THE POLITICS OF DEPENDENCE

Economic Parasites and Vulnerable Lives

PATRICK J. L. COCKBURN

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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.

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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

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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