A Genealogy of *Dependency*: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State

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EPENDENCY HAS BECOME a keyword of U.S. politics. Politicians of diverse views regularly criticize what they term *welfare dependency*. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas spoke for many conservatives in 1980 when he vilified his sister: "She gets mad when the mailman is late with her welfare check. That's how dependent she is. What's worse is that now her kids feel entitled to the check, too. They have no motivation for doing better or getting out of that situation" (quoted in Tumulty 1991). Liberals usually blame the victim less, but they, too, decry welfare dependency. Democratic Senator Daniel P. Moynihan prefigured today's discourse when he began his 1973 book by claiming that "the issue of welfare is the issue of dependency. It is different from poverty. To be poor is an objective condition; to be dependent, a subjective one as well. . . . Being poor is often associated with considerable personal qualities; being dependent rarely so. [Dependency] is an incomplete state in life: normal in the child, abnormal in the adult. In a world where completed men and women stand on their own feet, persons who are dependent—as the buried imagery of the word denotes—hang" (Moynihan 1973, 17). Today, "policy experts" from both major parties agree "that [welfare] dependency is bad for people, that it undermines their motivation to support themselves, and isolates and stigmatizes welfare recipients in a way that over a long period feeds into and accentuates the underclass mindset and condition" (Nathan 1986, 248).

If we can step back from this discourse, however, we can interrogate some of its underlying presuppositions. Why are debates about poverty and inequality in the United States now being framed in terms of welfare dependency? How did the receipt of public assistance become associated with dependency, and why are the connotations of that word in this context so negative? What are the gender and racial subtexts of this discourse, and what tacit assumptions underlie it?

We propose to shed some light on these issues by examining welfare-related meanings of the word *dependency*.[1] We will analyze *dependency* as a keyword of the U.S. welfare state and reconstruct its genealogy. By charting some major historical shifts in the usage of this term, we will excavate some of the tacit assumptions and connotations that it still carries today but that usually go without saying.

Our approach is inspired in part by the English cultural-materialist critic, Raymond Williams (1976). Following Williams and others, we assume that the terms that are used to describe social life are also active forces shaping it.[2] A crucial element of politics, then, is the struggle to define social reality and to interpret people's inchoate aspirations and needs (Fraser 1990). Particular words and expressions often become focal in such struggles, functioning as keywords, sites at which the meaning of social experience is negotiated and contested (Williams 1976). Keywords typically carry unspoken assumptions and connotations that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate—in part by constituting a body of *doxa,* or taken-for-granted commonsense belief that escapes critical scrutiny (Bourdieu 1977).

We seek to dispel the *doxa* surrounding current U.S. discussions of dependency by reconstructing that term's genealogy. Modifying an approach associated with Michel Foucault (1984), we will excavate broad historical shifts in linguistic usage that can rarely be attributed to specific agents. We do *not* present a causal analysis. Rather, by contrasting present meanings of dependency with past meanings, we aim to defamil-

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[1] Another part of the story, of course, concerns the word *welfare*. In this article, our focus is U.S. political culture and thus North American English usage. Our findings should be of more general interest, however, as some other languages have similar meanings embedded in analogous words. In this article we have of necessity used British sources for the early stages of our genealogy, which spans the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We assume that these meanings of *dependency* were brought to "the New World" and were formative for the early stages of U.S. political culture.

[2] This stress on the performative, as opposed to the representational, dimension of language is a hallmark of the pragmatics tradition in the philosophy of language. It has been fruitfully adapted for sociocultural analysis by several writers in addition to Williams. See, e.g., Bourdieu 1977, 1990a, 1990b; Scott 1988; Fraser 1989, 1990, 1992; and Butler 1990.

iarize taken-for-granted beliefs in order to render them susceptible to critique and to illuminate present-day conflicts.

Our approach differs from Foucault's, however, in two crucial respects: we seek to contextualize discursive shifts in relation to broad institutional and social-structural shifts, and we welcome normative political reflection.[3] Our article is a collaboration between a philosopher and a historian. We combine historical analysis of linguistic and social-structural changes with conceptual analysis of the discursive construction of social problems, and we leaven the mix with a feminist interest in envisioning emancipatory alternatives.

In what follows, then, we provide a genealogy of *dependency*. We sketch the history of this term and explicate the assumptions and connotations it carries today in U.S. debates about welfare—especially assumptions about human nature, gender roles, the causes of poverty, the nature of citizenship, the sources of entitlement, and what counts as work and as a contribution to society. We contend that unreflective uses of this keyword serve to enshrine certain interpretations of social life as authoritative and to delegitimate or obscure others, generally to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinate ones. All told, we provide a critique of ideology in the form of a critical political semantics.

Dependency, we argue, is an ideological term. In current U.S. policy discourse it usually refers to the condition of poor women with children who maintain their families with neither a male breadwinner nor an adequate wage and who rely for economic support on a stingy and politically unpopular government program called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Participation in this highly stigmatized program may be demoralizing in many cases, even though it may enable women to leave abusive or unsatisfying relationships without having to give up their children. Still, naming the problems of poor, solo-mother families as *dependency* tends to make them appear to be individual problems, as much moral or psychological as economic. The term carries strong emotive and visual associations and a powerful pejorative charge. In current debates, the expression *welfare dependency* evokes the image of "the welfare mother," often figured as a young, unmarried black woman (perhaps even a teenager) of uncontrolled sexuality. The power of this image is overdetermined, we contend, since it condenses multiple and often contradictory meanings of dependency. Only by disaggregating those different strands, by unpacking the tacit assumptions and evaluative

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[3] The critical literature on Foucault is enormous. For feminist assessments, see Butler 1987; Weedon 1987; the essays in Diamond and Quinby 1988; Alcoff 1990; and Hartsock 1990. For balanced discussions of Foucault's strengths and weaknesses, see Fraser 1989; McCarthy 1991; and Honneth 1992.

connotations that underlie them, can we begin to understand, and to dislodge, the force of the stereotype.

Registers of meaning

In its root meaning, the verb *to depend* refers to a physical relationship in which one thing hangs from another. The more abstract meanings— social, economic, psychological, and political—were originally meta- phorical. In current usage, we find four registers in which the meanings of dependency reverberate. The first is an economic register, in which one depends on some other person(s) or institution for subsistence. In a sec- ond register, the term denotes a sociolegal status, the lack of a separate legal or public identity, as in the status of married women created by coverture. The third register is political: here dependency means subjec- tion to an external ruling power and may be predicated of a colony or of a subject caste of noncitizen residents. The fourth register we call the moral/psychological; dependency in this sense is an individual character trait like lack of will power or excessive emotional neediness.

To be sure, not every use of *dependency* fits neatly into one and only one of these registers. Still, by distinguishing them analytically we present a matrix on which to plot the historical adventures of the term. In what follows, we shall trace the shift from a patriarchal preindustrial usage in which women, however subordinate, shared a condition of dependency with many men to a modern, industrial, male-supremacist usage that constructed a specifically feminine sense of dependency. That usage is now giving way, we contend, to a postindustrial usage in which growing numbers of relatively prosperous women claim the same kind of inde- pendence that men do while a more stigmatized but still feminized sense of dependency attaches to groups considered deviant and superfluous. Not just gender but also racializing practices play a major role in these shifts, as do changes in the organization and meaning of labor.

Preindustrial *dependency*

In preindustrial English usage, the most common meaning of *depen- dency* was subordination. The economic, sociolegal, and political regis- ters were relatively undifferentiated, reflecting the fusion of various forms of hierarchy in state and society, and the moral/psychological use of the term barely existed. The earliest social definition of the verb *to depend* (*on*) in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) is "to be connected with- in a relation of subordination." A *dependent,* from at least 1588, was one "who depends on another for support, position, etc.; a retainer, atten- dant, subordinate, servant." A *dependency* was either a retinue or body

of servants or a foreign territorial possession or colony. This family of terms applied widely in a hierarchical social context in which nearly everyone was subordinate to someone else but did not incur individual stigma thereby (Gundersen 1987).

We can appreciate just how common dependency was in preindustrial society by examining its opposite. The term *independence* at first applied primarily to aggregate entities, not to individuals; thus in the seventeenth century a nation or a church congregation could be independent. By the eighteenth century, however, an individual could be said to have an *independency,* meaning an ownership of property, a fortune that made it possible to live without laboring. (This sense of the term, which we would today call economic, survives in our expressions *to be independently wealthy* and *a person of independent means.*) To be dependent, in contrast, was to gain one's livelihood by working for someone else. This of course was the condition of most people, of wage laborers as well as serfs and slaves, of most men as well as most women.[4]

Dependency, therefore, was a normal, as opposed to a deviant, condition, a social relation, as opposed to an individual, trait. Thus, it did not carry any moral opprobrium. Neither English nor U.S. dictionaries report any pejorative uses of the term before the early twentieth century. In fact, some leading preindustrial definitions were explicitly positive, implying trusting, relying on, counting on another, the predecessors of today's *dependable.*

Nevertheless, *dependency* did mean status inferiority and legal coverture, being a part of a unit headed by someone else who had legal standing. In a world of status hierarchies dominated by great landowners and their retainers, all members of a household other than its "head" were dependents, as were free or servile peasants on an estate. They were, as Peter Laslett put it, "caught up, so to speak, 'subsumed' . . . into the personalities of their fathers and masters" (1971, 21).

Dependency also had what we would today call political consequences. While the term did not mean precisely *unfree,* its context was a social order in which subjection, not citizenship, was the norm. *Independence* connoted unusual privilege and superiority, as in freedom from labor. Thus, throughout most of the European development of representative government, independence in the sense of property ownership was a prerequisite for political rights. When dependents began to claim rights and liberty, they perforce became revolutionaries.

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[4] In preindustrial society, moreover, the reverse dependence of the master upon his men was widely recognized. The historian Christopher Hill evoked that understanding when he characterized the "essence" of feudal society as "the bond of loyalty and dependence between lord and man" (1972, 32). Here *dependence* means interdependence.

Dependency was not then applied uniquely to characterize the relation of a wife to her husband. Women's dependency, like children's, meant being on a lower rung in a long social ladder; their husbands and fathers were above them but below others. For the agrarian majority, moreover, there was no implication of unilateral economic dependency, because women's and children's labor was recognized as essential to the family economy; the women were economic dependents only in the sense that the men of their class were as well. In general, women's dependency in preindustrial society was less gender-specific than it later became; it was similar in kind to that of subordinate men, only multiplied. But so too were the lives of children, servants, and the elderly overlaid with multiple layers of dependency.

In practice, of course, these preindustrial arrangements did not always provide satisfactorily for the poor. In the fourteenth century new, stronger states began to limit the freedom of movement of the destitute and to codify older informal distinctions between those worthy and unworthy of assistance. When the English Poor Law of 1601 confirmed this latter distinction, it was already shameful to ask for public help. But the culture neither disapproved of dependency nor valorized individual independence. Rather, the aim of the statutes was to return the mobile, uprooted, and excessively "independent" poor to their local parishes or communities and, hence, to enforce their traditional dependencies.

Nevertheless, dependency was not universally approved or uncontested. It was subject, rather, to principled challenges from at least the seventeenth century on, when liberal-individualist political arguments became common. The terms *dependence* and *independence* often figured centrally in political debates in this period, as they did, for example, in the Putney Debates of the English Civil War. Sometimes they even became key signifiers of social crisis, as in the seventeenth century English controversy about "out-of-doors" servants, hired help who did not reside in the homes of their masters and who were not bound by indentures or similar legal understandings. In the discourse of the time, the anomalous "independence" of these men served as a general figure for social disorder, a lightning rod focusing diffuse cultural anxieties—much as the anomalous "dependence" of "welfare mothers" does today.

Industrial *dependency:* The worker and his negatives

With the rise of industrial capitalism, the semantic geography of dependency shifted significantly. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *independence,* not *dependence,* figured centrally in political and economic discourse; and its meanings were radically democratized. But if we read the discourse about independence carefully, we see the shadow of a powerful anxiety about dependency.

What in preindustrial society had been a normal and unstigmatized condition became deviant and stigmatized. More precisely, certain dependencies became shameful while others were deemed natural and proper. In particular, as eighteenth and nineteenth century political culture intensified gender difference, new, specifically gendered senses of dependency appeared—states considered proper for women but degrading for men. Likewise, emergent racial constructions made some forms of dependency appropriate for the "dark races" but intolerable for "whites." Such differentiated valuations became possible as the term's preindustrial unity fractured. No longer designating only generalized subordination, *dependency* in the industrial era could be sociolegal or political or economic. With these distinctions came another major semantic shift: now *dependency* need not always refer to a social relation; it could also designate an individual character trait. Thus, the moral/psychological register was born.

These redefinitions were greatly influenced by Radical Protestantism. It elaborated a new positive image of individual independence and a critique of sociolegal and political dependency. In the Catholic and the early Protestant traditions, dependence on a master had been modeled on dependence on God. In contrast, to the radicals of the English Civil War, or to Puritans, Quakers, and Congregationalists in the United States, rejecting dependence on a master was akin to rejecting blasphemy and false gods (Hill 1961). From this perspective, status hierarchies no longer appeared natural or just. Political subjection and sociolegal subsumption were offenses against human dignity, defensible only under special conditions, if supportable at all. These beliefs informed a variety of radical movements throughout the industrial era, including abolition, feminism, and labor organizing, with substantial successes. In the nineteenth century these movements abolished slavery and some of the legal disabilities of women. More thoroughgoing victories were won by white male workers who, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, threw off their sociolegal and political dependency and won civil and electoral rights. In the age of democratic revolutions, the developing new concept of citizenship rested on independence; dependency was deemed antithetical to citizenship.

Changes in the civil and political landscape of dependence and independence were accompanied by even more dramatic changes in the economic register. When white workingmen demanded civil and electoral rights, they claimed to be independent. This entailed reinterpreting the meaning of wage labor so as to divest it of the association with dependency. That in turn required a shift in focus—from the experience or means of labor (e.g., ownership of tools or land, control of skills, and the organization of work) to its remuneration and how that was spent. Radical workingmen, who had earlier rejected wage labor as "wage slavery,"

claimed a new form of manly independence within it. Their collective pride drew on another aspect of Protestantism, its work ethic, that valorized discipline and labor. Workers sought to reclaim these values within the victorious wage labor system; many of them—women as well as men—created and exercised a new kind of independence in their militance and boldness toward employers. Through their struggles, economic independence came eventually to encompass the ideal of earning a family wage, a wage sufficient to maintain a household and to support a dependent wife and children. Thus, workingmen expanded the meaning of economic independence to include a form of wage labor in addition to property ownership and self-employment.[5]

This shift in the meaning of independence also transformed the meanings of dependency. As wage labor became increasingly normative—and increasingly definitive of independence—it was precisely those excluded from wage labor who appeared to personify dependency. In the new industrial semantics, there emerged three principal icons of dependency, all effectively negatives of the dominant image of "the worker" and each embodying a different aspect of nonindependence.

The first icon of industrial dependency was "the pauper," who lived not on wages but on poor relief.[6] In the strenuous new culture of emergent capitalism, the figure of the pauper was like a bad double of the upstanding workingman, threatening the latter should he lag. The image of the pauper was elaborated largely in an emerging new register of dependency discourse—the moral/psychological register. Paupers were not simply poor but degraded, their character corrupted and their will sapped through reliance on charity. To be sure, the moral/psychological condition of pauperism was related to the economic condition of poverty, but the relationship was not simple, but complex. While nineteenth-century charity experts acknowledged that poverty could contribute to pauperization, they also held that character defects could cause poverty (Gordon 1992). Toward the end of the century, as hereditarian (eugenic) thought caught on, the pauper's character defects were given a basis in

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[5] One might say that this redefinition foregrounded wage labor *as* a new form of property, namely, property in one's own labor power. This conception was premised on what Macpherson 1962 called "possessive individualism," the assumption of an individual's property in his [*sic*] own person. Leading to the construction of wages as an entitlement, this approach was overwhelmingly male. Allen Hunter (personal communication, 1992) describes it as a loss of systemic critique, a sense of independence gained by narrowing the focus to the individual worker and leaving behind aspirations for collective independence from capital.

[6] In the sixteenth century the term *pauper* had meant simply a poor person and, in law, one who was allowed to sue or defend in a court without paying costs (*OED*). Two centuries later, it took on a more restricted definition, denoting a new class of persons who subsisted on poor relief instead of wages and who were held to be deviant and blameworthy.

biology. The pauper's dependency was figured as unlike the serf's in that it was unilateral, not reciprocal. To be a pauper was not to be subordinate within a system of productive labor; it was to be outside such a system altogether.

A second icon of industrial dependency was embodied alternately in the figures of "the colonial native" and "the slave." They, of course, were very much inside the economic system, their labor often fundamental to the development of capital and industry. Whereas the pauper represented the characterological distillation of economic dependency, natives and slaves personified political subjection.[7] Their images as "savage," "child-like," and "submissive" became salient as the old, territorial sense of dependency as a colony became intertwined with a new, racist discourse developed to justify colonialism and slavery.[8] There emerged a drift from an older sense of dependency as a relation of subjection imposed by an imperial power on an indigenous population to a newer sense of dependency as an inherent property or character trait of the people so subjected. In earlier usage, colonials were dependent because they had been conquered; in nineteenth-century imperialist culture, they were conquered because they were dependent. In this new conception, it was the intrinsic, essential dependency of natives and slaves that justified their colonization and enslavement.

The dependency of the native and the slave, like that of the pauper, was elaborated largely in the moral/psychological register. The character traits adduced to justify imperialism and slavery, however, arose less from individual temperament than from the supposed nature of human groups. Racialist thought was the linchpin for this reasoning. By licensing a view of "the Negro" as fundamentally *other,* it provided the extraordinary justificatory power required to rationalize subjection at a time when liberty and equality were being proclaimed inalienable "rights of man"—for example, in that classic rejection of colonial status, the United States' "Declaration of Independence." Thus racism helped transform dependency as political subjection into dependency as psychology and forged enduring links between the discourse of dependency and racial oppression.

[7] Actually, there are many variants within the family of images that personify subjection in the industrial era. Among these are related but not identical stereotypes of the Russian serf, the Caribbean slave, the slave in the United States, and the American Indian. Moreover, there are distinct male and female stereotypes within each of those categories. We simplify here in order to highlight the features that are common to all these images, notably the idea of natural subjection rooted in race. We focus especially on stereotypes that portray African-Americans as personifications of dependency because of their historic importance and contemporary resonance in the U.S. language of social welfare.

[8] The evolution of the term *native* neatly encapsulates this process. Its original meaning in English, dating from about 1450, was tied to dependency: "one born in bondage; a born thrall," but without racial meaning. Two centuries later it carried the additional meaning of colored or black (*OED*).

Like the pauper, the native and the slave were excluded from wage labor and thus were negatives of the image of the worker. They shared that characteristic, if little else, with the third major icon of dependency in the industrial era: the newly invented figure of "the housewife." As we saw, the independence of the white workingman presupposed the ideal of the family wage, a wage sufficient to maintain a household and to support a nonemployed wife and children. Thus, for wage labor to create (white male) independence, (white) female economic dependence was required. Women were thus transformed "from partners to parasites" (Land 1980, 57; Boydston 1991). But this transformation was by no means universal. In the United States, for example, the family wage ideal held greater sway among whites than among blacks and was at variance with actual practice for all of the poor and the working class. Moreover, both employed and nonemployed wives continued to perform work once considered crucial to a family economy. Since few husbands actually were able to support a family singlehandedly, most families continued to depend on the labor of women and children. Nevertheless, the family wage norm commanded great loyalty in the United States, partly because it was used by the organized working class as an argument for higher wages (Hughes 1925; Breckinridge 1928; Pruette 1934; Gordon 1992).

Several different registers of dependency converged in the figure of the housewife. This figure melded woman's traditional sociolegal and political dependency with her more recent economic dependency in the industrial order. Continuing from preindustrial usage was the assumption that fathers headed households and that other household members were represented by them, as codified in the legal doctrine of coverture. The sociolegal and political dependency of wives enforced their new economic dependency, since under coverture even married women who were wage workers could not legally control their wages. But the connotations of female dependency were altered. Although erstwhile dependent white men gained political rights, most white women remained legally and politically dependent. The result was to feminize—and stigmatize—sociolegal and political dependency, making coverture appear increasingly obnoxious and stimulating agitation for the statutes and court decisions that eventually dismantled it.

Together, then, a series of new personifications of dependency combined to constitute the underside of the workingman's independence. Henceforth, those who aspired to full membership in society would have to distinguish themselves from the pauper, the native, the slave, and the housewife in order to construct their independence. In a social order in which wage labor was becoming hegemonic, it was possible to encapsulate all these distinctions simultaneously in the ideal of the family wage. On the one hand, and most overtly, the ideal of the family wage premised

the white workingman's independence on his wife's subordination and economic dependence. But on the other hand, it simultaneously contrasted with counterimages of dependent men—first with degraded male paupers on poor relief and later with racist stereotypes of Negro men unable to dominate Negro women. The family wage, therefore, was a vehicle for elaborating meanings of dependence and independence that were deeply inflected by gender, race, and class.

In this new industrial semantics, white workingmen appeared to be economically independent, but their independence was largely illusory and ideological. Since few actually earned enough to support a family singlehandedly, most depended in fact—if not in word—on their wives' and children's contributions. Equally important, the language of wage labor in capitalism denied workers' dependence on their employers, thereby veiling their status as subordinates in a unit headed by someone else. Thus, hierarchy that had been relatively explicit and visible in the peasant-landlord relation was mystified in the relationship of factory operative to factory owner. There was a sense, then, in which the economic dependency of the white workingman was spirited away through linguistic sleight of hand—somewhat like reducing the number of poor people by lowering the official poverty demarcating line.

By definition, then, economic inequality among white men no longer created dependency. But noneconomic hierarchy among white men was considered unacceptable in the United States. Thus, *dependency* was redefined to refer exclusively to those noneconomic relations of subordination deemed suitable only for people of color and for white women. The result was to differentiate dimensions of dependency that had been fused in preindustrial usage. Whereas all relations of subordination had previously counted as dependency relations, now capital-labor relations were exempted. Sociolegal and political hierarchy appeared to diverge from economic hierarchy, and only the former seemed incompatible with hegemonic views of society. It seemed to follow, moreover, that were sociolegal dependency and political dependency ever to be formally abolished, no social-structural dependency would remain. Any dependency that did persist could only be moral or psychological.

The rise of American *welfare dependency:* 1890–1945

Informed by these general features of industrial-era semantics, a distinctive welfare-related use of *dependency* developed in the United States. Originating in the late nineteenth-century discourse of pauperism, modified in the Progressive Era, and stabilized in the period of the New Deal, this use of the term was fundamentally ambiguous, slipping easily, and repeatedly, from an economic meaning to a moral/psychological meaning.

The United States was especially hospitable to elaborating dependency as a defect of individual character. Because the country lacked a strong legacy of feudalism or aristocracy and thus a strong popular sense of reciprocal obligations between lord and man, the older, preindustrial meanings of dependency—as an ordinary, majority condition—were weak and the pejorative meanings were stronger. In the colonial period, dependency was seen mainly as a voluntary condition, as in indentured servitude. But the American Revolution so valorized independence that it stripped dependency of its voluntarism, emphasized its powerlessness, and imbued it with stigma. One result was to change the meaning of women's social and legal dependency, making it distinctly inferior (Gundersen 1987).

The long American love affair with independence was politically double-edged. On the one hand, it helped nurture powerful labor and women's movements. On the other hand, the absence of a hierarchical social tradition in which subordination was understood to be structural, not characterological, facilitated hostility to public support for the poor. Also influential was the very nature of the American state, weak and decentralized in comparison to European states throughout the nineteenth century. All told, the United States proved fertile soil for the moral/psychological discourse of dependency.

As discussed earlier, the most general definition of economic dependency in this era was simply non-wage-earning. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, that definition had divided into two: a "good," household dependency, predicated of children and wives, and an increasingly "bad" (or at least dubious) charity dependency, predicated of recipients of relief. Both senses had as their reference point the ideal of the family wage, and both were eventually incorporated into the discourse of the national state. The good, household sense was elaborated via the census (Folbre 1991) and by the Internal Revenue Service, which installed the category of dependent as the norm for wives. The already problematic charity sense became even more pejorative with the development of public assistance. The old distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor intensified in the late nineteenth century's Gilded Age. Theoretically, the undeserving should not be receiving aid, but constant vigilance was required to ensure they did not slip in, disguising themselves as deserving. Dependence on assistance became increasingly stigmatized, and it was harder and harder to rely on relief without being branded a pauper.

Ironically, reformers in the 1890s introduced the word *dependent* into relief discourse as a substitute for *pauper* precisely in order to destigmatize the receipt of help. They first applied the word to children, the

paradigmatic "innocent" victims of poverty.[9] Then, in the early twentieth century, Progressive-era reformers began to apply the term to adults, again to rid them of stigma. Only after World War II did *dependent* become the hegemonic word for a recipient of aid.[10] By then, however, the term's pejorative connotations were fixed.

The attempt to get rid of stigma by replacing *pauperism* with *dependency* failed. Talk about economic dependency repeatedly slid into condemnation of moral/psychological dependency. Even during the Depression of the 1930s, experts worried that receipt of relief would create "habits of dependence" or, as one charity leader put it, "a belligerent dependency, an attitude of having a right and title to relief" (Brandt 1932, 23–24; Gibbons 1933; Vaile 1934, 26). Because the hard times lasted so long and created so many newly poor people, there was a slight improvement in the status of recipients of aid. But attacks on "chiseling" and "corruption" continued to embarrass those receiving assistance, and many of the neediest welfare beneficiaries accepted public aid only after much hesitation and with great shame, so strong was the stigma of dependency (Bakke 1940a, 1940b).

Most important, the New Deal intensified the dishonor of receiving help by consolidating a two-track welfare system. First-track programs like unemployment and old age insurance offered aid as an entitlement, without stigma or supervision and hence without dependency. Such programs were constructed to create the misleading appearance that beneficiaries merely got back what they put in. They constructed an honorable status for recipients and are not called welfare even today. Intended at least partially to replace the white workingman's family wage, first-track programs excluded most minorities and white women. In contrast, second-track public assistance programs, among which Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), later Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), became the biggest and most well-known, continued the private charity tradition of searching out the deserving few among the many chiselers. Funded from general tax revenues instead of from earmarked wage deductions, these programs created the appearance that claimants were

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[9] For example, Warner 1894–1930 uses *dependent* only for children. The same is true of Abbott and Breckinridge (1921, 7) and National Conference of Charities and Correction (1890s–1920s). This usage produced some curious effects because of its intersection with the dependency produced by the normative family. For example, charity experts debated the propriety of "keeping dependent children in their own homes." The children in question were considered dependent because their parent(s) could not support them; yet other children were deemed dependent precisely because their parents did support them.

[10] Studies of welfare done in the 1940s still used the word *dependents* only in the sense of those supported by family heads; see, e.g., Brown 1940; Howard 1943; Bruno 1948.

getting something for nothing (Fraser and Gordon 1992). They established entirely different conditions for receiving aid: means-testing; morals-testing; moral and household supervision; home visits; extremely low stipends—in short, all the conditions associated with welfare dependency today (Fraser 1987; Gordon 1990; Nelson 1990).[11]

The racial and sexual exclusions of the first-track programs were not accidental. They were designed to win the support of Southern legislators who wanted to keep blacks dependent in another sense, namely, on low wages or sharecropping (Quadagno 1988). Equally deliberate was the construction of the differential in legitimacy between the two tracks of the welfare system. The Social Security Board propagandized for Social Security Old Age Insurance (the program today called just "Social Security") precisely because, at first, it did not seem more earned or more dignified than public assistance. To make Social Security more acceptable, the board worked to stigmatize public assistance, even pressuring states to keep stipends low (Cates 1983).

Most Americans today still distinguish between "welfare" and "nonwelfare" forms of public provision and see only the former as creating dependency. The assumptions underlying these distinctions, however, had to be constructed politically. Old people became privileged (nonwelfare) recipients only through decades of militant organization and lobbying. All programs of public provision, whether they are called welfare or not, shore up some dependencies and discourage others. Social Security subverted adults' sense of responsibility for their parents, for example. Public assistance programs, by contrast, aimed to buttress the dependence of the poor on low-wage labor, of wives on husbands, of children on their parents.

The conditions of second-track assistance made recipients view their dependence on public assistance as inferior to the supposed independence of wage labor (Milwaukee County Welfare Rights Organization 1972; West 1981; Pope 1989; 73, 144). Wage labor, meanwhile, had become so naturalized that its own inherent supervision could be overlooked; thus one ADC recipient complained, "Welfare life is a difficult experience. . . . When you work, you don't have to report to anyone" (Barnes 1987, vi). Yet the designers of ADC did not initially intend to drive white solo mothers into paid employment. Rather, they wanted to protect the norm of the family wage by making dependence on a male breadwinner con-

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[11] Starting in the 1960s increasing numbers of black women were able to claim AFDC, but prior to that they were largely excluded. At first, the language of the New Deal followed the precedent of earlier programs in applying the term *dependent* to children. De facto, however, the recipients of ADC were virtually exclusively solo mothers. Between the 1940s and 1960s the term's reference gradually shifted from the children to their mothers.

tinue to seem preferable to dependence on the state (Gordon 1992). Aid to Dependent Children occupied the strategic semantic space where the good, household sense of dependency and the bad, relief sense of dependency intersected. It enforced at once the positive connotations of the first and the negative connotations of the second.

Thus, the poor solo mother was enshrined as the quintessential *welfare dependent*.[12] That designation has thus become significant not only for what it includes but also for what it excludes and occludes. Although it appears to mean relying on the government for economic support, not all recipients of public funds are equally considered dependent. Hardly anyone today calls recipients of Social Security retirement insurance *dependents*. Similarly, persons receiving unemployment insurance, agricultural loans, and home mortgage assistance are excluded from that categorization, as indeed are defense contractors and the beneficiaries of corporate bailouts and regressive taxation.

Postindustrial society and the disappearance of "good" dependency

With the transition to a postindustrial phase of capitalism, the semantic map of dependency is being redrawn yet again. Whereas industrial usage had cast some forms of dependency as natural and proper, postindustrial usage figures all forms as avoidable and blameworthy. No longer moderated by any positive countercurrents, the term's pejorative connotations are being strengthened. Industrial usage had recognized some forms of dependency to be rooted in relations of subordination; postindustrial usage, in contrast, focuses more intensely on the traits of individuals. The moral/psychological register is expanding, therefore, and its qualitative character is changing, with new psychological and therapeutic idioms displacing the explicitly racist and misogynous idioms of the industrial era. Yet dependency nonetheless remains feminized and racialized; the new psychological meanings have strong feminine associations, while currents once associated with the native and the slave are increasingly inflecting the discourse about welfare.

One major influence here is the formal abolition of much of the legal and political dependency that was endemic to industrial society. Housewives, paupers, natives, and the descendants of slaves are no longer formally excluded from most civil and political rights; neither their subsumption nor their subjection is viewed as legitimate. Thus, major forms of dependency deemed proper in industrial usage are now considered

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[12] Men on "general relief" are sometimes also included in that designation; their treatment by the welfare system is usually as bad or worse.

objectionable, and postindustrial uses of the term carry a stronger nega-
tive charge.

A second major shift in the geography of postindustrial dependency is
affecting the economic register. This is the decentering of the ideal of the
family wage, which had been the gravitational center of industrial usage.
The relative deindustrialization of the United States is restructuring the
political economy, making the single-earner family far less viable. The
loss of higher paid "male" manufacturing jobs and the massive entry of
women into low-wage service work is meanwhile altering the gender
composition of employment (Smith 1984). At the same time, divorce is
common and, thanks in large part to the feminist and gay and lesbian
liberation movements, changing gender norms are helping to proliferate
new family forms, making the male breadwinner/female homemaker
model less attractive to many (Stacey 1987, 1990; Weston 1991). Thus,
the family wage ideal is no longer hegemonic but competes with alter-
native gender norms, family forms, and economic arrangements. It no
longer goes without saying that a woman should rely on a man for
economic support, nor that mothers should not also be "workers." Thus,
another major form of dependency that was positively inflected in indus-
trial semantics has become contested if not simply negative.

The combined result of these developments is to increase the stigma of
dependency. With all legal and political dependency now illegitimate, and
with wives' economic dependency now contested, there is no longer any
self-evidently good adult dependency in postindustrial society. Rather, all
dependency is suspect, and independence is enjoined upon everyone. In-
dependence, however, remains identified with wage labor. That identifi-
cation seems even to increase in a context where there is no longer any
"good" adult personification of dependency who can be counterposed to
"the worker." In this context, the worker tends to become the universal
social subject: everyone is expected to "work" and to be "self-supporting."
Any adult not perceived as a worker shoulders a heavier burden of self-
justification. Thus, a norm previously restricted to white workingmen
applied increasingly to everyone. Yet this norm still carries a racial and
gender subtext, as it supposes that the worker has access to a job paying
a decent wage and is not also a primary parent.

If one result of these developments is an increase in dependency's
negative connotations, another is its increased individualization. As we saw,
talk of dependency as a character trait of individuals was already wide-
spread in the industrial period, diminishing the preindustrial emphasis on
relations of subordination. The importance of individualized dependency
tends to be heightened, however, now that sociolegal and political de-
pendency are officially ended. Absent coverture and Jim Crow, it has
become possible to claim that equality of opportunity exists and that

individual merit determines outcomes. As we saw, the groundwork for that view was laid by industrial usage, which redefined dependency so as to exclude capitalist relations of subordination. With capitalist economic dependency already abolished by definition, and with legal and political dependency now abolished by law, postindustrial society appears to some conservatives and liberals to have eliminated every social-structural basis of dependency. Whatever dependency remains, therefore, can be interpreted as the fault of individuals. That interpretation does not go uncontested, to be sure, but the burden of argument has shifted. Now those who would deny that the fault lies in themselves must swim upstream against the prevailing semantic currents. Postindustrial dependency, thus, is increasingly individualized.

Welfare dependency as postindustrial pathology

The worsening connotations of *welfare dependency* have been nourished by several streams from outside the field of welfare. New postindustrial medical and psychological discourses have associated dependency with pathology. In articles with titles such as "Pharmacist Involvement in a Chemical-Dependency Rehabilitation Program" (Haynes 1988), social scientists began in the 1980s to write about *chemical, alcohol,* and *drug dependency,* all euphemisms for addiction. Because welfare claimants are often—falsely—assumed to be addicts, the pathological connotations of *drug dependency* tend also to infect *welfare dependency,* increasing stigmatization.

A second important postindustrial current is the rise of new psychological meanings of dependency with very strong feminine associations. In the 1950s, social workers influenced by psychiatry began to diagnose dependence as a form of immaturity common among women, particularly among solo mothers (who were often, of course, welfare claimants). "Dependent, irresponsible, and unstable, they respond like small children to the immediate moment," declared the author of a 1954 discussion of out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Young 1954, 87). The problem was that women were supposed to be just dependent enough, and it was easy to tip over into excess in either direction. The norm, moreover, was racially marked, as white women were usually portrayed as erring on the side of excessive dependence, while black women were typically charged with excessive independence.

Psychologized dependency became the target of some of the earliest second-wave feminism. Betty Friedan's 1963 classic, *The Feminine Mystique,* provided a phenomenological account of the housewife's psychological dependency and drew from it a political critique of her social subordination. More recently, however, a burgeoning cultural-feminist,

postfeminist, and antifeminist self-help and pop-psychology literature has obfuscated the link between the psychological and the political. In Colette Dowling's 1981 book, *The Cinderella Complex,* women's dependency was hypostatized as a depth-psychological gender structure: "women's hidden fear of independence" or the "wish to be saved." The late 1980s saw a spate of books about "codependency," a supposedly prototypically female syndrome of supporting or "enabling" the dependency of someone else. In a metaphor that reflects the drug hysteria of the period, dependency here, too, is an addiction. Apparently, even if a woman manages herself to escape her gender's predilection to dependency, she is still liable to incur the blame for facilitating the dependency of her husband or children. This completes the vicious circle: the increased stigmatizing of dependency in the culture at large has also deepened contempt for those who care for dependents, reinforcing the traditionally low status of the female helping professions, such as nursing and social work (Sapiro 1990).

The 1980s saw a cultural panic about dependency. In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association codified "Dependent Personality Disorder" (DPD) as an official psychopathology. According to the 1987 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III-R), "The essential feature of this disorder is a pervasive pattern of dependent and submissive behavior beginning by early childhood. . . . People with this disorder are unable to make everyday decisions without an excessive amount of advice and reassurance from others, and will even allow others to make most of their important decisions. . . . The disorder is apparently common and is diagnosed more frequently in females" (American Psychiatric Association 1987, 353–54).

The codification of DPD as an official psychopathology represents a new stage in the history of the moral/psychological register. Here the social relations of dependency disappear entirely into the personality of the dependent. Overt moralism also disappears in the apparently neutral, scientific, medicalized formulation. Thus, although the defining traits of the dependent personality match point for point the traits traditionally ascribed to housewives, paupers, natives, and slaves, all links to subordination have vanished. The only remaining trace of those themes is the flat, categorical, and uninterpreted observation that DPD is "diagnosed more frequently in females."

If psychological discourse has further feminized and individualized dependency, other postindustrial developments have further racialized it. The increased stigmatization of welfare dependency followed a general increase in public provision in the United States, the removal of some discriminatory practices that had previously excluded minority women from participation in AFDC, especially in the South, and the transfer of

many white women to first-track programs as social-insurance coverage expanded. By the 1970s the figure of the black solo mother had come to epitomize welfare dependency. As a result, the new discourse about welfare draws on older symbolic currents that linked dependency with racist ideologies.

The ground was laid by a long, somewhat contradictory stream of discourse about "the black family," in which African-American gender and kinship relations were measured against white middle-class norms and deemed pathological. One supposedly pathological element was "the excessive independence" of black women, an ideologically distorted allusion to long traditions of wage work, educational achievement, and community activism. The 1960s and 1970s discourse about poverty recapitulated traditions of misogyny toward African-American women; in Daniel Moynihan's diagnosis, for example, "matriarchal" families had "emasculated" black men and created a "culture of poverty" based on a "tangle of [family] pathology" (Rainwater and Yancey 1967). This discourse placed black AFDC claimants in a double-bind: they were pathologically independent with respect to men and pathologically dependent with respect to government.

By the 1980s, however, the racial imagery of dependency had shifted. The black welfare mother that haunted the white imagination ceased to be the powerful matriarch. Now the preeminent stereotype is the unmarried teenage mother caught in the "welfare trap" and rendered dronelike and passive. This new icon of welfare dependency is younger and weaker than the matriarch. She is often evoked in the phrase *children having children*, which can express feminist sympathy or antifeminist contempt, black appeals for parental control or white-racist eugenic anxieties.

Many of these postindustrial discourses coalesced in early 1990s. Then–Vice President Dan Quayle brought together the pathologized, feminized, and racialized currents in his comment on the May 1992 Los Angeles riot: "Our inner cities are filled with children having children . . . with people who are dependent on drugs and on the narcotic of welfare" (Quayle 1992).

Thus postindustrial culture has called up a new personification of dependency: the black, unmarried, teenaged, welfare-dependent mother. This image has usurped the symbolic space previously occupied by the housewife, the pauper, the native, and the slave, while absorbing and condensing their connotations. Black, female, a pauper, not a worker, a housewife and mother, yet practically a child herself—the new stereotype partakes of virtually every quality that has been coded historically as antithetical to independence. Condensing multiple, often contradictory meanings of dependency, it is a powerful ideological trope that simultaneously organizes diffuse cultural anxieties and dissimulates their social bases.

Postindustrial policy and the politics of dependency

Despite the worsening economic outlook for many Americans in the last few decades, there has been no cultural revaluation of welfare. Families working harder for less often resent those who appear to them not to be working at all. 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. Instead, the honorific term *independent* remains firmly centered on wage labor, no matter how impoverished the worker. Welfare dependency, in contrast, has been inflated into a behavioral syndrome and made to seem more contemptible.

Contemporary policy discourse about welfare dependency is thoroughly inflected by these assumptions. It divides into two major streams. The first continues the rhetoric of pauperism and the culture of poverty. It is used in both conservative and liberal, victim-blaming or non-victim-blaming ways, depending on the causal structure of the argument. The contention is that poor, dependent people have something more than lack of money wrong with them. The flaws can be located in biology, psychology, upbringing, neighborhood influence; they can be cast as cause or as effect of poverty, or even as both simultaneously. Conservatives, such as George Gilder (1981) and Lawrence Mead (1986), argue that welfare causes moral/psychological dependency. Liberals, such as William Julius Wilson (1987) and Christopher Jencks (1992), blame social and economic influences but often agree that claimants' culture and behavior are problematic.

A second stream of thought begins from neoclassical economic premises. It assumes a "rational man" facing choices in which welfare and work are both options. For these policy analysts, the moral/psychological meanings of dependency are present but uninterrogated, assumed to be undesirable. Liberals of this school, such as many of the social scientists associated with the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, grant that welfare inevitably has some bad, dependency-creating effects but claim that these are outweighed by other, good effects like improved conditions for children, increased societal stability, and relief of suffering. Conservatives of this school, such as Charles Murray (1984), disagree. The two camps argue above all about the question of incentives. Do AFDC stipends encourage women to have more out-of-wedlock children? Do they discourage them from accepting jobs? Can reducing or withholding stipends serve as a stick to encourage recipients to stay in school, keep their children in school, get married?

Certainly, there are real and significant differences here, but there are also important similarities. Liberals and conservatives of both schools rarely situate the notion of dependency in its historical or economic context; nor do they interrogate its presuppositions. Neither group ques-

tions the assumption that independence is an unmitigated good nor its identification with wage labor. Many poverty and welfare analysts equivocate between an official position that *dependency* is a value-neutral term for receipt of (or need for) welfare and a usage that makes it a synonym for *pauperism*.

These assumptions permeate the public sphere. In the current round of alarums about welfare dependency, it is increasingly claimed that "welfare mothers ought to work," a usage that tacitly defines work as wage earning and child raising as nonwork. Here we run up against contradictions in the discourse of dependency: when the subject under consideration is teenage pregnancy, these mothers are cast as children; when the subject is welfare, they become adults who should be self-supporting. It is only in the last decade that welfare experts have reached a consensus on the view that AFDC recipients should be employed. The older view, which underlay the original passage of ADC, was that children need a mother at home—although in practice there was always a class double standard, since full-time maternal domesticity was a privilege that had to be purchased, not an entitlement poor women could claim. However, as wage work among mothers of young children has become more widespread and normative, the last defenders of a welfare program that permitted recipients to concentrate full-time on child raising were silenced.

None of the negative imagery about welfare dependency has gone uncontested, of course. From the 1950s through the 1970s, many of these presuppositions were challenged, most directly in the mid-1960s by an organization of women welfare claimants, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). The women of NWRO cast their relation with the welfare system as active rather than passive, a matter of claiming rights rather than receiving charity. They also insisted that their domestic labor was socially necessary and praiseworthy. Their perspective helped reconstruct the arguments for welfare, spurring poverty lawyers and radical intellectuals to develop a legal and political-theoretical basis for welfare as an entitlement and right. Edward Sparer, a legal strategist for the welfare rights movement, challenged the usual understanding of dependency: "The charge of antiwelfare politicians is that welfare makes the recipient 'dependent.' What this means is that the recipient depends on the welfare check for his [*sic*] material subsistence rather than upon some other source . . . whether that is good or bad depends on whether a better source of income is available. . . . The real problem . . . is something entirely different. The recipient and the applicant traditionally have been dependent on the whim of the caseworker" (Sparer 1970–71, 71). The cure for welfare dependency, then, was welfare rights. Had the NWRO not been greatly weakened by the late 1970s, the revived discourse of pauperism in the 1980s could not have become hegemonic.

Even in the absence of a powerful National Welfare Rights Organization, many AFDC recipients maintained their own oppositional interpretation of welfare dependency. They complained not only of stingy allowances but also of infantilization due to supervision, loss of privacy, and a maze of bureaucratic rules that constrained their decisions about housing, jobs, and even (until the 1960s) sexual relations. In the claimants' view, welfare dependency is a social condition, not a psychological state, a condition they analyze in terms of power relations. It is what a left-wing English dictionary of social welfare calls *enforced dependency,* "the creation of a dependent class" as a result of "enforced reliance . . . for necessary psychological or material resources" (Timms and Timms 1982, 55–56).

This idea of enforced dependency was central to another, related challenge to the dominant discourse. During the period in which NWRO activism was at its height, New Left revisionist historians developed an interpretation of the welfare state as an apparatus of social control. They argued that what apologists portrayed as helping practices were actually modes of domination that created enforced dependency. The New Left critique bore some resemblance to the NWRO critique, but the overlap was only partial. The historians of social control told their story mainly from the perspective of the "helpers" and cast recipients as almost entirely passive. They thereby occluded the agency of actual or potential welfare claimants in articulating needs, demanding rights, and making claims.[13]

Still another contemporary challenge to mainstream uses of *dependency* arose from a New Left school of international political economy. The context was the realization, after the first heady days of postwar decolonization, that politically independent former colonies remained economically dependent. In *dependency theory,* radical theorists of "underdevelopment" used the concept of dependency to analyze the global neocolonial economic order from an antiracist and anti-imperialist perspective. In so doing, they resurrected the old preindustrial meaning of dependency as a subjected territory, seeking thereby to divest the term of its newer moral/psychological accretions and to retrieve the occluded dimensions of subjection and subordination. This usage remains strong in Latin America as well as in U.S. social-scientific literature, where we find articles such as "Institutionalizing Dependency: The Impact of Two Decades of Planned Agricultural Modernization" (Gates 1988).

What all these oppositional discourses share is a rejection of the dominant emphasis on dependency as an individual trait. They seek to shift the focus back to the social relations of subordination. But they do not have

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[13] For a fuller discussion of the social control critique, see Gordon 1990. On needs claims, see Fraser 1990 and Nelson 1990.

much impact on mainstream talk about welfare in the United States today. On the contrary, with economic dependency now a synonym for poverty, and with moral/psychological dependency now a personality disorder, talk of dependency as a social relation of subordination has become increasingly rare. Power and domination tend to disappear.[14]

Conclusion

Dependency, once a general-purpose term for all social relations of subordination, is now differentiated into several analytically distinct registers. In the economic register, its meaning has shifted from gaining one's livelihood by working for someone else to relying for support on charity or welfare; wage labor now confers independence. In the sociolegal register, the meaning of dependency as subsumption is unchanged, but its scope of reference and connotations have altered: once a socially approved majority condition, it first became a group-based status deemed proper for some classes of persons but not others and then shifted again to designate (except in the case of children) an anomalous, highly stigmatized status of deviant and incompetent individuals. Likewise, in the political register, dependency's meaning as subjection to an external governing power has remained relatively constant, but its evaluative connotations worsened as individual political rights and national sovereignty became normative. Meanwhile, with the emergence of a newer moral/psychological register, properties once ascribed to social relations came to be posited instead as inherent character traits of individuals or groups, and the connotations here, too, have worsened. This last register now claims an increasingly large proportion of the discourse, as if the social relations of dependency were being absorbed into personality. Symptomatically, erstwhile relational understandings have been hypostatized in a veritable portrait gallery of dependent personalities: first, housewives, paupers, natives, and slaves; then poor, solo, black teenage mothers.

These shifts in the semantics of dependency reflect some major sociohistorical developments. One is the progressive differentiation of the official economy—that which is counted in the domestic national product—as a seemingly autonomous system that dominates social life. Before the rise of capitalism, all forms of work were woven into a net of dependencies, which constituted a single, continuous fabric of social hierarchies. The whole set of relations was constrained by moral understandings, as in the preindustrial idea of a moral economy. In the patriarchal families and communities that characterized the preindustrial period, women

[14] For an argument that Clinton's recent neoliberal discourse continues to individualize dependency, see Fraser 1993.

were subordinated and their labor often controlled by others, but their labor was visible, understood, and valued. With the emergence of religious and secular individualism, on the one hand, and of industrial capitalism, on the other, a sharp, new dichotomy was constructed in which economic dependency and economic independence were unalterably opposed to one another. A crucial corollary of this dependence/independence dichotomy, and of the hegemony of wage labor in general, was the occlusion and devaluation of women's unwaged domestic and parenting labor.

The genealogy of dependency also expresses the modern emphasis on individual personality. This is the deepest meaning of the spectacular rise of the moral/psychological register, which constructs yet another version of the independence/dependence dichotomy. In the moral/psychological version, social relations are hypostatized as properties of individuals or groups. Fear of dependency, both explicit and implicit, posits an ideal, independent personality in contrast to which those considered dependent are deviant. This contrast bears traces of a sexual division of labor that assigns men primary responsibility as providers or breadwinners and women primary responsibility as caretakers and nurturers and then treats the derivative personality patterns as fundamental. It is as if male breadwinners absorbed into their personalities the independence associated with their ideologically interpreted economic role, whereas the persons of female nurturers became saturated with the dependency of those for whom they care. In this way, the opposition between the independent personality and the dependent personality maps onto a whole series of hierarchical oppositions and dichotomies that are central in modern culture: masculine/feminine, public/private, work/care, success/love, individual/community, economy/family, and competitive/self-sacrificing.

A genealogy cannot tell us how to respond politically to today's discourse about welfare dependency. It does suggest, however, the limits of any response that presupposes rather than challenges the definition of the problem that is implicit in that expression. An adequate response would need to question our received valuations and definitions of dependence and independence in order to allow new, emancipatory social visions to emerge. Some contemporary welfare-rights activists adopt this strategy, continuing the NWRO tradition. Pat Gowens, for example, elaborates a feminist reinterpretation of dependency:

> The vast majority of mothers of *all classes and all educational levels* "depends" on another income. It may come from child support . . . or from a husband who earns $20,000 while she averages $7,000. But "dependence" more accurately defines dads who count on women's unwaged labor to raise children and care for the home.

Surely, "dependence" doesn't define the single mom who does it all: child-rearing, homemaking, and bringing in the money (one way or another). When caregiving is valued and paid, when dependence is not a dirty word, and interdependence is the norm—only then will we make a dent in poverty. [Gowens 1991, 90–91]

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