

## Afterword

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In one form or another, the concept of dependence has, from the first, been foundational to modern understandings of humanity, society, and economy. For liberal theorists, individual freedom stemmed from a natural right to property that “owed nothing to society;” those without proprietorship of person and possessions were reduced to a dehumanized “dependence on the will of other men” (Macpherson 1962: 3,158). In this formulation, the dependence connotes incompleteness, indigence, disenfranchisement. The Great Confinement of 17<sup>th</sup> century France, Foucault argues, applied state discipline to those who failed to exercise industrious self-production. For more collectivist thinkers, it was precisely the multivalent *interdependence* of humankind as species that ensured its innately social character. And its social survival.

In fact it was the incompleteness of individuals and groups as self-propagating entities that, for Durkheim, fostered the moral cohesion of society. And, rather than becoming more self-determining with industrialization a complex division of labor, humans became ever more intricately interdependent, even if more indirectly so. Thus Durkheim’s insistence that the “cult of individualism” was a modernist myth, a Promethean fiction sanctified by the artifacts of liberal world-making: personal rights, contracts, the law of supply and demand. Hegel took the implications of dependence in a dialectical direction: it was the reciprocal, if unequal, dependence of master and slave that gave rise to intersubjective consciousness. Famously, Marx reformulated this dynamic as the structural conflict between classes, itself an historic interplay between

two orders of dependence: of workers on wage labor, and of capital on the value extracted from their toil. The vaunted self-determination of bourgeois individualism disavows its actual entanglement in a web of social and economic relations. The ideological erasure of socially embedded productivity, here, has its parallel in the fetishism of commodities under capitalism: a process by which objects of human manufacture take on the appearance of autonomous things with intrinsic value and an independent life.

In its conventional liberal usage then, dependence implies both moral and material insufficiency, immaturity, reliance on others. It draws on the telos of nineteenth-century evolutionary biology that used the logic of 'development' and 'progress' to splinter humankind into the more or less civilized, the more or less modern, rational, self-possessed, thus to order hierarchies of power and value. The social and spatial *gestalt* of Western industrial society, with its nesting order of interdependent yet unequal domains – female:male, kinship:market, family:state, colony:metropole – idealized this political economy. Critics have long contested its core ideological assumptions, not least the very way in which dependency has been defined. Not only were capital and labor *reciprocally* dependent, but female domestic work, along with work of people of color and other discounted producers, was integral to the accumulation of wealth. What is more, the effort to free itself entirely from a dependency on human labor is arguably a leitmotif of the history of capitalism, this by rendering workers ever more redundant, absent, abject. But we are now living through times in which wage work is widely held to be even less central than before to the production of wealth, when mechanization and

financialization have lead to talk of ‘the end of labor,’ when rising informal economies are becoming the new normal even in the capitalist heartlands; times, more generally, in which received, modernist articulations of economy, polity, and society are being radically reconfigured. In the process, established lines are being redrawn between autonomy and reliance, debt and solvency, production and circulation. And dependency itself, as James Ferguson (2015:100) notes, may be rethought, more appropriately, as a site of “distributive labor,” attachment, and moral obligation.

Hence the renewed preoccupation in recent decades with dependence itself, to which this fine clutch of papers speaks. That preoccupation is a symptom of a global shift in received liberal configurations of gender, labor, and social reproduction. Thus, for example, Ståle Wig – who, like others, argues that the self-made, autonomous person is an illusion – explores the performance of imagined individuality among Cuban market traders, men and women each deploying different techniques of the self, each calling out or hiding the moral and material dependencies that make the illusion real; the point, patently, lies in the fact that the practical construction of personhood is always an act of profound social entailment, of existential interdependence. This last point is extended *very* cogently by Holly Wardlow, who, in looking into the lives of women with HIV in Papua New Guinea, shows that these “dead” individuals – dead because they are only alive due to ARVs – are held accountable for two things at once: excessive independence, manifest in their uncontrolled sex, *and* excessive dependence, in that they require care, as do their own dependents, to survive. The women themselves protest this. What local discourse does not allow is that this is a case, at once, of

interdependence and *intradependence*; that is, dependence inside dependencies, creating a web of relations of mutuality among those radically individuated by their physical situation. Dependence, intradependence, and interdependence are three interwoven, locally agonistic faces of sociality here, as everywhere.

If anything brings the question of in/ter/dependence to the fore at this moment of radical reconfiguration, it is the relationship between citizen and state, which Katherine Smith explores in the context of an English public housing estate. She argues that dependence on welfare, itself deeply moralized, permits nothing but bare survival in place, without any vision of a tomorrow; even more so now under conditions of extreme austerity. But, here too, when the dependent has dependents, future making is essential: it inheres in the very fact of parenthood. What comes starkly to the fore, then, is the impossibility of social reproduction. In sum, it is not only the dialectics of dependence in the here-and-now that are in question. It is also their deployment in the forward movement of time.

Kinship and domesticity – real, fictive, of idiomatic – is a critical site in which those dialectics play out. Lotte Danielsen, contesting James Ferguson's (2013) claim that South Africans seek out hierarchical dependencies, demonstrates that black domestic workers employed by white families clearly would prefer to avoid relations of subordination. But they often cannot, given the difficulties of garnering income by other, less subservient means. Domestic labor is especially prone to degrading, unregulated toil: the afterlife of colonial norms tend to cast female domestic workers most readily as daughterly dependents, i.e. in the paternalist idiom of kinship, pretending to mutual

responsibility, affect, gift exchange. Black men, disparagingly referred to as “boys,” are kept away from the inner sanctum of the family home, being made to labor “outside.” Both categories resent their subordination. Yet they are also alive to possibilities that lie in the ambiguous coexistence of kinship and wage labor: women in particular use *faux* intimacy to press obligations, striving to turn inter/dependence into an economic survival strategy, even a pathway to a life beyond subordination for themselves and their children.

All of these observations come together, more or less directly, in Susana Narotzky’s essay on inter-generational relations. She, too, plants her gaze firmly on intimate kinship and domestic relations: in Spain the creation of greater familial and domestic dependency has resulted from economic liberalization, the shrinking of the labor market, state retraction, and austerity. Thus are micro-sociology and macro-political economy, state and citizen, family and society, waged and non-waged work entailed in one another. And entailed in a structural moment that seems unsustainable, one in which younger people, whose aspirations to independence have been put on long hold, are imbricated in inter-generational relations that conduce to deep ambivalence: to a paradox of autonomy and dependency, mutual care and resentment. What is more, dependency, here as everywhere, takes multiple forms, including ones that feed increasingly unrealistic models of entrepreneurial individualism. The more general implication? That those domestic (inter, intra) dependencies subsidize and devalue wage employment, relieving capital and the state of the costs of social reproduction. In the upshot, human life becomes enmeshed in a tight weave of

contradictions, a counterpoint of social and affective relations among persons – at once individuated and socially embraced – way too complex to be reduced to terms like dependency or autonomy.

This takes us back to our general point. In the long history of Euromodernity, capital has sought perennially to undermine labor, keeping it dependent (or making it redundant) while celebrating and theologizing the figure of the autonomous, self-possessed individual: an adult white male situated in a domestic family whose unpaid female toil sustained the very possibility of social reproduction. In the process, the rank dependency of capital, on *both* the paid wage labor it constantly devalued and the unpaid domestic labor that ensured its reproduction, was carefully hidden – making it, capital, appear to be the independent, driving force of history. With the radical reconfiguration of economy, society, and the state, that delicate balance, hidden in plain sight, has become unfixed, rendering the dialectic of dependence and autonomy – that is, of the dependence of independence on inter- and intra-dependence – starkly clear. And existentially, socially, and theoretically problematic, a deep challenge for the social sciences, and human life everywhere, to confront.

## REFERENCES

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