inability of massive sections of society to pay back mortgage debt on private housing that triggered the collapse of financial institutions, subsequent public bailouts, massive losses of homes and a general economic downturn.[2] In European societies, squatting has been increasingly criminalised,[3] with the UK making the most recent move of introducing prison sentences for those who squat in residential property.[4] This has been done at a time when even the government admits that the housing market is 'broken,'[5] and many others have pointed out that there is a crisis stemming from insufficient new building, extensive ownership of empty properties[6] and the use of real estate for financial speculation, especially in London.[7] On the other hand, the issue of squatting has developed in quite a different direction in other parts of the world. In South Africa, for example, a right to housing is enshrined in the constitution, and while this right is limited in a number of ways, it has nonetheless had a real impact on the reasoning of courts in eviction cases, where the rights of private owners must now

P. J. L. Cockburn, *The Politics of Dependence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8_6

be balanced against the claims of squatters to adequate housing.[8] In fact, current South African law will normally not allow evictions where homelessness will result.[9]

Housing is one area of property regimes that draws attention to the way in which property rights can make members of society deeply dependent upon one another: owners become dependent on banks and the ups and downs of the housing market; renters become dependent upon owners for access to housing; one generation becomes dependent on the next for the inheritance of wealth that can give access to the inflated market; the homeless become dependent upon the state, charities and perhaps friends and family, as self-help solutions (squatting) are removed by criminalisation. In particular, housing is a social issue that makes us acutely aware of the *vulnerabilities* that private property can produce: vulnerabilities to the power of landlords, to the force of the state in cases of eviction and, in the end, to the elements through lack of shelter. Critics of the way that private property in housing currently works have used the idea of 'property outsiders,' and reconstructed a view of property 'from the margins,' in order to capture this sense in which property laws produce insecurity for non-owners.[10]

But while *private* property in *housing* pushes dependencies and vulnerabilities to the centre of political debate, it is not the only form of property, nor the only object of property, that structures our dependence on one another. In fact, all forms of property, from public, to state, to common, to private, structure the ways in which we depend upon one another in a society. And all valuable resources—not just housing but commercial property, labour power, consumer goods, means of transport and much more—all of these are distributed and regulated in ways that structure our dependence upon one another. This chapter will thus focus on the ways in which property law and practices *distribute powers* and *structure dependencies.*

The feminist arguments about women and the welfare state, discussed in Chapter 2, aimed to expose normatively loaded assumptions about dependence that underpin conservative accusations of 'bad' dependence on the state. These accusations have had some purchase in public debate because they simply take for granted—one could say they 'naturalise'—certain modes of social organisation (including the nuclear family and wage labour), and feminist arguments had to work hard to 'denaturalise' those assumptions, and show that they took patriarchy and capitalism for granted. In this chapter, as in the previous chapter on money, I want to push that denaturalisation agenda even further and to describe fundamental social institutions as ways of structuring dependence. Reviewing some of the feminist discussions, I argued in Chapter 2 that the idea that people are interdependent upon one another in any society was correct in a very general way, but that this was not a fact to which we could appeal to solve our issues of social justice. This is because our interdependence is not a fact of human existence that somehow comes 'before' social and political institutions and practices; that very interdependence is given *form* and *structure* by our basic institutions. In turn, that structured interdependence is the basis for the asymmetrical relations of dependence that place people in positions of relative social power and subjugation. This chapter on property and the previous chapter on money give a theoretical description of how these social institutions create a specific quality of dependence: one largely structured as market relations. When we describe this dependence as a form of *vulnerability*, we can begin to see how the kinds of property law we have, and the kinds of money we use, make a difference to the degrees of *exposure* to social and economic pressures suffered by difference people in society.

The idea of 'property outsiders' captures this point well. In this chapter, I take the idea of 'property outsiders' into a broader discussion of property that focusses not only on housing, but also on how both the rules of property law and the distribution of property holdings structure our economic interactions with one another. This is not only a story about the 'haves' and the 'have-nots,' as the housing examples above might suggest. It is a story about the *kind of power* that property gives to owners, whether these owners have very much property or very little; only as a second step will we then be able to see exactly in what sense the problem of unequal distribution of property is really a problem about the unequal distribution of power in a society.

The history of political theory contains many critics of private property who have seen the institution as one that *divides* society, subjugating those with little or no property to those who have much (especially in the form of land and capital). This critique was, for example, made by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (a republican), Karl Marx (a communist) and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (an anarchist).[11] What has particularly outraged critics of property over the centuries is the right to tap the productive energies of others through the mere ownership of property.

This can be done by extracting *profit* by taking from others what they make using that property, and by extracting *rent* by demanding payment from those who need access to the resource that is owned. Thus, when Proudhon famously proclaimed that 'property is theft!,' and called the proprietor a 'parasite,' a 'broken machine,' a 'robber' and a 'vulture,' it was not the ability to keep hold of material objects that he railed against, but the ability to claim the fruits of other people's labour.[12] Property in the means of production has been the target of a great deal of parasites rhetoric, especially developed as criticisms of 'unearned income' (which I discuss in detail in the next chapter). In this chapter, what will be in focus is the *practical* dependence of non-owners upon owners that is enforced in property regimes. The story of this chapter is thus not so much about parasitism as about the *vulnerabilities* produced by a regime of private property and market exchange.

To tell *this* story I begin not with towering figures from the history of political thought (like those named above), but with economist and legal realist Robert Lee Hale (1884–1969). Hale developed a view of property that explained, with great precision, exactly what kind of power property bestows: it is, he argued, the power to *release others* from the obligation, imposed by the state, to abstain from using the property in question. Behind this seemingly dry and innocuous observation lies an extraordinarily radical reconceptualisation of how property works within an economy. In my terms, it shows us how we are all 'property outsiders.' After explaining the core of Hale's account of property and power, this chapter will look at the consequences that this account has for thinking about dependence: what kinds of dependence does 'market society' produce and what forms of dependence does it free us from? The overall argument is that property is a way of *instituting our dependence on others* (currently in a manner that causes great inequality). This idea stands in stark contrast to a liberal tradition that celebrates property as securing individual *in*dependence.

The chapter goes on to compare the legal approaches discussed to contemporary political philosophy on the topic of property. The aim here is to bring issues of *time* into the discussion of property and dependence, and to lead towards the conclusion in which I argue that 'the rhythm of justice' should be a key concern when thinking about what property means for dependence within society.

How Property Structures Social Life

In our daily navigations through the world, property is one of the most important social institutions that we respond to, count on and sometimes stumble over. The distribution of property rights influences where we can go (not into the neighbour's house at midnight), what we can use without consent (my bike, not yours), what we can tell other people to do (no entry!) and what we can offer to other people (come work for me!). Exactly *how much* property we have influences what deals we can make in markets, and exactly *what kinds of* property we have determines what kinds of control I have: owning land is not the same as owning money, which is different again from owning shares in a company.

One important thing to note about property, then, is that as a social institution it has many functions and serves many purposes. Discussions of property often reveal commitments to a plurality of human values: security, freedom, welfare and equality, for example.[13] These commitments sometimes happily fit together in the decisions that courts and legislatures make about property rules. Sometimes, however, these various commitments conflict with one another, even where we decide that we want to defend the owners of private property: if a company wants to extract ground water from the land next to my house, and this threatens my house with collapse, whose property rights win? My right to security or their right to make profitable use of their neighbouring plot of land?[14] Such tensions and clashes between value commitments tend to go unnoticed when they get bundled together into the idea of a 'right to private property' that we either want to defend or criticise.

Not only are there tensions *within* any private property regime, but there are of course differences between various forms of property. Theorists have often identified four major forms of property: open access (a kind of non-property), common property, state property and private property.[15] The taxonomy covers over some important differences, for example between state property controlled by specific state organs (like military property) and state property regulated by public authorities but accessible without specific consent (like public parks owned by local government), but it does give a rough overview of how differently access to resources can be organised. While one form of property may be dominant in a society, in most societies we live with a mixture of property forms: private houses, common clubhouses, state-owned but publically accessible highways, state-owned and publically inaccessible military barracks and sometimes even unregulated open access to things like mushrooms in forests and strawberries in hedgerows—all of these can exist side by side. The important point for the present purposes is that we can describe these different forms of property as different ways of structuring our dependence on one another for access to resources.

In any society with any degree of division of labour and a distribution of resources, we depend upon one another for getting things, doing things and generally surviving. We depend upon one another for forms of care and help, and for access to the things that we need to produce and consume. A property regime is a way to structure these dependencies, setting the rules for how I can get what I need, what I can keep hold of and what I can claim from others. One of the key differences between forms of property is in how they distribute the authority to make decisions about the resource in question: do I need permission from a community to get access to something? Do I need to get the thing in an exchange with its current private owner (perhaps in a market)? Do I rely on a specific state institution to delegate a resource to me? It is not difficult to see why these questions are politically charged.

Underlying these practical questions of how people get access to resources is the legal and political question of who or what enforces the rules that structure these interactions? Who or what makes property rules stick? The answer here is not necessarily straightforward. Legal pluralists have pointed out, for example, that rules can be issued by many different kinds of authority, maybe enforced by many different actors, and may overlap and conflict with one another even within one community or society.[16] For example, rules of inheritance within a religious community may be at odds with the laws enforced by the state within which the community lives: which set of rules wins out is a question of whose authority is recognised and who has the power to enforce decisions.[17] Nonetheless, there is no doubt that in most societies the state takes the primary role in specifying and enforcing property rights (and not just specifying what the *state* owns). Thus, states enforce rights to private property, common property and even regulate the use of open access resources (e.g. the 'right to roam' on unfenced land as a *right*).

What I have said so far focusses on access to resources, but we need to remember that this access is not just about meeting immediate needs. Property is a social institution that bridges the economic, legal and political aspects of social life, opening up and closing down what people can *do with* and *do to* one another. To own property is to have a form of *wealth*; it is to have specific kinds of *rights* and *duties*; and it is to have a kind of *power*. Or put another way, property structures our *economic practices*, our *legal relationships* and our *political relationships*. For this reason, the politics of property touches upon our daily practices, our core social institutions and our fundamental ideas of justice.

Property and Acquisition

In 1964, legal theorist Charles Reich made a profound diagnosis of the nature of wealth in capitalist welfare states. For huge sections of society, the government stood at the centre of their economic relationships: it was the guarantor of income in the form of welfare benefits, the provider of state jobs, the distributer of contracts, franchises, licences and subsidies, and the owner of crucial public resources and services.[18] Given that our economic lives are so entwined with government, Reich argued, we need to extend protection to the forms of income and access to wealth that it now controls; we need to transform these into rights. To do this '[w]e must create *a new property*.'[19] His argument has been used by judges in the United States Supreme Court in reasoning about the rights of welfare recipients, and attacked by those who refuse to accept that the concept of 'property' can and should be extended in this way.[20]

Reich was developing a view of property that emphasises the way in which property structures economic relationships and rights to income. This, of course, is a very different starting point for thinking about property, than if we begin with rights to personal property in *things*: in my bike, my coffee cup and my wedding ring. Very roughly, we might summarise the difference here by saying that some approaches to property (like Reich's) focus on how property rules structure *acquisition*, while other approaches focus on how property rules help us to *keep hold of things*. The first view looks at property in the midst of economic interactions; the second view looks at property as a protection against others (including the state).[21] In practice, these are two sides of the same coin, but overemphasis on the latter (issues about exclusion) has tended to push both theorists and popular ideology towards the idea that property is best understood as an institution that helps us to maintain our *independence*. On this view, which is correct but partial, it is (private) property that gives us the ability to withdraw from public life into privacy, the ability to control resources without asking anyone and the ability to organise one's affairs without the meddling of others—not least the state. But there is a problem here. All of these ideas about property and independence are built on a view of property 'from the inside,' from the standpoint of *owners*. For 'property outsiders,' by contrast, property is an institution that produces specific kinds of *dependence*. This dependence is most clearly seen when we return to questions about *acquisition* and *access*, the face of property that Reich was concerned with.

I will be arguing that it is the perspective of property 'outsiders' that shows why dependence is at the heart of property politics. But what does it mean to look at property from the perspective of 'property outsiders'? It could mean at least two different things, which we need to distinguish here. On the one hand, we might be concerned (with Jeremy Waldron, for example) about those who have almost no property at all, particularly the homeless.[22] This approach focusses on particular social actors whom a system of ownership and access has failed: their suffering looks like a side effect of an otherwise well-functioning system (if only they were owners the social problem seems to disappear). On the other hand, we might be concerned with the fact that we are *all* property outsiders when it comes to other people's property, and that even if we own some things, we may still be deeply dependent upon the ways that other people choose to use their property. When legal scholar Joseph Singer identified a 'reliance interest' in property to describe the injustices of industrial plant closures,[23] he wasn't pointing to the dependence of the property-less (e.g. on charity or the state), but the very specific dependence of a group of workers on a specific resource owned by a company: in this case, the resource was the factory itself, which workers relied on as a place to produce and earn. I will introduce Singer's case and his argument in more detail below, but the point for now is simply this: as much as property gives a form of security for owners, it also produces vulnerabilities and dependencies in those who don't own a given resource; those dependencies become more fundamental the more central the resource is to organising a normal human life in society. Thus, forms and objects of property that structure work (e.g. ownership of the means of production: factories, fields, offices) and access to shelter (e.g. ownership of the housing stock) and mobility (e.g. cars, buses, roads, rail networks) entail more fundamental dependency relationships than, say, the ownership of jewellery and lawnmowers.

The two senses of 'outsider' are clearly different. Pointing out that *some people* (e.g. the homeless) are particularly harmed by a current property regime is part of a normative concern with the *distribution of property* in society. Pointing out that we are *all* property outsiders is part of an analytical concern with *how the institution of property works* within our economic practices. However, these two concerns are closely linked: if we can see that property makes us all outsiders by making us dependent on other owners for access to things we need, we can also see more clearly why having very little property exacerbates this dependence and the vulnerabilities associated with it. In other words, the two senses of 'property outsider' raise two key political issues that are linked: the first is about *distribution*, the second is about the *rules* that determine the nature of the powers that are thus distributed.

This way of introducing property as the topic of this chapter may be controversial for some. Legal theorists and political philosophers have tended to prefer discussing and debating property solely in terms of rights: whether that is the right *to* property and its moral justification,[24] or the set *of* rights that ownership of property entails.[25] It remains the minority, albeit an influential minority, who aim to understand and evaluate property primarily as a form of power, which is delegated to people in society. Legal realist Morris Cohen voiced this idea of property as delegated power most radically: '[N]ot only medieval landlords but the owners of all revenue-producing property are in fact granted by the law certain powers to tax the future social product. When to this power of taxation there is added the power to command the services of large numbers who are not economically independent, we have the essence of what historically has constituted political sovereignty.'[26] In short, legal rights give social powers. And we can ask a number of critical questions about these powers: What *kind* of power does property give to owners? Is it *legitimate* in its current form? And how are these powers *distributed* in society between the weak (Reich's concern for welfare recipients) and the strong (Cohen's critique of captains of finance and industry)?

The next section will outline a view of how private property works in a market economy as it structures the ways that we interact with one another when we make economic bargains. Using Robert Lee Hale's legal economics, it unpacks the claim, so strikingly made by Cohen, that property gives owners a form of power that is, in an important sense, indistinguishable from the political power wielded by governments.

Property as a Means of Coercion in a Market Economy

In 1922 Robert Lee Hale managed to capture, with astonishing brevity, what I (following others) have called a view of property from 'the outside.' Property, he noted, gives owners privileges (e.g. access to something), rights (e.g. to exclude others, thus imposing a *duty* on them to stay out) and powers (to alter the rights and privileges of others).[27] With the last of these, he did not have in mind a purely legal 'power,' like the power of a judge in court, but also an economic power within the given circumstances. This is how he put it: 'This power [of ownership] is a power to release the pressure which the law of property exerts on the liberty of others.'[28] No one has given a better starting point for understanding the relationship between property and dependence.

This claim cuts against the grain of a liberal view of economic practice and justice. On that view, a market economy is essentially a vast network of voluntary exchanges, and it is the voluntariness of the exchanges that makes them legitimate.[29] This voluntariness is regarded as grounding their legitimacy because it shows that the people involved weren't *coerced* into anything, and thus that there is no abuse of *power* in normal market exchanges. On this view, a market economy is essentially the *opposite* of a feudal or slave economy: labour is bought and sold in processes of bargaining, but it is not extracted by threat of force.[30]

But what if voluntariness does not imply a lack of coercion? A worker makes her 'free' decision to work for a specific wage under a certain *pressure*: this is the pressure that the state imposes on a person when it threatens her with sanctions for breaking the law of property. If she steals in order to consume (e.g. food), she will be punished for breaking the laws of property; if, without consent from the owner, she uses some means of production (like machines or, today, computers) that belong to someone else, then she will again be punished under the laws of property. On the other hand, as an *owner* of property (for simplicity, say a whole factory), a person can *channel* the pressure that the state applies when it defends property rights. This owner has the power to direct the *threat* of state sanctions (that would be delivered by the court and police) at the non-owner who would like access to some resource. This means that from the perspective of someone who doesn't currently own a specific resource, but who needs or wants that resource, the institution of property is principally a form of ever-present threat of sanctions in the event of non-compliance (with the rule: don't steal). It is as property outsiders, non-owners, as market dependent, that we meet other people within a market economy. This doesn't mean that some people in this economy have no property at all, it just means that the very reason that we enter into market exchange at all is because there exists resources that we *don't* currently have access to. As Hale puts it rather darkly: '…all money is paid, and all contracts are made, to avert some kinds of threats.'[31]

It is within this context of ever-present threats that people make economic bargains with one another. Bargains may be made voluntarily in a narrow sense of being *chosen* as the preferable option, but that fact does not diminish the role that coercion has played in the interaction.[32] When a person enters a market everything is withheld from her by other owners who can use the law of property to exclude. In order to get access to these things, then, she must bargain with the owners over the conditions under which that owner will agree *not* to call on the state, if she walks away with some money, or if she enters a building to work, and or if she uses a service. An owner of a factory can't *make* a person come and work for her, but she can withhold things from that person (e.g. access to the means of production and monetary compensation for working it) that are vital to that person's life. The more vital these things are, and the fewer the other options that a person has for getting them another way, the more bargaining power the owner has vis-à-vis the non-owner. In the extreme, the worker, if they are to get by at all, may have to be willing to accept a very bad bargain for the right to use the means of production. In modern industrial society the result of this bargain is not that the worker gets access to the means of production and then gets to keep the thing produced; rather, the worker gets a wage in compensation for her labour, and this wage can be used to get access to things owned by yet other people (food, housing, etc.). As Hale puts it: 'The employer's power to induce people to work for him depends largely on the fact that the law previously restricts the liberty of these people to consume, while he [the employer] has the power, through payment of wages, to release them to some extent from these restrictions.'[33] This view of economic interaction succinctly summarises what I have been referring to as 'market dependence,' in which access to resources is largely structured within markets and hence shares in these resources are a function of power within markets.

If this picture of economic life seems unfairly normatively loaded against owners, we need to see that this is not the end of the story. It is not only the owners of productive assets who can make threats: so too can those who would labour.[34] They can threaten to withhold their labour. We can see that this is a threat if we think about how strike action works—the threat to strike is exactly what constitutes the bargaining power of a union (and the workers that it represents). In whose favour the bargain is made, then, does not depend on who can coerce and who cannot: both coerce one another with the state backing each up to the extent of their rights (e.g. to property and to liberty). The outcome of the bargain depends on the severity of the consequences of carrying out the threat for each party: if the factory owner carries out the threat of keeping the gates closed, the workers may go hungry (in desperate times) or at least have to significantly change their lifestyle (in modern welfare states); if the worker (or more realistically, the workers' union) carries out the threat of withholding labour, then the factory owner loses profits, out of which (in our simplified example) she draws her income. The impact of this latter deprivation depends, of course, on the owner's store of wealth and other incomes.

The point of all of this is that we can re-describe market economies in ways that do not focus on 'voluntary exchange' but on the balance of power between actors in the making of 'mutual threats.' These threats are possible because the state will apply its force to back up the rights of the parties. While situations of bargaining over labour contracts give us the clearest illustration of the overall point here, the account captures also what happens in all kinds of other exchanges: here too, there is a clash between mutual threats, resulting in the end in a bargain about the conditions under which an owner will 'release the pressure' that the law or property exerts on the liberty of the opposite party. Such threats can be very serious in a world where we need to keep consuming and producing to survive. Thus, legal rules structure *how* we can coerce one another, while actual distributions of property within a given society structure *who* has the power to make effective use of that coercion. Earlier I distinguished between two senses of 'property outsider' that map onto this distinction: on the one hand, *we are all* non-owners of specific things that we need; on the other hand, *some people* in society have so little property, and hence bargaining power, that they remain painfully exposed to the pressure that others can put on them through the institution of property. These two points come together in Hale's claim that 'To be prohibited from eating except on condition of performing certain work is in practice equivalent to being ordered more directly to do that work. That is precisely what our law of property does to the propertyless man…'[35]

This view of property in a market economy has consequences for how we think about the nature of government and political power.[36] By enforcing private property rights, the state allows private individuals to channel the force of the state to their advantage. Private property is thus not primarily a protection *against* the state (as libertarians would have it), but a way in which states *delegate* powers to coerce one another to people within a society. The unevenness of property holdings thus translates into an uneven distribution of real powers within a society. The concept of 'private government' concisely captures the point.[37] Hale, like Cohen, wanted to show that the powers that people held as owners were almost exactly parallel to the powers that central government have over our liberties: while governments can restrict our freedoms directly with laws and police, private owners restrict our freedoms by *mobilising* these laws and police. Liberals have tended only to worry about the first form of power, but not the second. Where they have recognised property as relevant for the balance of power in a society, apologists of 'free markets' have argued that economic power (structured through private property) acts as a counterweight to the coercive powers of central government.[38]

I have spent time here on Hale's realist view of economic practices because his work puts us in a position to say a great deal about property and dependence. What Hale's analysis has done (if we are convinced by him) is to shift our attention from the black and white contrast between 'free' and 'unfree' societies, or 'free' and 'regulated' markets, to the structures of dependence in every economy and society. His work reframes questions of policy by arguing that the important choices to be made are not about ensuring freedom and avoiding coercion, but about how *to institutionally structure powers of coercion* with a view to *structuring the freedoms* that individuals have in their lives in society.[39] He thought that with a different system of rules regulating private property—particularly rules about inheritance and government grants—the balance of power within society could be radically altered while still keeping rights to private property.[40]

Of course, the basic idea that property is a form of power that owners, especially of productive assets, wield over non-owners is not Hale's discovery (it has been a cornerstone socialist and anarchist political thought). But he did do two important things with it: first, he made strong arguments attacking the sharp distinction between public power and private power, and revealed the muddled reasoning that resulted when courts tried to clearly separate economic from political coercion and control; second, he provided an analytical vocabulary that, while normatively pregnant, did not have an ideal image of society (such as communism) built into it from the beginning—one might still prefer a libertarian world of coercion to a socialist one, or a welfare state one. Hale clearly believed in the use of public government to counter the ills and inequality produced by private government, but one *could* follow his analysis without accepting this conclusion.

The analysis opens up a number of critical questions about property and dependence, but it also leaves much unanswered. If laws of private property *make us* dependent in a specific way, could they also be reshaped to *defend* those who are made dependent? Does property in a market society produce social injustice because of the *way that it works* in our economic practices, or simply because it is unevenly distributed in society? The next sections explore answers to these questions.

What Should Dependence Mean for Property Law?

In 1982, after an unsuccessful legal challenge by the steel workers' union, the US Steel Company demolished two steel plants in Youngstown, Ohio. The decision to allow this showed that the property rights of the company in the end had trumped the interests of the workers and their local community, which relied heavily on the plants for employment. Joseph W. Singer[41] has used this case to raise crucial questions about dependence: should courts allow companies to close such places of work, on which whole communities depend, and use the property however they wish (selling it; using it for other things; dismantling the works for scrap; etc.)? Or should the workers be protected against the decisions that would be most destructive of their modes of life? What do laws of private property demand here?

In the event the courts dealing with the case struggled, and in the end gave up, in the attempt to make relations of dependence matter for determining the respective property rights of the parties. But before reaching this conclusion, the district judge made clear his reservations:

> …it seems to me that a property right [for the workers to the plant] has arisen from this lengthy, long-established relationship between United States Steel, the steel industry as an institution, the community in Youngstown, the people in Mahoning County and the Mahoning Valley in having given and devoted their lives to this industry[42]

The problem was that he believed that there was no legal precedent for treating the case in this way. In response to this, Singer argues for two points: first of all, the court should have identified a legally relevant *interest* that workers and their community had in the steel plant. This was a 'reliance interest': a legitimate stake in the future of the plant that *had grown out of* the very dependence that the community had on this industrial infrastructure. Recognition of such an interest could have resulted in giving the workers (as a collective) the first right to buy the property and continue working it if it is still profitable enough to do so. Second, the court could have found precedents for this line of reasoning in other areas of property law where social relationships *do* matter for how we determine the outcome of such disputes.

The social relations that we should be interested in here are ones that involve property in some way, and ones in which parties become dependent upon one another during the course of their interaction.[43] These relations could be between husband and wife, between land owners and people crossing the land, between landlords and tenants, between welfare recipients and the state or between some other parties.[44] The point is that courts have in fact looked at the way in which people in these relationships become dependent on the other party in ways that give them legitimate expectations and interests in the continuation of the relationship. This is especially obvious when we look at how courts divide property holdings in the event of divorce: who *bought* the property is not a fact that ties the hands of the court in determining who will *get* the property when the relationship breaks down. The point is that courts have indeed already recognised *social relationships*, and their development over time, as *the source of legal entitlements*. Thus, Singer argues that 'In a variety of circumstances, property rights are shared or shifted to non-owners [in current US law] when they have relied on relationships of mutual dependence that made access to such property available in the past.'[45]

Singer's view of the rights and wrongs of industrial plant closure draws heavily on the realist view of property and market relations developed by Hale and others.[46] But the issue has taken a new turn. The point is now not only that property rights, enforced by the state, place us in positions of dependence upon one another; the point now is also that the law can compensate for this (in some cases) *by making the fact of dependence into the basis for a claim to rights.* Just as the law puts every individual under a pressure by threatening her with sanctions for breaking property law, it has the power to release specific individuals from a degree of this pressure by transferring property rights to her (this of course also *increases* the pressure on those who thus lose their rights).

If we follow this line of reasoning about social relations and property rights, then we begin to shift the normative connotations that we attach to the idea of 'dependence.' No longer a purely *negative* state, to be dependent on others, becomes a feature of social life that we can positively affirm and build into the law of property.

Criticisms of the Legal Realist Approach to Property and Market Exchange

Current market relationships and the private property regime that underpins them are made to look suspect, if not downright unjust, in the light cast on them by Hale and Singer. Neither proposes doing away with markets and property, and both argue for *reform* rather than destruction of these practices and institutions. Hale, writing in the turbulent world of the 1920s, even darkly suggests that the 'friends' of property should reform it before the 'enemies' of property take it upon themselves to do so.[47] But their arguments do not paint a positive picture of market society: there remains the sense that as things are, market relations generate more injustice than justice. Of course, their picture of property and markets has dissenters.

First of all, addressing the kind of realist position developed by Hale, opponents have argued that the conceptual shift that underpins this position overextends the ordinary uses of the concepts of 'threat' and 'coercion.' If these categories become too broad, we lose sight of important moral distinctions between forms of pressure people can put on one another: we can't so simply translate 'voluntariness' into 'coercion' without losing important differences in forms of human interaction. Turning to Singer's argument, two more problems present themselves. One is that it will always be difficult to define what kinds of dependence relationships matter to the law of property, and how to form clear legal rules about these relationships that do not open the door to arbitrary legal decisions. Another worry, perhaps peculiar to moral philosophers, is that we cannot derive normative conclusions in an argument from solely factual premises. In other words, the *fact* that some people depend on other people in a particular way that has been structured by property relations over time can give no basis for the *normative justification* of a redistribution of property rights: facts and norms just don't mix like that.[48]

Just how challenging these criticisms are to the legal realist position depends largely on what it is that we think theorists of property like Hale and Singer are doing. Insofar as their re-descriptions of how property works in a market economy are meant to challenge the *starting points* from which legal and political debates about property begin, they achieve this brilliantly without raising any of the worries voiced above. We may wrangle over the analytical and normative differences between 'coercion,' 'exploitation,' 'pressure' and so on, but the fundamental reversal in our view of property—achieving the view from 'the outside'—does not depend on such fine distinctions. Hale and Singer have succeeded in placing 'dependence' on equal footing with 'independence' in our view of how property structures the interaction between people in society. However, if we want to go further, like Singer, and argue for positive legal rights that *should* be recognised on the basis of this re-description, then critics are right that however moral this may sound in theory, there would be difficulties in practice of disentangling those dependence relations that matter for legal reasoning from those that don't. As I have been arguing, we are *all* property outsiders, and hence dependent on others for access to things, in a minimal sense of this term.

Criticisms, of Hale at least, have also come from another direction, in the form of a defence of markets as an institutional framework of human interaction. According to legal scholar and historian Jedediah Purdy, Hale's picture of market society fails to grasp what an enormous achievement it was to establish a legal regime that *limited* the ways in which people could coerce one another: yes, we coerce one another in a market regime, but we are not born into subjugation (as in a slave society or a feudal order). Furthermore, in a market society that recognises 'free labour' we cannot even legally create contracts that would prevent an employee from leaving work (under fear of violence). This is no small achievement of a society and a legal system, and, as the struggles of courts to figure out such rules shows, things could have turned out differently.

Hale failed in another way too. He remained stuck in the mode of *critique*, and never developed a positive account of what a just legal and economic system *would* look like.[49] Given this lack, the criticism of market relationships becomes a bit too easy.

Purdy's arguments are important for a number of reasons. First of all, by going in detail through the rulings of pre-Civil War American courts about labour discipline applied to slaves, he certainly succeeds in showing that the coercion applied to slaves was qualitatively different to that applied later to 'free labour.' It is not a small thing that labour contracts, in contrast to slave-ownership or rental, do not give the buyer rights to beat a person or to physically restrain them if they want to leave. Purdy is well aware that the contrast between slavery and free labour should not be overdrawn. In practice, freed slaves often returned to conditions of dependence extremely similar to those they had left: agricultural labour under harsh conditions for little pay.[50] But he is surely right that free labour raised a different set of problems for courts to deal with than slavery did: the task now was to set the limits of how *bargaining* is conducted amongst persons, rather than to set the limits of *force* that could be applied to slaves.

We can describe a situation of bargaining in two ways: Hale analyses the bargaining situation as a series of *threats*, but Purdy argues that we should rather analyse it (in more traditional liberal terms) as a process of *recruitment*. Market economies and the private property regimes that underpin them produce contexts in which people *recruit* one another to their projects. While this descriptive shift may seem to abandon Hale's view and return to the naïve vision of 'voluntary exchange' that Hale was attacking, this is not, in fact, the case. Purdy unpacks his idea of recruitment in a way that preserves much of the critical insight of Hale's arguments, without abandoning hope in markets as an economic institution. Thus, he distinguishes between the 'rules of recruitment' in a market economy (the laws that define how I can bargain with another person: I can't threaten them with violence) and the 'circumstances of recruitment' (the actual distribution of resources in the given situation: this determines each person's degree of leverage in the bargain); together these 'rules' and 'circumstances' make up the 'terms of recruitment.'[51] What Purdy has done here is to preserve the sense that a market relationship is indeed very different from a slave relationship because the participants are protected by laws that forbid participants from using threats of violence and imprisonment as elements in the bargaining process. On the other hand, he clearly acknowledges that in situations of greatly unequal wealth between the parties involved, the *bargaining power* of these parties will be unequal and the outcome of bargains may be very unjust.

Dependence is a crucial idea here. It is because we are *all* dependent upon others that we need to recruit people to our projects in the first place: this is true of both the strong and the weak in society. However, this dependence can be either 'reciprocal' or 'nonreciprocal.' The fictional 'social contract' in which members of society come together to agree on a political order is the paradigm case of the former: dependence with equality. The slave relationship is the paradigm case of the latter: dependence without equality.[52] With this distinction in mind, and looking back over history, Purdy clearly thinks he sees a historical development in a good direction: '…the incremental replacement of nonreciprocal forms of dependence with reciprocal forms.'[53]

There are at least two important normative claims being developed by Purdy here. First of all, he thinks that we can judge levels of justice within a society by looking at the degree of reciprocal dependence that its laws and its actual distributions of wealth produce: How *equal* are we in our dependence? How *mutual* is that dependence? The fairness of the bargains that happen in a society depends on the answers to these questions. Second, Purdy makes an important observation about how dependence relationships in one part of a person's life are related to their dependence relationships in another. Thus, in a market economy a person may be in a weak bargaining position in the labour market, but even if they do make bad deals here this exchange may nonetheless give that person *more* bargaining power in *other* contexts: the best example here is the increased power of women within their family if they have an income that is not dependent upon a male breadwinner. Put more broadly, the point is that the market relations may produce one form of dependence (on employers) but also produce a more balanced set of power relations elsewhere in the social system.[54]

There is a hopeful liberal message in Purdy's view of property and market relations.[55] But Purdy's distinction between the 'rules' and the 'circumstances' of recruitment leaves us with some important questions: should we be more concerned with issues of quantity and distribution when we reason about property and social justice, or about the quality of the property and contract laws that structure how this property 'works'? Or do both concerns require equal attention? And in what would this 'reciprocal dependence' consist? Would it mean that we should meet each other with roughly equal resources in every context of recruitment? Or rather that, as in the example of empowering women through formal employment, that our powers and vulnerabilities need to be spread through different parts of social life in a way that leaves us options of 'exit' from any specific bargain? And finally, a question towards which the discussion will develop here: What has *time* got to do with all of this?

We can examine these questions below in the contrast between recent political philosophy and recent legal scholarship on property.

Is Dependence a Matter of Quantities or Qualities of Property?

Contemporary liberal egalitarian political theory (here I include both legal theory and political philosophy) grounded in the experience of capitalist democracies raises the question of what kind of property regime best supports the aspiration of moving towards a just society. The tradition of legal theorising discussed above, from Hale's legal realism, to Singer's 'progressive property,' to Purdy's liberalism, has asked this question by looking at the history and the details of the US legal system, and suggesting how it could develop. This focus on legal reasoning stands in contrast to forms of political philosophy that have directed their attention to the relation between the individual and the political community as a whole, without engaging with the details of property law. Thus, the idea of 'property-owning democracy' has been debated in recent political philosophy in the wake of John Rawls' argument that in *contrast* to capitalist welfare states '…the background institutions of property-owning democracy [would] work to disperse the ownership of wealth and capital, and thus to prevent a small part of society from controlling the economy, and indirectly, political life as well.'[56] It is worth looking at the discussion that has grown out of this claim because it will give us a way to think about whether the dependence produced by a property regime is best analysed in terms of quantities of property (distribution) or the qualities of property (the rules that govern what powers property gives). I will argue, in turn, that this issue in fact prompts us to see why the problem of dependence cannot be divorced from problems about *time and justice*.

As I noted in the Introduction, the idea that the ownership of property gives citizens the necessary independence to participate freely and reasonably in public life has been an important one in Western political thought and has been used in both progressive and conservative political arguments. The term 'property-owning democracy' was, however, first used in British Conservative political thought in the 1920s in an attempt to articulate an alternative to the collectivised property regime proposed by socialism.[57] Its early proponents did not see a strong role for the state in bringing about a redistribution of property rights through, for example, the forced conversion of firms to cooperative enterprises or progressive taxation, but saw property-owning democracy rather as an ideal that might be encouraged but not imposed by the state. Since these beginnings, the concept of property-owning democracy has been taken up on both the Left and the Right of British politics. A redistributive and egalitarian vision of property-owning democracy was promoted by the economist James Meade in his *Efficiency, Equality and the Distribution of Property* from 1964, which included proposals for a basic income, measures to equalise holdings of private property, and increased social ownership of the economy. On the other hand, the government of Margaret Thatcher drew on the conservative lineage of property-owning democracy when it privatised much of the public sector, particularly public housing. In short, 'property-owning democracy' is a concept that has paradoxically been envisioned as both as an alternative to, and as a complement to, social democratic policies that would promote the socialisation of productive assets and support state-sponsored welfare provision.

The focus on property-owning democracy in recent political philosophy is due, however, not to the turns of ideology in British national politics, but to the fact that John Rawls used the concept (taken from Meade) to articulate a liberal egalitarian political order that offered an *alternative* to welfare state capitalism. While Rawls has often been read as an apologist for welfare state capitalism, his remarks on property-owning democracy have kindled interest amongst interpreters who hope to find a more radical political vision in his work. Given the brevity of Rawls' own arguments about this ideal political and economic order, it is commentators like these who have done the work of reconstructing what Rawls vision of property-owning democracy might mean in practice.[58]

Rawls claimed that a property-owning democracy would stand in clear contrast to welfare state capitalism, where a small section of society typically controls a great deal of the means of production. He also suggested that there was an important difference between redistribution of income (in welfare state capitalism and its various forms of welfare payments) and the more fundamental dispersal of productive assets that would be controlled by citizens in the very course of economic production and exchange (imagined in property-owning democracy). This difference has been captured in more recent discussions with the distinction between *re*distribution and *pre*distribution.[59] The temporality implied by these labels (and Rawls' own argument) is problematic and often confusing, but it deserves some careful attention.

Rawls used an awkward temporal metaphor to explain what he meant by 'property-owning democracy.' He claimed that in such a society distribution would be achieved 'not by redistribution of income to those with less at the end of each period, so to speak, but rather by ensuring the widespread ownership of productive assets and human capital…at the beginning of each period.'[60] This temporal language is both odd and distracting. It is odd because economic processes are, of course, not divided into discrete 'periods'—a before and an after of production. As a commentator has pointed out, 'one man's *ex post* is another man's *ex ante*.'[61] The temporal language is distracting because it conceals the fact the principle contrast here is between redistributive transfers organised by a welfare state and *delivered as cash flows that will be used for consumption*, and the redistribution *of productive assets that can be put to use as the basis for further production* (i.e. other forms of wealth such as shares or land). The lack of clarity here is not the result of confused ideas, but rather of the fact that the issue of the timing of redistribution (it's 'rhythm') is integrally linked to the issue of property as a form of power. To see this, we can think about the different kinds of goals and policy proposals voiced by proponents of property-owning democracy.

On the one hand, some proponents place much emphasis on *the points within a life course* (ages) that citizens should receive property (in cash, housing subsidies and productive assets) from state-administered distributional programmes funded through taxation.[62] A lump sum received at the age of 18 may influence a person's life chances in a very different way from the same amount paid over the course of 20 years in welfare payments. Furthermore, the transfer of privilege across generations through inheritance should be blocked.[63] These are concerns with the 'rhythm' of distribution. On the other hand, some theorists leave issues of time to one side and focus on how a property-owning democracy would allow people to take control of work,[64] investment,[65] and (presumably, although this is not in focus in the literature) local planning and housing. This is a concern with the powers bestowed by particular forms of property when it comes to the organisation of key parts of social life.

The focus on *time* and the focus on *power* are different, but they are integrally linked. Proponents of property-owning democracy are critical of contemporary welfare states for redistributing wealth in a form that leaves the recipients dependent upon the state: a steady but very limited flow resource does not put many of the powers of property into the hands of recipients. Such limited but constant flows allow the recipients to consume, using money or food stamps, for example, but they do not put these recipients in any position to use property productively. This would mean, in Purdy's terms, using property as a means of recruitment. This kind of property power emerges only when owners control a significant quantity of property at one point in time. Hence, the *quantity* of property transferred at the right *point in the lifetime of an individual* eventually translates into a *qualitatively distinct* form of property power, such as in the control of work (in a company I now own) or the control of housing (in contrast to only being a tenant).

What remains underdeveloped in the property-owning democracy debates is a discussion of exactly how specific laws of property structure these potential powers that a (pre-)distributive regime tries to channel into the hands of individuals. What I have been trying to do with this discussion, then, is to show the integral connection between egalitarian property concerns that focus on *quantity* and egalitarian property concerns that focus on the *quality* of property rules (i.e. just what kind of institution it is in law and practice). While both the legal theorists and the property-owning democrats want to keep both of these dimensions in view, in practice they each slide towards one concern to the neglect of the other. Singer is right to complain that Rawls and Rawlsian liberal egalitarians focus too exclusively on distributive justice and fail to see that property laws shape the contours of social relationships continuously over time by determining exactly what kind of power property *is* in different social situations.[66] But the value of property-owning democracy discussions is that they force us to think about what I have called the 'rhythm of justice,' and what that rhythm means for how we organise dependence and vulnerability in our societies.

Conclusion: The Rhythm of Justice

What I have been working towards is the idea that time matters for our thinking about dependence. We can now express this point using the idea of 'property outsiders' developed earlier. In a minimal sense, we are all property outsiders throughout our whole life. This means that in a society with private property and markets, private property is a pressure exerted upon my liberty by other owners and the state that will back them up. I depend on them, and making bargains with them, to get the things I need, and I experience that dependence in particularly markets: I am market dependent. However, some people are property outsiders in the stronger sense of the term: they have so little property that their liberty is even more restricted than most people's. Hence, they make bad deals and they enjoy few of the powers that property can bestow on people. Finally, across a person's life that person moves between relative degrees of being 'outside.' As a child most people enjoy only a minimal degree of the powers of property that concern the coercion (or recruitment) of others ('you give me that piece of string and I'll let you go down this slide' is a form of coercion in Hale's sense, but quite a weak one). However, for most people this lack of property power gradually transforms into some degree of coercive and recruiting capacity. But how does this transformation happen? It happens through mechanisms like inheritance that transfer lumps of property all at once, but it happens also through the slow operations of property law in determining who gets what in productive processes (rights to profit and rent), in disputes about resources (what I can use my property for), and in the regulation of social relations (who gets to keep the car when we get divorced?). Our understanding of how property regimes structure our relations of dependence needs to capture both of these temporal dimensions at once: the long-term cycles of distribution and the constant ticking-over of property law.

In 2012, when the UK government introduced criminal sanctions for squatting in empty houses, it reinforced the dependence of people who need a home on landlords and existing owners within the housing market. This change may not have affected a huge section of the British population, but it did make the lives of the homeless more difficult, while making it easier for the owners of real estate to leave their property empty, usable as a second home, a store of value, or for financial speculation.[67] When 3 years later a new government led by the same party announced that it would raise the amount of housing wealth that could be passed between generations through inheritance without taxation, it made property in housing an even more convenient vehicle for the transfer of intergenerational privilege (now properties worth up to £1 million can be passed from parents to children without taxation).[68] These developments are illustrative of a wider trend, beyond the UK, of housing becoming perhaps the most socially divisive form of property in contemporary societies today. While the property power of housing ownership is clearly different from the property power of factory ownership that was paradigmatic in Hale's examples, the degree of one's housing debt or equity determines to a great extent how easily one can mobilise resources in other parts of life: where all surplus income goes to servicing mortgage debt or high rents one becomes severely dependent upon labour markets as a source of income; conversely those who have inherited housing wealth or profited from the sharply rising market, now have real social powers denied to much of the population: possibilities for mobility, rent extraction, preferable terms of borrowing for consumption and investment, and not least the ability to work less. Certainly, the reciprocal dependence dreamed of by Purdy does not exist in contemporary housing markets, with knock-on consequences for our dependencies in other parts of social life.

The point here is not that the housing crisis has introduced dependencies where there were none before. The point is, rather, that each decision on property law, like those made by the UK government in recent years, is a decision that *reorganises* the relations of dependence and their corresponding vulnerabilities in society. As housing becomes a more and more important store of society's wealth, some forms of dependence are strengthened and others weakened. The vertical dependence of one generation on the next for access to this resource and the horizontal dependence of mortgagors on banks for credit are strengthened. So too, is the dependence of non-owners on owners, where squatting is criminalised (now access can only be acquired by making bargains with owners to rent or buy). The dependence of wealthy owners on the labour market and the state is weakened: housing wealth can be translated into leisure time, access to private health care, and a pension that the state no longer needs to provide. It is easy to see why these alterations to property law constitute a tightening and loosening of the various *political* bonds that link us in society.

Notes

1. Manuel B. Aalbers, *The Financialization of Housing: A Political Economy Approach* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).
2. R. Dyal-Chand and N. M. Davidson, "Property in Crisis," *Fordham Law Review* 78 (2010).
3. Mary Manjikian, *The Securitization of Property Squatting in Europe* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

4. Lorna Fox O'Mahony, David O'Mahony, and Robin Hickey, eds., *Moral Rhetoric and the Criminalisation of Squatting: Vulnerable Demons?* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015); on earlier legal developments in land law relevant to squatting and adverse possession see Neil Cobb and Lorna Fox, "Living Outside the System? The (Im)morality of Urban Squatting After the Land Registration Act 2002," *Legal Studies* 27(2) (2007).
5. Department for Communities and Local Government, *Fixing Our Broken Housing Market* (Report, Published Online, February 2017), accessed 13 February 2017, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/590463/Fixing_our_broken_housing_market_-_accessible_version.pdf.
6. In 2012, the year that squatting was criminalised 50,290 households were registered as statutorily homeless in the UK, while almost 1 million properties stood empty. See, SQUASH, *The Case Against Section 144* (Report by Squatters' Action for Secure Homes, Online, 2013), accessed 11 February 2015, http://www.squashcampaign.org/repeal-law/the-case-against-section-144-2/.
7. Joe Beswick et al., "Speculating on London's Housing Future: The Rise of Global Corporate Landlords in 'Post-Crisis' Urban Landscapes," *City* 20(2) (2016).
8. Lilian Chenwi, "Putting Flesh on the Skeleton: South African Judicial Enforcement of the Right to Adequate Housing of Those Subject to Evictions," *Human Rights Law Review* 8 (2008).
9. Stuart Wilson, "Planning for Inclusion in South Africa: The State's Duty to Prevent Homelessness and the Potential of 'Meaningful Engagement'," *Urban Forum* 22 (2011): 266.
10. Lorna Fox O'Mahony, "Property Outsiders and the Hidden Politics of Doctrinalism," *Current Legal Problems* 67(1) (2014); André van der Walt, *Property in the Margins* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2009).
11. For an overview of the intellectual history of these property critiques, see Christopher Pierson, *Just Property: Vol. II: Enlightenment, Revolution, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
12. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property?* trans. Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For the various insults about proprietors, see, respectively, pages: 140, 159–160, 177.
13. On value pluralism as a foundational feature of property law and theory, see, Gregory Alexander, "Pluralism and Property," *Fordham Law Review* 80 (2012).
14. Joseph W. Singer, *Entitlement: The Paradoxes of Property* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 19–25.

15. Franz von Benda-Beckmann, Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, and Melanie G. Wiber, "The Properties of Property," in *Changing Properties of Property*, ed. Franz von Benda-Beckmann, Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, and Melanie G. Wiber (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 8.
16. Franz von Benda-Beckmann and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, "Temporalities in Property Relations under a Plural Legal Order: Minangkabau Revisited," *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 46(1) (2014).
17. Ibid. For an example from the UK, see, Innes Bowen, "The End of One Law for All?' BBC News Online, 28 November 2006, accessed 9 December 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/6190080.stm.
18. Charles Reich, "The New Property," *The Yale law Journal* 73(5) (1964): 734–737 (emphasis added).
19. Reich, "The New Property," 787.
20. *Goldberg v. Kelly*, 397 U.S. 254 (1970); the decision is heavily criticised in Richard Epstein, "No New Property," *Brooklyn Law Review* 56(3) (1990).
21. For an extended discussion the methodological issues involved in defining property and the use of paradigm cases in these arguments, see Patrick J. L. Cockburn, "A Common Sense of Property?' *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 17(1) (2016): 78–93.
22. Jeremy Waldron, "Community and Property—For Those Who Have Neither," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 10 (2009): 161–192.
23. Joseph W. Singer, "The Reliance Interest in Property," *Stanford Law Review* 40(3) (1988).
24. Jeremy Waldron, *The Right to Private Property* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
25. Anthony M. Honoré, "Ownership," in *Oxford Essays in Jurisprudence*, ed. A. G. Guest (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).
26. Morris Cohen, "Property and Sovereignty," in *Property: Mainstream and Critical Positions*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 160.
27. For a discussion of Hale's use of Wesley Hohfeld's fundamental categories of legal relations, see Warren J. Samuels, "The Economy as a System of Power and Its Legal Bases: The Legal Economics of Robert Lee Hale," *University of Miami Law Review* 27(3–4) (1973): 274–276.
28. Robert L. Hale, "Rate Making and the Revision of the Property Concept," *Columbia Law Review* 22(3) (1922): 214.
29. Robert Nozick provides the classic libertarian discussion of legitimate entitlement to property based in just acquisition and transfer (i.e. free exchanges): Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Basic Books, 1974).

30. For a discussion of how liberal political theory and US courts have seen this distinction over time, see Jedediah Purdy, "People as Resources: Recruitment and Reciprocity in the Freedom-Promoting Approach to Property," *Duke Law Journal* 56: 1097–1098.
31. Robert L. Hale, "Bargaining Duress and Economic Liberty," *Columbia Law Review* 43(5) (1943): 612.
32. Ibid., 606.
33. Ibid., 627.
34. Ibid., 606.
35. Robert L. Hale, "Coercion and Distribution in a Supposedly Non-Coercive State," *Political Science Quarterly* 38(3) (1923): 473.
36. Robert L. Hale. *Freedom Through Law: Public Control of Private Governing Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952).
37. For a discussion of the concept of 'private government,' see Samuels, "The Economy as a System of Power," 295–302.
38. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 7–21.
39. Samuels, "The Economy as a System of Power," 279.
40. This solution is, of course, not acceptable for those who think that current rights to bequeath and inherent are integral to *what property is*. For an overview of views on inheritance and bequest in the history of political thought about property, see Robert Lamb, "The Power to Bequeath," *Law and Philosophy* 33 (5) (2014).
41. Singer is the leading figure in what has become known as 'progressive property' scholarship in the USA. Together with other leading property theorists, Singer introduced the term into the academic field in 2009 as a label for property scholarship that challenged dominant views of property: views that position owners at the centre of the legal analysis and concentrate on owners' right to *exclude* as the 'core' of what property 'is.' See Gregory E. Alexander et al., "A Statement of Progressive Property," *Cornell Law Review* 94 (2009).
42. *United Steel Workers v. United States Steel Corp.* 631 F. 2d 1264, at 1280. Quoted Singer, "The Reliance Interest in Property," 619.
43. 'Many of the legal developments of the twentieth century can be described as recognition of obligations that emerge over time out of relationships of interdependence.' Singer, "The Reliance Interest in Property," 653.
44. Ibid., 663–699.
45. Ibid., 678.
46. Singer explicitly aligns himself with Cohen and Hale on the question of property and power. See ibid., 650–651.
47. Hale, "Rate Making," 216.

48. All of these criticisms are raised in Stephen R. Munzer, "Property as Social Relations," in *New Essays in the Legal and Political Theory of Property*, ed. Stephen R. Munzer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
49. Purdy, "People as Resources," 1097–1098.
50. Ibid., 1071.
51. Ibid., 1094.
52. Ibid., 1111.
53. Ibid., 1112 and 1113.
54. Ibid., 1100–1107.
55. 'So far as conditions of dependence and, consequently terms of recruitment, are reciprocal, persuasion [in contrast to force] will occupy a greater place in interpersonal appeals.' Ibid., 1114.
56. John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*: *A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2001), 139.
57. This brief overview of the conceptual history of 'property-owning democracy' is based on Ben Jackson, "Property-Owning Democracy: A Short History," in *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond*, ed. Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
58. For a good overview of recent arguments on the topic, see Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson, eds., *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
59. Gavin Kerr, "'Predistribution,' Property-Owning Democracy and Land Value Taxation," *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 15(1) (2016).
60. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 139.
61. Martin O'Neill, "Free (and Fair) Markets Without Capitalism: Political Values, Principles of Justice, and Property-Owning Democracy," in *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond*, ed. Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 90.
62. Thad Williamson, "Realizing Property-Owning Democracy: A 20-Year Strategy to Create an Egalitarian Distribution of Assets in the United States," in *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond*, ed. Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
63. O'Neill, "Free (and Fair) Markets," 81.
64. Nien-hê Hsieh, "Work, Ownership, and Productive Enfranchisement," in *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond*, ed. Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
65. David Schweickart, "Property-Owning Democracy or Economic Democracy?' in *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond*, ed. Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
66. Joseph W. Singer, "Democratic Estates: Property Law in a Free and Democratic Society," *Cornell Law Review* 94 (2009): 1044–1045.

67. For a legal interpretation of the changes focussing on this consequence of the law, see Lorna Fox O'Mahony and David O'Mahony, "Crime as Property: A Restorative Perspective on the Criminalisation of Squatting and the 'Ownership' of Unlawful Occupation," in *Moral Rhetoric and the Criminalisation of Squatting: Vulnerable Demons?* ed. Lorna Fox O'Mahony, David O'Mahony, and Robin Hickey (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).
68. The change was made under David Cameron's Conservative government. Details of the changes can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inheritance-tax-residence-nil-rate-band#inh-home, accessed 16 February 2017.

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CHAPTER 7

Unearned Income and Inheritance

The identification of economic independence with earning a wage or salary holds a strong grip on our imaginations. In the first part of this book, we saw how claims about the dependence of welfare recipients, the dependence of unpaid housewives and the dependence of beggars in contrast to street paper sellers, all drew on the idea that making an income through market exchanges is a gold standard for economic independence. The reason for this is that we tend to assume that the income that we get from a job has been rightfully earned as compensation for our useful productive efforts and that the token of value that we receive in return (money) gives social power and freedom. In Chapters 3 and 4, we saw the difficulty of clearly disentangling market exchange from the social relationships and economic practices that surround it. In Chapters 5 and 6, we saw that money produces its own relations of dependence and that distributions of property are a background condition for determining our strengths and weaknesses as market actors. Nonetheless, the cultural association of economic independence with earning a salary remains a strong one that influences many people's views of work: the labour was my own, I could have sold it somewhere else, and with the money I get for it, I can make my own choices about consumption.

By contrast, income that is not earned in the labour market is much harder to connect to any particular efforts on the part of recipients. With the loss of this apparently simple connection between effort and reward, our moral reasoning about economic justice begins to splinter. Thus, however, much the political Left and Right might be able to

P. J. L. Cockburn, *The Politics of Dependence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8_7

agree on the legitimacy of earned income in general (leaving aside the massive inequalities in levels of compensation in actual societies), moral and political commitments sharply diverge when it comes to *un*earned income. More specifically, different *forms* of unearned income are treated wildly differently: both welfare recipients and financial speculators have been called 'parasites' (e.g. in the UK press[1]), but rarely by the same commentators. And while the unearned income received by welfare recipients is often seen as a moral and economic problem that fills political agendas (reform of welfare states), unearned income derived from asset ownership has been steadily rising in Europe and elsewhere without being described as 'economic dependence' by the mainstream of political discourse.[2] More generally, political support for taxes on wealth and inheritances has been decreasing in many countries around the world.[3]

There are, of course, always voices that disrupt this silence on the unearned income of owners. The socialist tradition has always denounced capital as a source of power and wealth and regularly described 'capitalists' as 'parasites.' In more sober language, the UK Labour party claimed at the start of the twentieth century that '[t]axation should aim at securing the unearned increment of wealth for the public use.'[4] In recent years, the *Occupy* movement that attracted enormous public visibility in the early 2010s focussed particularly on the financial sector as a part of the economy that (it is claimed) does nothing useful but extracts massive amounts of wealth from society. A number of recent academic books have also tried to reinvigorate the distinction between earned income and unearned income as a starting point for thinking about economic justice and policy.[5] Thomas Piketty puts the point simply and forcefully:

> To be sure, there is something astonishing about the notion that capital yields rent, or income that the owner of capital obtains without working. There is something in this notion that is an affront to common sense and that has in fact perturbed any number of civilizations, which have responded in various ways not always benign, ranging from prohibition of usury to Society-style communism.'[6]

In short, while it has not filtered through to the centre of political discourse today, the dependence of 'rentiers' on 'workers' has never gone unnoticed.

When we receive unearned income from a return on ownership of something (money, property, shares, etc.), we are both structurally dependent on the work of others and parasitical upon that work. The fact that receiving this income rarely leads to being labelled as 'economically dependent' reflects the imaginative and normative limitations of dominant political discourse. It was these limitations that I have repeatedly tried to expose by contrasting practical dependence (which tends to get noticed) with structural dependence (which tends to get overlooked).

Social and political theorist Andrew Sayer captures this contrast between different senses of 'dependence' when he writes that uneven ownership of assets '…of course produces inequality, transferring wealth from those who have limited income based on work, to asset owners, and the greater this inequality the greater the dependence of the former on the latter, though of course the asset rich are dependent on workers for producing the goods which give their money value.'[7] In this sentence, Sayer shifts from the practical and vulnerable sense of dependence to the structural and parasitical sense, using the contrast to emphasise the moral absurdity of the situation.

By calling unearned capital income a form of '*structural*' economic dependence, I am trying to emphasise the *impersonal* nature of the dependence relationship involved. When a person receives unearned income as a return on her capital—whether that income comes in the form of rent, or interest, or profit, or some other kind of entitlement[8]—she does so not because of *who she is*, or *who she knows*, or any of her *characteristics* (such as motherhood or need), but simply because of what she owns (e.g. shares in a company). And she draws on the productive power of (usually) countless anonymous employees, who she will never meet and probably never thinks of. The impersonal nature of the dependence relation is probably part of the reason that this form of economic dependence is not labelled as such. Another reason for this blind spot in political discourse is that a person who benefits from unearned income of this kind probably also (in contemporary societies) has an earned income, making his or her overall income a composite of earned and unearned, and probably changing across the course of a lifetime (e.g. in the transition from work income to pension income).

But if the stigma of economic dependence fails to attach to unearned income as return on ownership (except in the eyes of anarchists and socialists) partly because of the impersonal nature of the dependence relationship, it is hard to understand why inheritance—that massive mechanism of wealth transfer across generations—is not identified in public debate as a form of 'economic dependence.' Private inheritance is a fundamentally *personal* form of dependence of members of a generation on members of the preceding generation. It is a way of accumulating wealth that is not linked in any way with productive contributions to the economy, and which fundamentally structures other relationships of economic dependence in which we stand. As noted in the Introduction, people who have benefitted from significant transfers of wealth from their parents (as gifts or inheritance) are unlikely to have to depend on the administrative apparatus of a welfare state (for receiving basic insurance or support). And as I argued in Chapter 6, private wealth acts as a power in the market and a shield from the vulnerabilities of living in a market economy. But where is intergenerational dependence in our political discourses about economic dependence and justice? In European societies, at least, inheritance is becoming a greater and greater component of overall wealth, meaning that to be well-off is increasingly a matter of inheritance rather than work and earned income. This is not to say that rich people don't work; only that people who *only* work and don't inherit are increasingly unlikely to be amongst the richest in society.[9]

So when we think about unearned income, we need to keep both impersonal and personal relations of dependence in mind. One of Thomas Piketty's major points in *Capital in the twenty-first Century* is that high rates of return on capital (what I get for investing it) go hand in hand with the growing importance of inheritance as a source of wealth, and that this will exacerbate economic inequality in the long run. My concern is to squarely categorise inheritance and unearned income from asset ownership as manifestations of economic dependence and thus make them comparable to the other forms of economic dependence that have been examined in this book. The aim, of course, is not to level the moral and political difference between all forms of dependence, but to lay out their differences such that they can be seen more clearly.

In what follows, I begin with a brief history of the concept of the 'parasite,' drawing attention to its application as a metaphor for describing unjust and unsustainable economic relationships. In general, this is an ugly history—if I dare to use the concept myself, it is because by widening its applicability we can narrow the scope for using the concept to scapegoat specific social groups. Moving from metaphors to flows of wealth, I then outline different forms of unearned income and raise questions about the contrast with earned income. While on an individual level, the difference is clear, the distinction becomes less clear when we look at the social conditions within which earned income is generated. Nonetheless, what I question is not whether unearned income is really unearned, but whether earned income is really all so earned after all. While apologists of capitalism seek to defend unearned income as justified, I question whether even earned income is always justified. Next, I move from the distinction between earned income and unearned income to inheritance, looking at the link between inheritance and unearned income. In the final section, I return to some of the contrasting senses of 'dependence' developed in previous chapters and argue that inheritance constitutes a form of economic dependence *across time* that is integrally connected to other forms of economic dependence *at a point in time.*

Social Parasites

When particular groups of people are called 'parasites' in the popular press or extremist propaganda, the intention is often to dehumanise them by comparing human beings to parasitic plants or animals that extract vital energy from a host organism. This application of a biological concept to metaphorically describe a social relationship horrifies us partly because of the ways that it has been used historically: Nazi ideology and propaganda paved the way for, and tried to justify, the genocide of the European Jews with exactly this metaphor. Today, it remains a favourite of extremist groups, particularly as applied to immigrants and Jews.

But the concept of 'parasite' does not, in fact, originate in the biological domain, later to be picked up and applied to society.[10] Its first uses in Ancient Greece were to describe a class of priests who ate together as part of their religious practice. By extension, 'parasite' was then used in the Greek and Roman world to describe anyone eating at a table at the expense of others. It was this sense that carried into modern European languages: in the seventeenth century, Shakespeare could use the word to describe a grovelling courtier. It was only in the eighteenth century that the biological use of the term became firmly established to describe non-human organisms—initially plants and later animals.

From around this time onwards, we also begin to see more radical polemical political uses of the concept. French revolutionaries criticising the *ancien regime* made extensive use of the metaphor, as did later socialists (e.g. Marx and Lenin) when they condemned bourgeois institutions and people. Until 1961, the Soviet Union even used 'parasite' as a legal term to describe a person whose crime was the avoidance of work and an anti-social lifestyle.[11] Anti-Semitic uses go at least as far back as the late eighteenth century, and in racist rhetoric today the biological meaning and the social meaning have become intertwined in fears of immigrants (the social use) carrying diseases and pests (the biological use).[12]

To sum up this very rough historical sketch, we seem to move from relatively benign social applications, through to biological applications, and finally to the atrocious social applications, both economic and racial, mainly of the twentieth century.

But this history has not destroyed the attractiveness of the metaphor for many. In contemporary political economy, the idea of economic parasites has recently been applied by Michael Hudson in his *Killing the Host: How Financial Parasites and Debt Bondage Destroy the Global Economy*. In his book, Hudson draws on the old distinction between earned income and unearned income, and the newer contrast between the 'real' economy and the 'financial' economy. Imagining national economies as 'hosts' and private financial firms as 'parasites,' he repeats classical socialist uses of the metaphor, as he describes the way in which the financial sector can capture value without adding to the production of useful goods and services in the 'real economy.' Unlike extremist right-wing rhetoric or Soviet law, then, his usage is institutional rather than personal: it focusses on economic relationships between artificial bodies, rather than social relationships between groups of flesh and blood individuals.

But what is new is that Hudson's metaphor does not begin with biological parasites in general, but specifically with *behaviour-altering* parasites. His claim, then, is that the continued ability of the financial sector to extract value from the productive economy depends on the assent and compliance of governments, which he imagines as the infected 'brain' of society, where policy decisions are made about economic institutions. Hudson's story is thus about the power of the financial sector to set economic and political agendas and solidify the claims of unearned income (from lending) to a huge share of global wealth, against the claims of earned income (from production).

Unearned Income as Wealth Extraction

The historical story about the rising power of the financial sector in national and world politics is an important one, but it focusses our attention on the power struggles and alliances of elites, rather than the underlying question of what it means for income to be earned or unearned. It is therefore worth stepping back from Hudson's explicit polemics against the financial sector and looking at the most basic differences between our various claims to a share in society's resources. This broader task is emphasised by Andrew Sayer when he argues that if we do not distinguish between practices that merely capture wealth and economic practices that produce wealth, then we are, in effect, '…condoning unproductive and, indeed, parasitic activities.'[13]

When a share of society's wealth comes to us as a *flow* of resources (usually money), we tend to speak of 'income.' Three kinds of income are important to begin with.[14] The first is *earned income*. This is a compensation for a productive input; it is income based on work. The second is *unearned income linked to status*. This is income that a person gets due to their particular recognised status within a political society: in modern welfare states, for example, some people are recognised as having specific needs (e.g. through disability, parenthood or illness) that entitle them to support. The third form of income is *unearned income based on ownership*. This is income that comes from charging others for the use of a scarce resource that is privately owned. This flow of income, then, is not linked to either work or status, but simply the fact of owning assets that others need. It can take the form of profits, rent, interest and more, all of which derive from ownership: of shares in company, of land, patents or other rentable things, and of money.

The three forms of income distinguished above are not legal categories as such, although states do categorise forms of income in rather more complex ways for the purposes of differentiating rates of taxation. I will criticise the concept of 'earned income' below, but these three categories nonetheless make a useful starting point for thinking about what kind of economic practices we live with in contemporary capitalist welfare states. Putting aside inheritance until the next section, most of us receive an income in two or three of these ways: most adults have paying jobs (earned income), many people receive economic support due to a social status (e.g. disability support, parental support, etc.) and finally many people (although certainly not all) receive an unearned income based on ownership at some point in their life, such as in the form of interest on bank savings or a pension (from a fund that expands through capital investment). On top of this, welfare states provide their citizens with access to resources (e.g. national health systems) by virtue of their general status as citizens. Since these latter resources do not take the form of a flow of money, let us leave them aside for the moment in these considerations of income.

The difference between the three forms of income is not clear in our everyday experience of money and resources. The case of pensions shows why: pension funds are comprised both of payments that a person makes from their earned income (usually a salary or wage) and from the interest that the fund can raise by investing the pool of money that it commands. When money is paid out to a pensioner, it is certainly not earmarked as coming either from the 'earned' part or the 'unearned part' of the fund. As I noted above, societies do earmark flows of money and resources as certain points in the economy, such as the tax system. But the special taxation of pensions, where pension payouts avoid a significant amount of income tax,[15] shows that we often do not use taxation to track productive contributions directly, but rather to incentivise and disincentivise different forms of economic behaviour. In any case, most of the time the difference between earned income and unearned income remains unmarked in our daily lives.

The pension example shows an epistemological difficulty with the earned/unearned distinction: the easiest way to think about what income is earned and what is unearned is by referring to a single person and asking which parts of their income result from work, which from status and which from ownership; but if we push the problem one step back, then things get muddled: What about the earned income of employees working for investment banks? The bank as a whole captures *unearned income* (by owning valuable assets), but the individual employee takes home *earned income* (by working for that bank). If we only looked at the individual employee, then we would never have asked about the further economic practices or social conditions that stood *behind* the work. This shows that while on a personal level we are certainly interested in *effort* and *reward* as normative features of *earned income*, on a more abstract level we may in fact be interested in specifying the *productive contribution* of specific individuals to the overall pool of goods and services available in a society. But as we have seen these two concerns do not align neatly: to answer the question about productive input, we cannot simply ask whether an individual made this money in the form of a salary (from a job) or rent (from asset ownership), or ask how the state taxed the money.

Salaries do not directly reflect productive input, but rather a multi-sided balance of power: a balance of power of course between employees and firms (this is what unions are interested in), but also a balance of power between individual firms and other social actors, which include their competitors, their consumers, governments and, in fact, everyone interested in the resources that the firm commands. In the end, it is probably state enforcement of international borders, stopping flows of labour from poor to rich countries, that has the biggest effect on 'earned' income levels on a global scale. The difference between the wages of a Bangladeshi and a Swedish bus driver is not explained by a difference in productive input, efficiency or effort.[16] The wages of Swedish bus drivers are certainly 'earned' in one sense, but the fact that these wages can command such an enormous quantity of goods (perhaps produced in Bangladesh) has nothing to do with the quality of the work. The difference depends on a history of power, control, ownership and scientific and technological development,[17] and not least border controls, all of which benefit our Swedish bus driver due to his status as a Swedish citizen—not his productive input.

It is for these reasons that the category of 'earned income' needs to be treated with normative caution. It *is* useful for understanding differences between the kinds of claims people have to money and resources, but it is not useful for tracking the difference between productive input and unproductive 'extraction' of wealth on an individual level. On a *global scale*, we can indeed talk about the ratio between productive work (making goods and services) and simple value capture (claiming a return as a right of ownership), but we do not find this ratio by looking at how individuals divide their earned income and unearned income in their tax returns. This critique of the idea of 'earned income' is closely connected to the mistrust that we should have in the cultural association of economic independence with participation in markets: the fact of earning one's money in a job says nothing about the deep structural dependencies that determine the amount of goods and services I can command for my salary (how many T-shirts I can buy from Bangladesh). Chapter 3 on unpaid domestic work also gave us grounds for caution when thinking about earned income. That chapter raised the important question of *who* it was that earned the wage given to a worker in a job: Was it the individual worker? Or was it the whole family unit (including an unpaid domestic worker) only one of whom appears in the company wage lists? Or was it, rather more radically and confusingly, those who raised and educated the waged worker?

I have spent some time in cautioning against treating earning income as simple and justified, but this should in no way diminish our scepticism towards unearned income. In fact, the idea of unearned income is now even more central because we can now see that what we earn in the labour market is closely related to background conditions of ownership (as argued in the previous chapter on bargaining power) and status (especially citizenship), and hence decoupled in a number of ways from individual effort. Furthermore, unearned income in its pure forms (based solely on ownership or status) should remain central to our questions of economic justice: if we leave *individuals* behind and look at a whole society, what we are interested in is the total aggregate of each kind of income flow *between* sections of society. Is there, for example, one part of society that gets *much more* unearned income in total than other parts of society? This is a crucial issue for egalitarian (particularly socialist) politics, and the answer is 'yes.' Not only that, but unearned income is, in effect, income *taken from* earned income, either before wages are paid at all (i.e. in the division of revenue between labour and capital) or in the marketplace (e.g. rent paid from a salary to pay an owner for the use of a house). What is true of landlords is true of all other forms of ownership that can command a return of some form, from patents to money.

There are at least two reasons that unearned income should trouble us as a society. The first is that if income is going to have any link at all to *effort* and *merit*, then this link is only present at all in the case of earned income (and there the link on an individual level is also weak). Unearned income, by contrast, is purely a function of power.[18] It is my rights as an owner, which will be backed by the force of the state that protects the flow of unearned income into my bank account, which maintains the flow. This is a set of relationships determined by power, not merit. The second trouble with unearned income is that ownership of assets in highly unequal in all societies (there are of course many degrees of difference here). If ownership of assets was distributed evenly in a society,[19] unearned income might seem unfair in specific cases, but on average everyone would be benefitting (and losing) equally from it: I own a bike which I charge you for using; but you own a place to park it, for which you charge me. But the fact is that ownership of resources is *not* evenly distributed in individual societies or globally, and rent-bearing assets are highly concentrated in the hands of the wealthy (both the cause and effect of their wealth).[20]

So far the discussion has assumed that return on ownership requires no effort (and so breaks the moral link between effort and reward) and it is essentially unproductive (one person captures more of society's wealth than they give back in the form of useful goods and services). These are *very* controversial claims. But when hedged properly, they are difficult to dispute. First of all, it must be admitted that ownership of assets that give a return (property, capital, etc.) does require management, and so to the extent to which they have to do this, the landlord and capitalist are not mere idlers.[21] Second, finance *is* a valuable service insofar as it increases the efficiency of the economy *as a whole*, indirectly adding to the pool of things and services that we can actually *use*. But having noted these points, we need to return to realities. To the extent to which an individual's wealth is managed by other people (bankers, renting agencies, lawyers), the individual's income from that wealth remains solely based on ownership. It is therefore unearned income not linked in any way to effort. This is probably the case for the vast majority of asset ownership. Even where individuals do this work of management themselves, their ongoing claims to income rest on decisions made in the past, and the link to desert and effort becomes increasingly tenuous with time. Even more importantly, as long as the return on assets stands at a higher rate than the expansion of output of goods and services (with use values in themselves), investors are benefitting simply from asset inflation and not from increasing the efficiency of the economy.[22] This is why the equation $r > g$ stands at the centre of Piketty's analysis of capital from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries (where r stands for rate of return on capital, and g stands for rate of growth of output and wages). The implication is that just owning assets and charging a rent for their use is a better way to make money than investing in production and taking a share of the increased levels of output: 'The entrepreneur inevitably tends to become a rentier, more and more dominant over those who own nothing but their labor.'[23]

As I have pointed out several times in this book, the inequality of ownership should have serious consequences for how we imagine and describe economic dependence in the societies in which we live. What we live with in unequal societies is the divergence of practical and structural dependence. This divergence is shown by the way in which the stigma of dependence is attached often to the lives of the poor, sometimes to the lives of the rich, but rarely to both at once. The divergence is also evinced in social and political theory, where the parasitic dependence of the asset rich is contrasted with the vulnerable dependence of the asset poor.[24] Perhaps what is most significant about this divergence concerns the relative robustness and fragility of the different kinds of claims that social actors have to a share of income. Unearned income flows through institutional channels (laws of property and contract) that are immensely solid, like hard-packed sediments in the riverbed of the economy. It takes state intervention in the form of taxation, provision of basic resources outside of the market (e.g. social housing),[25] legislation or seizure to stop that flow. And its continuity is ensured by spreading risks in diverse portfolios of assets. Earned income flows through institutional channels that are far less solid: like shifting rivulets in a delta, streams of income can appear and disappear as firms open and close, and jobs are created and destroyed. It takes only a slight shift in capital markets for a flow of earned income to switch tracks and leave its former recipient stranded in the mud. The equivalent of an asset portfolio for earned income is to have several jobs at once.

The structural dependence of the recipients of unearned income is as naturalised for our eyes as the basic economic institutions with which we live within capitalist economies. Instead of people depending on other people, we just see a set of practices and laws that do not appear to raise the issue of dependence at all. On the other hand, the practically dependent are judged and judged very differently from one another: the difference between depending on a firm, a family member or a bureaucrat can mean the difference between condemnation and praise.

One of the basic institutions structuring the relations between structural and practical dependence is hiding in clear slight: inheritance.

Inheritance

Inheritance and gifts between generations are a major mechanism maintaining the inequality between those who have considerable wealth and those who have very little (or owe more than they own).[26] For this reason, levels of inheritance taxation have historically been a contentious political issue. Several European countries and the USA introduced a progressive inheritance tax (i.e. a tax based on percentages of wealth transferred or inherited) around the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries. In the UK, this rose from a highest rate of 8% in 1894 to a highest rate of 75% in 1949 and has been declining since then. Levels of wealth that are exempt from taxation have largely followed average house prices (so that houses can be inherited tax free).[27] The US has a long tradition of political opposition to the intergenerational transfer of privilege through inheritance, and in the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt argued that '…inherited economic power is as inconsistent with the ideals of this generation as inherited political power was inconsistent with the ideals of the generation which established our Government.'[28] The top rate in the USA stood at 77% between 1940 and 1981 (considerably higher than, e.g. France or Germany[29])—but has since then dwindled rapidly (with extremely high thresholds for exemption: currently up to $5.5 million can be transferred untaxed[30]).

While rates of taxation are an obvious policy issue, perhaps less obvious for contemporary eyes are the struggles of questions of testamentary freedom (Can a person give their wealth to whomever they want?) and the legality of entails (Can property be legally tied to family dynasties and its sale by each generation restricted?).[31] Both of these issues concern, in large part, the rights of families against the rights of individuals. The dilemma can be summarised in the contrast between the views on inheritance of two towering figures of nineteenth-century philosophy. For G. W. F. Hegel, to support the rights of testamentary freedom (i.e. let people bequeath their property as they wish) is to support the 'arbitrary dispositions' of an individual owner 'at the expense of family relationships,' which weakens the latter's 'ethical standing.'[32] On the other hand, J. S. Mill thought that 'although the right of bequest, or gift after death, forms part of the idea of private property, the right of inheritance, as distinguished from bequest, does not.'[33] Mill's point was that the family has no claims against the individual owner, if we really respect the latter's property rights. In Germany and France, inherited wealth is still taxed more if it is passed outside of the direct line of descent or the nuclear family, illustrating a political commitment to the family as a unit of social stability and continuity that can be propped up through economic policy. Put in terms of this book, the questions of levels of taxation and the freedom of testaments have considerable importance for the ties of economic dependence between generations: low rates of taxation make it *possible* to depend on one's predecessors for wealth, while freedom to disinherit gives parents a particular form of power over their economically dependent children.

But exactly what role does inheritance play in maintaining economic inequality? The answer is more complex than one might imagine. Because people accumulate wealth in a number of ways including through earned income, unearned income and inheritance, we should not assume that the wealthy are wealthy solely because they inherited money, and the poor are poor solely because they failed to inherit money. The relationships amongst these sources of wealth are very important, but they are not entirely determined in advance.

To see this, we can imagine a person who has a high-paying job, buys assets (say a house that can be rented out) with the surplus income and then receives an unearned return in the form of rent and windfalls on the increase in house prices, all without inheriting. This person ends up wealthy, but not because she had wealthy parents. On the other hand, we can imagine a person who has no earned income, and no assets, but then suddenly receives a lump sum in the form of an inheritance. This person also ends up wealthy, but solely because she had wealthy parents. Such people as these two do exist. But what is much more common is that the different sources of wealth march in step—at least to some extent. In the UK, how much people inherit correlates both with their levels of education, with home ownership and with ownership of financial assets.[34] This is to say that people who already have wealth tend to take a significant share of inherited wealth. Slightly differently, however, it does not appear that levels of *income* before inheritance are a good indicator of whether, or how much, a person will inherit. For example, significant numbers of people who earn little inherit a lot. Nonetheless, the overall picture in the UK is one in which the economically advantaged (before inheritance) gain more through inheritance than the economically disadvantaged (before inheritance). And to inherit certainly then puts one in a position to accumulate wealth more easily after this point: for example, by owning a house that requires no rent or mortgage payments.

This way of putting the point may seem unnecessarily awkward and cautious—why not just say that the rich get richer? As John Hill (et al.) point(s) out, even once we are sure that inheritance *reproduces* economic inequality in general in the short term, we cannot know *a priori* (without investigation) whether inheritance makes economic inequality *worse* or *better* in the long run. The answer will depend on the social practices and individual decisions of people in a given society. For example, in a society with an extremely high degree of social mobility we would expect poor people to marry rich people quite often, and when the happy couple inherits money from the wealthy lineage that money may either be immediately shared or go to the poorer spouse when rich partner dies. The overall effect would be a redistribution of wealth between people *born* rich and people *born* poor. While the example is a bit contrived and does not fit with social realities as they are in most countries, it is simply meant to show that there are a number of ways in which the mechanism of inheritance *could* deconcentrate wealth along *some* parameters. Whether it in fact does so will depend on both social practices and the laws of inheritance that are in place. In the UK, it appears that inheritance neither exacerbates nor lessens wealth inequality—it simply maintains it.[35]

But if maintaining inequality were not bad enough, studies in other countries suggest a bleaker picture with inheritance having a ratchet effect on economic inequality. This is Thomas Piketty's argument in his detailed study of inheritance in France from the nineteenth century to today. When we take intergenerational gifts (transferred during life) and inherited wealth (transferred after death) together, wealth given from parents to children will probably account for one quarter of total lifetime resources for people born in the 1970s and after. This means that whatever other earned income and unearned income they may have, on average (in France) a quarter of the things a person can control, consume, sell, spend, etc., are things given to them by the previous generation. This is a high figure. It is much higher than the quantities inherited by people born in the first half of the century (people who inherited between or after the World Wars). It is approaching the levels characteristic of France in the nineteenth century.

This high figure is important for two reasons: one to do with effort and merit, and the other to do with inequality. First of all, inherited wealth is wealth that has no link at all to the inheritor's productive contribution to the economy or more generally to their work. It is just a lottery of birth, qualified slightly by parents' ability to disinherit their children. Second, though, this average figure of 25% conceals the social reality, which is that some people are inheriting huge fortunes, while others are inheriting nothing. Piketty notes that one in six French people inherit wealth that is equal to the total lifetime earnings of a person in the least-well-paid 50% of the population (and this latter group, furthermore, inherit almost nothing).[36]

The crux of Piketty's argument about the increasing role of inheritance is this. In a society where owning assets and charging for their use *pays better than* increasing productivity through improvements in technology, knowledge, organisation and efficiency, any gains in productivity that do happen are swallowed up by the claims of capital: 'The past devours the future,' as he puts it.[37] This means that an ever greater amount of society's overall wealth will go to those who make their money through rent rather than through labour. This means, finally, that those who have shall have more, since it is this capacity to benefit from unearned income which is effectively passed between generations in large inheritances. At present, passing on this advantage is actually very easy. Inherited wealth is usually only taxed above very high thresholds, and on top of this, most governments tax earned income more heavily than unearned income[38] and fail to tax wealth directly at all. This shows that the issue of social mobility and distributions of inheritances (between many children or few) may simply be beside the point: the real problem is that it will be *owners* who get rich because they are owners, and that this form of unearned income will only grow in importance as a share of national wealth.

Displacing Dependence: Time and Society

'We are once again living in a golden age of gift giving, much more so than in the nineteenth century.'[39] This is Piketty's comment on the rising importance of *inter vivo* gifts as a mechanism of wealth transfer between generations. While he was here principally talking about *quantities* of gifts compared to inheritances, and thus making a statistical point, he was also no doubt also aware that the study of gift economies has been the backbone of economic anthropology since the work of Bronislaw Malinowski[40] and Marcel Mauss.[41] The salient feature of gift economies is precisely the fact that transfers of wealth establish social bonds of debt, which stands in contrast to market exchange in which debts are mutually cancelled in the instant of exchange. While the anthropological literature from Malinowski to Pierre Bourdieu concentrates on systems of gift giving amongst societies of living people, gifts and inheritances across generations remain the unseen bonds of social debt in capitalist societies dominated by markets. The problem from an egalitarian point of view is that debt to our parents and dead ancestors *feels* very different from debt to our unknown social contemporaries.

But dependence on previous generations is, I suggest, a kind of displacement of the dependence we have on our contemporaries. Hidden in the inheritance transfer is a social debt that we only ever see as an intergenerational personal debt (which cannot be repaid anyway). As a form of wealth transfer, gifts and inheritances increase the dependence of each generation on the last, because if large stocks of society's overall wealth are transferred in this form, then these 'vertical' social ties (across generations) become more important than our 'horizontal' ties (within a generation) for our access to that wealth. Inheritance *reduces* individuals' practical, immediate, dependence on both welfare states and on the labour market. It also *increases* a person's power in the processes of bargaining detailed in the previous chapter on property. In short, this diachronic economic dependence (over time) drastically alters the synchronic dependence relations (at a point in time) in which a person stands.

To express this in terms of the basic meanings of dependence that I have worked with in this book: the practical, personal and vulnerable dependence of children upon parents translates, through the institution of inheritance, to the structural, impersonal and parasitical dependence of owners upon workers. Discourses of economic dependence that focus on the question of participation in the labour market miss both of these forms of economic dependence because they do not bother to open up, as feminists and critical political economists have done, the institution of the family as an economic and political unit. The economy as an 'instituted process,' in Polanyi's sense, includes not only the interlocking of paid and unpaid work; not only the jigsaw puzzle of exchange, redistribution, reciprocity and house-holding, that makes up any person's means of meeting needs—but also the slow working of all of these practices across time, leaving an unequal social world.

Notes

1. Andreas Musolff, "From Social to Biological Parasites and Back: The Conceptual Career of a Metaphor," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 9(2) (2014): 18–19.
2. The claim that the rate of return on capital has exceeded the rate of expansion of economies in the twentieth century, and looks set to do so well into the twenty-first century, is the most fundamental conclusion of Thomas Piketty's analyses in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University

Press, 2014). In terms of income, this has meant that since around the 1970s there has been a steady rise in the percentage of income that is *unearned* and derives from the ownership of assets (in contrast to wages, salaries, bonuses, etc.). Piketty's detailed analysis is for France, his broader analysis is of European trends, and his broadest claims encapsulate the world economy.

3. John Hills et al., *Wealth in the UK: Distribution, Accumulation, and Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 152. The authors refer to evidence from Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Greece, the UK and the USA.
4. Extract from a Speech at the Labour Party Conference of 1909. Quoted in Hills et al., *Wealth in the* UK, 156.
5. Andrew Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015); Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*; Michael Hudson, *Killing the Host: How Financial Parasites and Debt Bondage Destroy the Global Economy* (Dresden: ISLET Verlag, 2015).
6. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 423–424.
7. Andrew Sayer, "Moral Economy, Unearned Income, and Legalized Corruption," in *Neoliberalism and the Moral Economy of Fraud*, ed. David Whyte and Jörg Wiegratz (London: Routledge, 2016), 52.
8. For a discussion of the various varieties of unearned income, see Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 49–118.
9. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 402.
10. In what follows I rely on: Musolff, "From Social to Biological Parasites."
11. Ibid., 23.
12. Andreas Musloff, "Immigrants and Parasites: The History of a Bio-Social Metaphor," in *Migrations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Michi Messer, Renee Schroeder, and Ruth Wodak (Vienna: Springer Vorlag, 2012).
13. Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 134.
14. I draw here on Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 41–48. However, I have modified his categories in order to introduce their normative significance only in a second step (rather than immediately as he does).
15. John Hills, et al., *Wealth in the* UK, 175–179.
16. The example is from Ha-Joon Chang, *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2010), 23–30.
17. Scientific, technological and organisational development is something that we inherit from past generations, on both global and local scales. We inherit too their abuses of resources and nature. For a discussion of our dependence on the 'commons,' see Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 140.
18. Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 47.

19. On the idea of property owning democracy, see Chapter 6.
20. Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 1–14.
21. 'In such cases [where capitalists actually manage the businesses they own] they can be called *working capitalists*; their profit is *partly earned* (in so far as they help to organise and plan the work) and *partly unearned* (in so far as their ownership of scarce assets allows them to take advantage of the dependence of workers and extract profit).' Ibid., 86. The fact of effort here does not, of course, necessarily mean that this effort produces use-values: it may be just extracting value from somewhere else in society, rather than adding to the overall stock of useful things and services.
22. This is a slightly different point from the point about desert. Ownership itself will never be a productive activity even when investment is benefitting the economy as a whole.
23. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 571.
24. Andrew Sayer notes: 'So there is an interdependency between workers and capitalist employers; they both need each other. But it is employees who are in the weaker position.' And again: '…on the one hand, the profit of the capitalist involved in production is *parasitic*, like that of the rentier, but on the other hand, it also depends on keeping the host organisms alive and supporting their growth.' And finally: 'Instead of taking the legitimacy of absentee shareholding for granted, we should recognize it for what it is: a means by which uncommitted owners can benefit from the contributions of *committed, dependent employees*.' Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 85, 88 and 94, respectively (emphasis added).
25. Thanks to Andrew Sayer for pointing out the positive point here: the provision of services outside of markets can reduce the possibilities for rent extraction just as much as taxation can.
26. For information about the UK, this section draws on John Hills, et al., *Wealth in the* UK, 92–118; For information about France, the chapter draws on Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 377–429. Where I provide no page reference, it is these sources on which the discussion is based.
27. John Hills, et al., *Wealth in the* UK, 174.
28. Quoted in Jens Beckert, "The *Longue Durée* of *Inheritance* Law; Discourses and Institutional Development in France, Germany, and The United States Since 1800," *European Journal of Sociology* 48 (2007): 91.
29. Beckert, "The *Longue Durée* of Inheritance Law," 108.
30. On estate tax in the USA, see: https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/estate-tax. On inheritance tax in the UK, see: https://www.gov.uk/inheritance-tax. The UK figure is based on an inheritance from 2 parents combining wealth as money and as property.

31. See Beckert, "The *Longue Durée* of Inheritance Law." All historical detail in the paragraph is drawn from this source, and I have therefore omitted references for subsequent sentences.
32. G. W. F. Hegel quoted in Robert Lamb, "The Power to Bequeath," *Law and Philosophy* 33(5) (2014): 635. And Hegel adds: 'In England, where all kinds of eccentricity are endemic, innumerable foolish notions are associated with wills.' Quoted in Ibid.
33. J. S. Mill quoted in Lamb, "The Power to Bequeath," 635–636.
34. John Hills et al., *Wealth* in the UK, 103–104.
35. John Hills et al., *Wealth* in the UK, 111.
36. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 421.
37. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 571.
38. On the UK difference between tax on earned and unearned income in the UK, see John Hills et al., *Wealth in the* UK, 167.
39. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 393.
40. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978 [1922]).
41. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990 [1925]).

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CHAPTER 8

Conclusion: Choosing Our Dependencies

Human beings depend on one another for care, support, nurturing and learning. In this sense, dependence is simply the human condition. But we are dependent upon one another as political and economic creatures too, and this dependence is structured by our most fundamental institutions. The family is one such institution, which of course organises care and nurture, but it also organises flows of wealth, the division of labour and the reproduction of economic privilege. The welfare state, money, property and markets are four further complex institutional structures that give and withhold access to resources, making people dependent in specific ways on their contemporaries and predecessors. These forms of dependence, unlike the basic dependence in the care relation, are a product of power struggles and institutional evolution—things could be different.

In order to broaden our view of economic dependence, and begin to describe the qualitative differences between forms of dependence, I have made four basic senses of dependence central to the discussions in this book: these are practical dependence and structural dependence, and vulnerability and parasitism. I have also described relations of dependence in other ways that were specifically relevant to the institution being discussed: I suggested, for example, that the idea of 'market dependence' might help us to understand how people depend on one another as owners of private property, labour power and money. I also argued that the contrast between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' dependence might help us to think about the politics of money; the link between 'synchronic'

P. J. L. Cockburn, *The Politics of Dependence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78908-8_8

and ‘diachronic’ dependence might help us to think about the justice and injustice of inheritance; and the contrast between ‘personal’ and ‘impersonal’ dependence might help us to describe the qualitative differences amongst various social and economic relationships. Finally, I have argued that some forms of dependence are culturally stigmatised, while other forms of dependence are not and that in politics and public discourse we are often very bad at making that distinction in ways that bear scrutiny. Political commentators, for example, have often seen parasitism where they should have seen vulnerability, such as in their blanket condemnations of welfare dependency. More broadly, many of us see economic independence where we should see a form of dependence: the market dependence of the salaried worker; the structural dependence of the rentier.

There are three concluding points that I hope the discussions in this book go some way towards supporting. The first concerns political discourse and decision-making about dependence; the second concerns the ambitions of political theory; and the third concerns our ethical attitudes towards parasitism.

First of all, simply noting our fundamental dependence upon one another as human beings is not enough for answering difficult questions about how to organise our economic dependencies that we can actually make choices about. We are as dependent on capitalist societies as we would be in socialist ones or anarchist ones, but the dependence is qualitatively different, and this matters.[1] More than this, relations of economic dependence can be organised in a whole range of ways even within capitalist societies, depending on how fundamental aspects of economic practice are organised, such as through inheritance law. Part of the lesson here is that big labels like ‘capitalism’ and ‘socialism’ only go so far in telling us something about the societies that they are meant to describe, because what those big labels mean in practice is a result of the details of property law, money creation, social norms, social policy and much more.

What I have tried to urge here is that rather than judging the justice of economic institutions and social policy in a society by asking whether they promote *independence*, we should be asking whether these institutions and policies structure economic *dependence* in the ways that we want. Do they, for example, create intense vulnerability amongst a part of the population? Do they allow parasitic dependence amongst another part of the population? Do they balance dependence in one part of our economic lives (e.g. in the labour market) with a different kind of dependence in another part (e.g. access to basic services through the state)? Do they allow our relations of dependence across time to significantly affect our relations of dependence at a point in time (e.g. through inheritance), and what is the result in terms of equality of access to resources?

There is no reason to believe that networks of dependency relations cannot be structured in ways that provide significant degrees security and freedom, given that our economic lives are not one-dimensional. Most of us are both vulnerable and parasitic, both practically and structurally dependent, either all at once or across the course of a lifetime. The political problem is that within individual societies and globally, we suffer and enjoy these forms of dependence in greatly varying degrees depending on who we are and where we live. In order to grasp this, we must broaden our view of economic dependence to include *much more* than the predicament of citizens faced with welfare states on the one hand and labour markets on the other. A person's relation to the state and market actually tells us surprisingly little about how that person depends on others and how others depend upon her.

The politics of dependence is a politics not of ideals but of trade-offs. This is a mildly depressing idea. But in a political era where the norms of rhetorical culture[2] require that every policy has to be presented as being in everyone's best interest, with no losers, what we really need is a bit of realism: of course there are losers, but some people *should* lose some of their privileges. Not only that, but some political choices entail that we *all* lose something, so that we can *all* gain something else. For example, a new form of money, in a Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) say, could radically decouple our economic practices from dependence upon the authority of governments; but it might simultaneously make us dependent upon members of our local community in ways that could be suffocating. The collectivisation of property might free us from the despotism of individual owners, but subject us to the despotism of the majority. The abolition of inheritance could significantly undermine the structural dependence of the wealthy, but it would also destabilise the family as a social unit of continuity within which people can form expectations about the future. These are trade-offs and very difficult ones. But we should not imagine that they can be avoided—we are doing things *in some way* anyhow.

We should see contemporary capitalist welfare states as the institutional expression of a series of trade-offs concerning dependence: at a very minimum, they strike a balance between personal dependence on the family, impersonal dependence on the administrative arms of the state, vulnerable dependence on markets and the parasitical dependence of rentiers. Of course, these 'balances' are struck in vastly different ways in different societies: that is why we have different 'worlds of welfare capitalism.'[3] Furthermore, these trade-offs are never permanent. According to critics of neoliberalism, the trade-offs struck in the twentieth century are currently being rapidly and disastrously undone: 'In "freeing" [people] from democratically controlled support via the local and central state,' writes Andrew Sayer '[neoliberalism] produces new forms of dependency for the majority: indebtedness – isolated individuals dependent on those whose control money, those who will "support" them only if they provide their creditors with unearned income in the form of interest.'[4]

Nonetheless, even defenders of welfare states must face the fact that distributing social and economic power through taxation and spending alone leaves essentially untouched a core of economic institutions that constitute the deep foundations of the forms dependence that we live with: I have singled out the family, markets, private property, bank and state money and inheritance laws. A radical rethinking of economic dependence requires engagement with these institutions: whether we can find better alternatives or not, they cannot be left out of our political reasoning about economic dependence. If we do so, then we risk arbitrarily isolating 'welfare dependence' as a problem that will bear the brunt of social stigma.

But in order to pose political problems in a way that captures this depth and breadth of our economic lives, we also need a more subtle vocabulary for describing dependence than we have hitherto seen in public debate. The basic contrast between structural and practical dependence has not hitherto done enough (or any) work in public rhetoric and social theory. Structural dependence refers to the reliance on the productive energies of others made possible by our basic economic institutions that channel flows of resources between people who are linked not (necessarily) personally but institutionally; practical dependence is the reliance of some people on the will of others for accessing the resources they need to carry on their lives. I am aware that the line will not always be sharp here, but surely the contrast does pick out important differences between, for example, the dependence that characterises rentiers and their unearned income and the dependence that characterises an unpaid domestic worker and the part of a wage packet that has been handed over to her at the end of the month. The bizarre thing from a moral point of view is that the visibility of practical dependence—at the extreme we can think of beggars in public space—has tended to attract social stigma, while the relative invisibility of structural dependence, organised through private contracts signed in some closed room, has only attracted the outrage of 'radical' critics. This strange asymmetry was perfectly captured in the welfare dependency rhetoric examined in Chapter 1, where conservative defenders of intergenerational privilege and unearned income through asset ownership could denounce the life-modes of the 'welfare dependent.' All such claims about dependence should prompt us to ask what kind of dependence is being referred to and what is being left out of the picture.

To sum up my first concluding point, then: we are not very good at talking about dependence in public debate because we have failed to differentiate very different senses of 'dependence' and thus failed to see dependence in the places that we should have. This failure has gone hand in hand with the failure to conceptualise law, policy and practice as the manifestation of trade-offs between forms of dependence. The idea of 'independence' becomes instead an umbrella concept for all of those forms of dependence that we have simply ideologically buried: Who today thinks of using money as an expression of dependence on one another, states and banks? Who imagines inheritance as a form of intergenerational dependence? My guess is very few.

My second concluding point concerns the ambitions of political theory. What can political theory hope to achieve? The aim of the discussions in the book has not been to propose what a just, liberal and egalitarian society should look like, but to clarify some of the choices that a political community has to face if it takes the many dimensions of dependence seriously. For most of us, institutions like money and property have become so naturalised and routinised that we stop thinking of them as the product of political struggles and choices at all. But they are. This does not mean that they can just be changed at the drop of a hat, or that any alternative money or property regimes would be clearly better, but it does mean that we need to recognise them as part of our political arrangements and not just background conditions against which real politics happens. Discussing them using the concept of dependence is one way to recapture the politics that we are living with in the midst of our economic lives.

In *Capital*, Marx wrote of the contrast between the capitalist economy of his day and the feudal economies of medieval Europe:

> Let us now transport ourselves from Robinson's island, bathed in light, to medieval Europe, shrouded in darkness. Here, instead of the independent man, we find everyone dependent – serfs and lords, vassals and suzerains, laymen and clerics. Personal dependence characterizes social relations of material production as much as it does the other spheres of life based on that production. But precisely because relations of personal dependence form the given social foundation, there is no need for labour and its products to assume a fantastic form different from their reality. They take the shape, in the transactions of society, of services in kind and payments in kind. The natural form of labour, its particularity – and not, as in a society based on commodity production, its universality – is here its immediate social form.[5]

This is a slightly tricky passage because Marx is both contrasting two forms of economic organisation (feudalism and capitalism), and he is contrasting two ways of *seeing* economic organisation ('Robinson's island' refers to political economists' utopian models of how economies work). While the contrast between the economic structures is real enough, the contrast between two ways of seeing the economy is deceptive: in the feudal economy we can see the social relationships *for what they are*; in the capitalist economy we have become accustomed to seeing social relationships in a '*fantastic form*.' As discussed in Chapter 4, Marx believed that the monetary economy had not transformed dependence into independence, but simply transformed the dependence relations from personal into impersonal ones.

One might draw a number of broader lessons from this (very rough) historical observation, or indeed disagree with it, but I would like to suggest one point of relevance to contemporary political theory. Marx was discussing a historical development, but we need to be cautious, too, in how we mark contrasts within *contemporary* social life, dividing the world into various 'spheres' of activity. We need caution here because, as Marx suggests, underneath appearances of sharp contrast, there may be important linkages and continuities. Theorising with 'spheres' is convenient because it helps to 'box-in' networks of power relations and tell stories about one 'box' spilling over into another: money into politics; politics into the home; private power into public power. And many of those stories are useful ones. But we need to be careful not to get our thinking backwards here. These categories should not suggest to us that the world itself somehow contains natural 'breaks' in the networks of power relations in society and that the 'dams' burst from time to time. For example, it is not that political power is 'in itself' fundamentally different to economic power. While we might *hope* for these forms of power to be different, in reality the command of resources and the command of people are integrally linked. We need laws and institutions that as much as possible separate the command of people from the command of resources precisely because political and economic power will not just 'separate themselves.' We also need laws that regulate public conduct and private conduct differently, and that restrict the use of force and so preserve the possibility of free choices and actions. Such laws do not simply *reflect* underlying 'original' differences, for example, between the public and private 'spheres'; such laws contribute to *producing* these contrasts and sometimes get it wildly wrong (rape within marriage, e.g., only became a criminal offence, i.e. a public concern, in most countries during the twentieth century—in some countries only in the *twenty-first* century).

When applied to issues of economic and social justice, the imagery of spheres has, I suggest, had a poor effect on much contemporary political theory. This is particularly so where it has tempted people to focus only on the contrast between 'the state' and 'the market': Should we have more or less of one or the other? This question expresses a real political concern; but just notice what it misses: the relation between paid and unpaid work, the powers and vulnerabilities produced in a property regime, the politics of different kinds of money, the whole problem of unearned income and inheritance. Basically, the contents of this book. Thinking in 'spheres' can be a good starting point, and I also use it to summarise and simplify, but we must not get trapped by it if the world turns out to be more complex than that—if the world turns out, as Marx suggests, to be one where first appearances are deceptive.

The social actor that political theory needs to understand is not an individual simply caught between states and markets, but an individual willingly and unwillingly participating in both formal and informal social institutions that, taken together, give that person a complex bundle of powers and vulnerabilities. Feminist political theory has always sought to understand the social condition of women as something determined from many sides at once—from the home, from social policy, from public and private law, from markets, from religion and more—and has thus always been concerned with the 'lateral' links amongst practices and institutions, links that make different paths and blockages for different groups in society as they move through the world. This view *across* a range of practices gives us complexity in our social descriptions, but more importantly it can be channelled into very specific arguments about, for example, what emancipatory and just childcare policies might look like.[6]

In this book, I have also tried to look 'laterally' across a range of practical and institutional relationships and thus understand our relations of dependence as users of money, as workers (paid and unpaid), as property outsiders and as members of households and families. What has been different from most feminist theory is that by focussing on economic dependence I have cast my theoretical net more widely (which comes, of course, with a cost) and tried to describe the relations of dependence entailed by many practices and institutions that do not immediately concern care or gender. I think that this is worth doing because feminism has *methodological* lessons for any contemporary political theory that go beyond its *normative* lessons about gender injustice. The failure of much contemporary political theory to think laterally across institutions has postponed serious engagement with economic dependence in political theory because it brings with it a failure to understand how apparent independence in one aspect (e.g. within the market) rests on real dependence elsewhere (e.g. in the home). Unfortunately, fine-tuning 'principles' have often seemed more pressing than understanding the world to which these principles should apply.

Explaining how a series of many different social and economic institutions contributes to structuring the balance of power in society (or lack of balance) requires theoretical *description*. It is this descriptive work that is necessary to delineate the choices about our basic economic institutions and practices that I think we face if we take a starting point in the problems of dependence. And it is principally this descriptive work that I have engaged in this book. Theoretical description looks different on paper to theoretical argumentation, but this does not make it any less normative. In fact, I doubt whether arguments are ever as effective as descriptions in persuading people to take up new normative views on a problem; to the extent that arguments are effective, I suspect that it is because they contain interesting descriptions of the problems that they concern. This claim is philosophical heresy.[7] But I make it in order to explain the methodological ambitions of this book, which stand in stark contrast to the methodological ambitions of much political philosophy today. As much as models and principles of justice, we need clear delineations of the *choices* that we face as political communities—choices that are often completely overlooked or presented in a distorted way in political theory and public discourse.

This was my second concluding point about the ambitions of political theory: the choice of dependence as a theoretical starting point reflects the ambition to produce *normatively loaded descriptions* that look *laterally* across several practices and institutions that structure our lives together and thus to clarify not *principles* of justice but *choices* about justice.

My third concluding point concerns the ethics of parasitism. *Almost no one* is independent in the sense that they could carry on their economic lives without others; *absolutely no one* is independent in the sense that they don't owe their wealth and capacities to others. But what should this fact mean for our ethical attitudes towards economic parasitism? What should we make of Orwell's claims, with which I started this book that the line between parasitism and usefulness is much thinner than we like to imagine?

It should be uncontroversial to claim that as human beings in society we are all *vulnerable*, albeit in very different ways and degrees depending on who we are and how the law protects us. Laws and policies should be crafted to respond to this fact.[8] But what about parasitism? Is that just for fat men in top hats and sneaky immigrants? The rhetoric of the radical Left and Right suggests that parasitism is the preserve of the few; this is a mistake.

The critique of economic parasites (of the kind developed in the last chapter) rightly condemns economic practices and institutions that keep some people poor by transferring the value of what they make and do into the hands of other people simply on the basis of who owns what. And so, on a social and political level, we can indeed minimise the disconnect between desert and reward and reorganise power relationships for the better by reforming money, property, inheritance and many other things. But political certainty can breed ethical complacency. Who does not draw on the productive energy of others without giving back to those people who have supported us? Of course, usually we just assume that if we have balanced this out 'somewhere else in the system,' then there was nothing parasitical about this dependence to begin with. With that thought in mind, we can reassure ourselves that when we are dealing in aggregates it will become obvious that some people are parasites while others are not. Surely we will come out ok and so can claim 'independence' by the back door. But using aggregate productive contributions across a lifetime as a test of parasitism poses the *ethical* problem of our personal conduct and attitudes poorly. The fact that we take from other people all the time, without recognition or thanks—often simply by virtue of our citizenship rights (see Chapter 6)—does not disappear just because we do the long-term sums. While others have tried to capture this ongoing dependence on others with the idea of 'interdependence,' my suggestion is that we go further and see the *parasitism* in our lives. On a social and global scale, this implies a kind of *pan-parasitism*.[9] The difference between interdependence and pan-parasitism here is ethically important. While interdependence can suggest a cosy mutuality, pan-parasitism suggests the inevitable *delay of goodness*. It suggests that what I have benefitted from is always more than I can grasp and repay—even if I try, my efforts will be out of sync with the actions from which I benefitted.

I do not for a moment want to level the differences between the rich and the poor, or the exploited and the exploiting. But unlike most left-wing theoretical analyses, I think that the figure of the *true* proletarian, who gives but never takes—the opposite of a parasite—is a harmful fiction. Rather than saying that in a just and equal society no one would be a parasite, we should see that even in a just and equal society we would all be parasites *from some other person's perspective at a point in time*. On the level of rhetoric, of course, my suggestion is meant to block the scapegoating of specific groups in society who become the convenient symbols of weakness and self-interest. The philosophically and psychologically difficult manoeuvre is to decouple our ethics from our politics in a way that allows for the reform of economic institutions and laws without setting up platforms of ethical complacency. It is all too easy to imagine that 'this business of parasites is about *them*, not *me*.'

In his observation about beggars, Orwell was not thinking like a political economist who knows that things need to be produced and services rendered. But he was thinking *realistically*: we have never organised our economic lives according to the criteria of 'usefulness,' and it would be catastrophe to do so. Dependence is not a condition to be overcome; it is one that needs to be instituted in a just way. Recognising that we are all parasites in some degree is not a bad starting point for debate about how to do that.

Notes

1. 'We are social beings: that means we are unavoidably dependent on each other in a host of ways, whatever kind of society we live in. that dependence can take mutually beneficial, life-enhancing forms, or oppressive, zero-sum, exploitative forms. How can we replace the latter with the former?' Andrew Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 342–343.
2. Thomas B. Farrell, *The Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
3. Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).
4. Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 345.
5. Karl Marx, *Capital: Vol 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 170.
6. For an exemplary essay linking social description to normative theorising, see Nancy Fraser, "After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment," in *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013).
7. For a more detailed heretical discussion of the relation between description and normativity, see Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 16–17.
8. Martha Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20 (1) (2008).
9. For a satirical take on this 'pan-parasitism,' see Patrick J. L. Cockburn and Charlotte Graminius, *Varieties of Parasites and Their Hosts* (Copenhagen: Forlaget Findes, 2016).

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