DISCUSSION PAPER 22 01

Christoph Antweiler

ON DEPENDENCE, DEPENDENCY, AND A DEPENDENCY TURN.

AN ESSAY WITH SYSTEMATIC INTENT

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction

Which phenomena are to be considered as forms of asymmetrical dependence and dependency among human beings? How can we distinguish between dependence and dependency? Do we need a "dependency turn" in cultural studies, social science and historical research? These are the key questions addressed in this paper. It is an explicitly conceptual paper that aims at a clarification of analytic issues of dependence and dependency in a systematic manner. This conceptual orientation entails an abstract approach. Accordingly, this piece does not analyze specific cases or case histories in detail, although I will give short examples throughout.

The first BCDSS concept paper[1] explored the intricacies of dependence and slavery and discussed many concepts rooted in different scientific approaches. This paper is focused on basic forms, processes, and types of asymmetrical relationality. The author is an anthropologist and has a keen comparative interest in relations of dependence but is not a specialist in this area. To concentrate on topical matters and in conformity with the essay format, I give no references here. It should be emphasized that I do not claim novelty for any of the ideas presented or discussed here. I have relied extensively on the literature cited in our first BCDSS concept paper, and I have learned a lot from the long, fruitful, and interdisciplinary discussions with my co-authors in preparing that piece.

In terms of trends in current academic literature, this paper goes deliberately against the grain in some respects. There is currently a tendency in some areas of the humanities to capture complex phenomena in broad, open-ended and deliberately vague or ambiguous terms. Accordingly, definitions are out of fashion. A second trend is to use central terms in pluralized form ("histories", "identities", "practices", "mobilities", "geographies", "temporalities"). A third path often followed is the use of metaphors (e.g. "social death") or neologisms (such as "actant", "capitalocene" and "more-than-human") to approach complex phenomena or to understand complicated contexts. Occasionally I fall into these habits myself. All the more reason why my guiding principle in this essay is that the more complex and complicated a phenomenon is to understand, the clearer, more precise and more differentiated the terms should be. I think that metaphors can play a productive role in the search for new questions and hypotheses. However, metaphors and neologisms are not a substitute for a theory in the sense of a generalizing statement. This discussion paper is explicitly intended as a working paper that makes some preliminary proposals on the systematics of dependency phenomena. It therefore forms an interim state of thinking and is anything but complete. I would be pleased if it became a "living paper" through its use for the examination of concrete cases and through intensive and detailed criticism.[2]

[1] Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler & Stephan Conermann (2021): *On Asymmetrical Dependency*. Bonn: Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (Concept Paper 1), https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/bcdss_cp_1-_on-asymmetrical-dependency.pdf

[2] My thanks go to Imogen Herrad and Janico Albrecht.

II. Dependence vs. Dependency

In order to enable greater analytical precision, a distinction between dependence and dependency may be helpful. Such a distinction, moreover, will allow us to connect and compare different projects studying both short-term developments and long-term trajectories of asymmetrical dependence, and spatially confined cases as well as those that extend over wider regions or even globally. Social dependency (beyond mere dependence) can be used as an overarching notion to describe a range of dependences in different and linked topical realms and at all scales, including macro-, meso- and micro-forms of dependence: thus forming a systemic phenomenon.

Dependence here refers to the smallest unit conceivable, a relationship between at least two connected elements (A, B), where at least one has limited agency and autonomy or scope of action *due to the linkage* A–B. Dependency, on the other hand, is conceived of as a system or structural form of practice of several and/or time-continuous dependences as systemic unities. This may be contoured in three directions. First, dependency might refer to any *systemic* form of dependence whatsoever. Second, dependency could be interpreted as the *holistic* aspect of specified relations. Third, on the meso- and micro-level, dependency may refer to a general social, cultural or even civilizational *tendency* or *inclination* to engage oneself or others in socioeconomic or socio-political relations that are characterized by dependence. This may be formulated in terms of social formation or in terms of an assemblage that includes objects.

Thus dependency would be conceived as a durable and stable form of different processes to create and support relations of dependence involving different actors, practices, and material entities. This definition functions similarly to the distinction between migrancy and migration. Whereas migration is the concrete movement to another place migrancy can be understood as the *condition* of habitual movement from one place of residence to another, a condition that privileges movement. The distinction between action and agency is not the same as the distinction between dependence and dependency, as agency is more related to *potential*.

The task would then be to determine how practices that create and support relations of dependence accumulate or agglomerate (over time) into broader social entities (societies, social formations, social orders, and constellations) through dependency. According to this view, social formations are processes that change continuously by means of the practices of various and multi-sited individuals and groups. The pivotal question here is how this structural form is given material form in social or societal reality. How was it constituted, and how has it achieved stability or continuity over time? What mechanisms are involved in its reproduction trans-generationally over time? Identifying this would imply a theoretical focus as well as an investigation of empirical data to establish a relationship between different elements, instead of assuming an earlier systematic connection.

Characteristic, trait	**Relations of dependence (single relation, practice)**	**Relations of dependency (systemic relations, praxis)**
Systemicity (1): structural relation to social order	single relation or seen as not or less related to other elements or dynamics of social order	related to other elements or dynamics of social order
Systemicity (2): links between dependences, articulation	a-systemic, item-like, not related to other asymmetric dependences	systemic; a condition related to other asymmetric dependences
Systemicity (3): analytical perspective	particularistic	holistic
Function: effect for stability or durability of social unit or entity	not functional for durability of social formation, social system or social order	functional for durability of social formation, social system or social order
Pattern (1): regularity in time, durability, longevity	irregularly, intermittent, transient, only at specific historical points	regularly, permanent, true trajectory, durable, trans-generational
Pattern (2): regularity in space, expanse	spatially limited occurrence, confined, parochial	spatially extended coverage such as regional or cross-boundary
Pattern (3): Number of instances, cases	single instance or case	multiple instances or cases
Number of dependence relations	one social/economic relation	many social/economic relations, multiple relations
Normalcy, normalization	not habitual, not socially grounded	habitual, commonplace, typical everyday experience
Normativity within social setting studied	no evaluative stance (by actors X, Y, Z)	negative or positive stance (by actors X, Y, Z)
Singularity or plurality	yes, several or many dependences	no, only one dependency referring to case or period (due to systemicity)

Table 1. Differentiating dependence and dependency through specific but partially linked characteristics

III. Social Dependence, Societal Dependence and Systemic Dependence

As understood here, dependence is first and foremost a human social relationship, albeit often a less humane or even inhumane one. This does not include forms of purely causal or ontological dependence, such as human dependence on natural resources, e.g. for carrying out an economic activity, building a monument or creating another object of material culture, and they will not be considered in this essay. In addition, since history usually matters in understanding dependency, it should be noted that path dependence can be important in the historical-genetic explanation of a historical or current dependency relationship under

consideration, but should be conceptually distinguished from the relational dependency under investigation.

If I speak of something as social, I am referring to, at minimum, a dyad of two individuals as interacting humans. The ontological core of social dependence approaches is the fact that the respective units, areas, systems, collectives, or persons connected are (or were) linked by *unequal relations*. The epistemic implication of this causal nexus is that to understand this structure of inequality, a careful analysis of the asymmetrical relation is needed, wherein two or more entities, polities, or systems are *articulated* via an unequal or hierarchical relation between persons, where one can control the other.

Social dependence is here defined as a specific form of social, economic or political ritual, or other form of human relationship. Relationships of social dependence can be conceived as asymmetrical relations between two or more actors. These actors may be persons, human collectives, juridical persons, institutions or states. Non-human causal agents or actants are excluded here, as I consider them to be behaving but not acting. If the unequal relations pertain to the larger supra-personal units called societies, we may speak of *societal* dependence. To understand this and apply it in empirical studies regarding pre-modern or contemporary societies, a suitable methodological approach would employ techniques suited to the study of *concrete social* relations, e.g., network analysis, area studies, regional systems analysis, systems theories, and complexity theories.

At first sight, our topic is not immediately linked to a more macro-oriented dependency theory as conceived within development studies or world system approaches. Nevertheless, we can learn a lot from different versions of dependency theory (*dependencia*), as it is a main theoretical approach for conceptualizing asymmetrical relations between societal entities. Dependence theory usually deals with asymmetrical relations between two spatial *macro*-entities. These entities are linked to one another through unequal exchange of materials, information and human beings (*articulation*). In the prototypical case these are colonizing units, also called *centers* (*metropoles*), which are linked with colonies or other dependent areas, the *peripheries* (*satellites*). The articulation is established and maintained by the relation of unequal exchange.

This structure of dependence is typically repeated across lower spatial scales within the colony's respective periphery, such as relations between a colonial center with its colonies or a city with its rural hinterland. Currently, we see a renewed interest in relations of dependence following the decline of classical dependence theories that took place in the 1990s. Dependence theory, which arose in the 1960s and 1970s, was conceived out of a critique of classical theories of social evolution and development. These dominant socio-evolutionistic approaches conceived long-term societal change as a one-directional phenomenon, emphasizing internal and cultural factors as key movers, and they entailed an assumption of necessary steps of development (the *ladder model*).

In contrast to developmentalist thinkers, dependence theorists emphasized external factors and investigated the success of developing areas via the image of parasitism appearing in the peripheries (with a focus that bore more on Latin America than on Africa and Asia). Dependence theories came under attack in the 1990s because they could not explain the

many *different* development paths taken by areas that had formerly been dependent on distant metropoles, such as the post-war trajectories of Ghana and South Korea, which appeared to begin in similar conditions. Dependence theory was followed by world system theory and more recent approaches that focus on the *Global South,* necessarily including the *Global North*. The macro-orientation and economic bias of *dependencia* theories calls for a rethinking of theories that focus on social dependence, replacing them with a combination of other approaches along with a focus on local developmental trajectories and regional agency, which is one of the main aims of the BCDSS.

The theoretical and methodological toolkit of dependence theory and related approaches with regard to the study of macro-economic and macro-political relations may relate to the economic and political fields proper and beyond the macro-scale. In relation to work and labor, dependence may be suitable for analyzing explicitly *social relations* and the scale of the *meso- or micro-levels* of such relations. Within the disciplines of cultural or social anthropology and sociology, many empirical studies of patron-client relations (*patronage* or *clientelism*) have been conducted; that is, these works examine social micro-relations that are structurally similar to macro-patterns of dependence and inter-dependence. If we think in terms of dependency and combine theoretical ideas ranging from macro-analysis to the micro perspective, theoretically challenging questions arise that are also *empirically* comprehensible through the use of existing sources or data sets that can realistically be constructed. Here are some examples of mostly unresolved issues:

- What are the specifics of asymmetric *inter*-dependence: in which ways are *super-ordinated* actors also (partially) dependent on their own subordinate or subaltern actors?
- In what ways can *subordinate*d actors use the (partial) dependence of their masters against them as their own *social capital*, facilitating them a certain degree of agency, e.g., through knowledge, technical expertise, mastery in work, or social cognition (knowledge of the social network)?
- Which persons and institutions can be characterized as *gatekeepers or brokers* to establish or maintain unequal work or labor relations?
- Are there opportunities (and if so, what are they?) for developing an asymmetric dependence through stages of inter-dependence into a more *mutual* labor relation (co-operation, symbiosis, or synergy)?
- What emerges when we see asymmetrical labor relations not as dyadic but *polyadic*, involving three or more individual, collective, or institutional actors?
- Are the relations in question socially dense, multiplex, and/or full of cultural content, or are they restricted to the relational aspects or a monoplex relatedness?
- Are there cases in which asymmetry and inequality are valued in a *positive* way by the subordinate?
- What are the specifics of dependence relations, if the partners are not only socio-economically or politically unequal but also *culturally* different?
- What are the specifics of slavery in comparison to other forms of severe or enduring dependence?

IV. Asymmetrical Dependence and *WEIRD* Research Biases

Dependence is related to politics, society and culture, and specifically to social order. Thus I start from the BCDSS' stance that asymmetrical dependency should be studied as a phenomenon that is both embedded in and structured by social order. How can the basic theoretical assumptions that were laid out in Concept Paper 1 be extended and further differentiated in a senseful way? First of all, structure: by which I mean a general notion of structure and not a specific linguistic or social-scientific notion of structure. Structures are by definition characterized by a certain measure of durability, which distinguishes them from processes or dynamics. However, we can also conceptualize structures as formed through social and societal practice, and deliberately prevent ourselves from seeing structures as something ontologically distinct from practices. Even practices may take on more structured forms if they become durable or pervasive, e.g., in rituals or other traditions that are explicitly linked to habit.

Thus, structures can be seen as being made up of multiple (and potentially causally contradictory) practices of multi-situated agents, namely, individuals, groups, assemblages of groups, organizations, and so on. This understanding of the development of *structuration* can be seen as a praxeological one, as used in many recent approaches to material studies in social science and archaeology. In this view, durable patterns of social life are created by interlinked processes. This links to agency, as we can assume that even in situations or settings with very restricted freedom due to strong and/or enduring asymmetrical relations, there may be at least some space for action.

I am especially concerned with the social and cultural aspects and dimensions of asymmetrical dependence as it manifests in relations between persons. Social structures and social practices are linked to social and societal relations. The very core of sociality itself is *relatedness*. The focal point of attention here should thus be on the question of how asymmetrical dependences *emerge* from the structuring and/or long-term development, that is, the institutionalization or canalization (or "fossilization") of specific social relations. The very notion of a social relation implies a *linkage* between persons, collectives, and/or organizations or social institutions. Because social actors are always related to their partners and to the given social situation, there are always links that bind them spatially or constrain their freedom. However, not every social relation should be regarded as a dependence relation. To have analytical power, the notion of dependency must designate something more than simply an extremely unequal social or economic relation. Furthermore, as said above, to avoid fuzzy conceptualization, we should be clear that (1) not every *synchronic* causal link between phenomena A and B is dependence, and (2) not every *diachronic* causal link between phenomena should be regarded as dependence.

A study of *asymmetrical* dependency could start by developing a conception of it as a specific form of *power relation*. The dynamics of power are formative for the dynamics of dependency. Nevertheless, on a theoretical level but also in empirical studies, we should distinguish analytically between different phenomena. We need to disentangle the relation between dependency and the personal and social relations of power, dominance, hierarchy, and inequality. The assertion that they are causally linked is not grounds to confuse them. This differentiation is relevant for *revealing* (instead of simply assuming) the causal links between

these four elements (a causal nexus) and to identify what is really at the core of the respective topic studied.

The systematization of dependency attempted here is explicitly intended to enable comparisons. Any enterprise of comparison implies the problem of criteria of comparison, the *tertium comparationis* (literally "the third", i.e. the common element, in a comparison). If we intend to develop an approach that is not biased toward Eurocentric or Atlanto-centric assumptions, a descriptive terminology is of the utmost importance for dependency studies. Our basic assumptions thus should not be limited to evidence produced in *WEIRD* (Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, Democratic) societies. That pertains especially to generalizing assumptions about the basic values as well as the motives and emotions of interacting humans. Our current textbook knowledge of the human psyche has been obtained from a very limited set of studies, almost all of which were performed by Western researchers on Western subjects in experimental settings. Where worldwide comparative data is available, *WEIRD* societies consistently occupy the extreme ends of the distribution. This makes these groups the worst subpopulations that can be used to generalize about the psyche and behavior of humans.

Thus, if we compare, e.g., Atlantic slavery and Greco-Roman slavery with Asian or African cases of asymmetrical dependency, we must ascertain that the *tertium comparationis* that we are developing does not already have a privileged relationship with Atlantic slavery or Greco-Roman slavery being the usual implicit prototypes. Unless we do this, there is a danger that non-Western cases, case histories and dependency systems will almost automatically be regarded as deviant forms. By implication, beyond preventing Eurocentric assumptions we should try to avoid *any* form of projecting our own experiences or norms onto other social and cultural settings in a universalizing way ungrounded in empirical research. We should avoid any nostro-centrism.

V. Ten Aspects of Asymmetrical Dependency for Empirical Analysis

I propose ten aspects to focus on when studying social forms and formations or any constellations of asymmetrical dependency. These perspectives might be useful to (a) describe and analyze cases or case histories, (b) compare instances of asymmetrical dependency and (c) situate individual research projects within the young landscape of dependence and dependency studies. However, this should not be understood to form a complete picture or a comprehensive catalog to be followed as a recipe.

V.1. Social and Societal Actors Involved

Who is involved in relations of dependence? Who is acting, and who is being acted upon? How much freedom is there to act as desired (agency)? In asymmetrical dependency relations, persons are involved, such as in the archetypical master and slave. The interlocutors or actors involved can also be different kinds of social entities, such as occupational groups, communities, families (or ethnic or occupational groups) or social categories (e.g. castes, classes, or social entities grouped by e.g. age or gender). Institutions (political or economic)

and institutional or collective entities like states, nations, and transnational entities (e.g. an abolition movement) may also operate as either actors or those acted upon.

We must decide whether to treat ideas, items of material culture, or environmental circumstances as actors according to the Latourian concept. In this question different practice approaches take different stances. In contrast to currently very common arguments, I only regard people as actors, if an action – in distinction from a mere *behavior* – contains intention. That does not mean that all of the *effects* of a given action are intended. Furthermore, this in no way excludes the possibility that material objects or non-human living beings can in part produce similar effects as actions by human actors. Many material circumstances or entities of material culture may constrain, enable, or even afford asymmetrical dependency to differing degrees. One example is buildings, walls, fences and other material boundaries that permanently restrict people's freedom of movement or their freedom to express themselves. So the general question is this: How do material structures or materialized relations enable or establish asymmetrical dependence through affordance? We may think of making and unmaking, among actions, as simultaneous processes that can unfold for one person, a collective, and in different rooms. This also applies to material restrictions on the spatial autonomy of large numbers of people in social categories, such as bonded laborers or poor women.

V.2. Number of Elements Linked and Forms of Relatedness

By adopting a systemic view of dependence relations, we can investigate the elements and relations that constitute the system. Because we are dealing with eminently relational phenomena, we should analytically differentiate between several morphological structures of relations, such as social versus economic networks. We can distinguish between a bilateral relation (dyad, binary), where two parties (A, B) are linked, e.g. by a work contract. A triadic relation would be one that connects three parties (A, B, C); these may all be of the same sort (e.g. three persons) or be different sorts of entities (e.g. two persons plus one institution). Relations of asymmetrical dependency involving more than three parties would appear as multilateral relations.

Social network theory provides (a) an alternative to purely structural theorizing by taking account of individuals and their social positions. Furthermore, it offers (b) precise language for describing relations and (c) methods for qualitatively or quantitatively analyzing networks empirically (qualitative network analysis). Such analyses could be useful for observing those processes of the formation of dependency that appear more open, and those that appear more closed in regard to intervention by elements outside the system envisioned. We can then ask to which degree a social formation or socio-political system of dependence can be described as open, and how asymmetrical relationships are related to kinship structures or possibly even defined as such. The question would then be why those processes assume specific characteristics in certain contexts and in relation to one another.

V.3. Social, Economic, and Psychic Substance of the Dependence Relation

What forms of relations exist between actors? How are the connections or links between individual and collective actors characterized? Within the latter, we may analytically distinguish primary asymmetries of *power* (control, influence, dominance, coercion, hegemony, or obedience and subjection), of *spatial* access (locale, area, distance, territory, or fixedness), of *economic* exchange (e.g. bulk trade or slave trade) or a specific form of *economic* relation: a *work-based* relation (labor), a *sexual* relation (e.g. coerced sex or romantic love), or relations characterized by another behavior or form of social interaction. In many cases, we observe (a) *multi-modal* relations, e.g. economic labor-cum-sex work, or (b) combinations where one relation prefigures or enables another relation, e.g. an androcentric or hetero-normative gender system that structurally enables coerced sex.

Our assumption is that asymmetrical dependency is characterized by a relationship in which the superordinate has control over actions and resources and can restrict the scope of mobility of the subordinate due to the threat of punishment. Moreover, asymmetrical dependency also stems from broader processes that are not directly connected to control over individuals and groups but rather with the control of territory: e.g. exploitation of natural resources, colonization, sovereignty, and so on. The effectiveness of power (below) should also be differentiated according to substance. Following Foucault, it could be argued that the control of bodies in e.g. slavery or some forms of sex work is a form of biopower. This is particularly relevant here because it enables us to understand the expression of power from A to B in terms of access to B's life and body. This brings us to the next aspect: control.

V.4. Subjects and Objects of Control

If we analyze dependence as a form of control because the control of dependent subjects is at the heart of the relationship of asymmetrical dependency, our next question is this: what is the specific substance that is controlled? Is it *physical mobility* (corporal immobility, bondage through debt, incarceration), *actions* (limited agency or sexuality; cf. less freedom), or *resources*? This includes restricted or prevented access to territory, to resources (one's own or others'), or the power to prevent others from using one's own resources. But control can also be achieved by limiting the emotions of the individual or by limiting the experiences of a person or a collective. One issue of control in terms of historical projects might be the distinction between a person´s or a group´s intentionally limited physical mobility vs. unintended immobility (via geographical isolation or social isolation from compatriots).

In empirical research on dependence it may make the most sense to begin by exploring the moments when relationships break up, break down, or are intentionally unmade ("unmaking"). An extreme but telling example is the forced cutting of all kinship ties, as in many forms of slavery. This central theme of the control of people by other people, by institutions or by material arrangements, concerns questions of the freedom of action and other aspects of autonomy of dependent people, which I will discuss below. Regarding control, in general, the following questions about freedom might be helpful: to what degree is there (a) a freedom to disobey, (b) a freedom to move away spatially (spatial exit), and (c) a freedom to withdraw from the relationship (social exit)?

V.5. Cultural Manifestation, Presentation, and Representation

How is dependency dealt with in thinking, representation, and acting? How are such relations evaluated, and to what extent are they accepted? This holds for the power-holders (super-ordinates) and especially for the subordinates, because we know generally less about those who are subordinated. Are the relations narrated or performed? If they are performed, is this through behavior alone (observable action) or intentional action? Are dependency relations mainly presented or represented? If presented or represented, are they conceived by the actors involved as "normal" social, economic, or gender relations (normalism), or not as normal?

Any theory of asymmetrical dependence has to include an analysis of dependency ideologies and their critique(s), or the different forms in which asymmetrical dependency is legitimized, taken for granted, and even questioned. For societies in which asymmetrical dependency is a widespread (or even normalized) form of relationship, a dissenting heterodox position is one that questions this normality, while an orthodox position affirms this form of relationship. On the other hand, in societies that are based on the norm of symmetrical dependency, an orthodox position is one that questions asymmetrical dependence, and a heterodox one affirms it.

The two cases are linked through different representations and practices of legitimation and de-legitimation of asymmetrical dependency. This implies a range of empirical questions: which symbolic-discursive (and practical, possibly also material-spatial) forms of legitimation can we observe or document? The same question arises for the public or private questioning of dependency from different points of view (heterodoxy or orthodoxy). Which forms of local knowledge, local worldviews, or world-ordering knowledge are involved?

This also holds for public outreach activities by scholars and presentations of our perspectives, and it results in different audiences. The use of the concept of slavery may be problematic in scientific terms to describe many of the forms we study, as it is only one case of asymmetrical dependency, and an extreme one at that. On the other hand, our academic idea of asymmetrical dependency may not be suited for presentations to any given lay audience.

V.6. Direction of Dependence and Temporality

Considering the fact that different actors are in a dependency relationship with each other – at least a dyad of two actors –, two basic directions of dependency are possible. We can distinguish a one-way dependency, where A is dependent on B (mono-dependency) or a two-way dependency where A is dependent on B, and B is dependent on A (mutual dependence, interdependence). However, it may be that the content or quality of dependence differs (A needs money, B needs care or love). In certain production systems or historical phases B (a worker and owner of their own working power) may be more replaceable than A (a factory owner or owner of the means of production). Two partners A and B may be both dependent on a third party C, a person or an institution. In addition there may be a *time aspect* that complicates the structure, e.g. within *delayed* dependence, *seasonal* dependence or *reciprocal* dependency, such as where the reciprocation is habitually or even normatively

postponed. For all of these relations, we might use categories developed in social network approaches, but also the differentiated vocabulary developed in biology to analyze relations of biological symbiosis, mutualism, or parasitism.

V.7. Symmetrical vs. Asymmetric Dependency

Relations of dependence may be symmetric or asymmetric. The analysis of dependence is thus closely related to phenomena associated with inequality and power. In an *asymmetrical* relation, partner A has greater social resources than B, whether these are capital, property, power, influence, prestige, knowledge, or economic resources, or superior access to other resources. The difference should be a systemic one and thus not related to e.g. seasonality or limited to specific social situations. Within a *symmetrical* relationship, partners are on an equal level (socially, politically, and economically). In interdependency, A and B are dependent on each other, but they (as well as others) may be equally dependent on one another, or one may be more dependent than the other. Often one is dependent, but has greater agency to move to another partner, as is typical e.g. in patron-client relations (*patronage*). We should distinguish asymmetrical dependence from hegemony and from heteronomy (vs. autonomy), and clearly indicate the linkages among these phenomena. Hegemony involves normalization in everyday practice or the adoption of this understanding of the world on the part of B in such a way that the asymmetrical relationship is legitimized.

In relation to all of these forms, asymmetry should be distinguished *analytically*, first, from socioeconomic inequality (via e.g. wealth, knowledge, and prestige). This is not to deny that social inequality goes hand in hand with dependence of B versus A, as A and B can be understood as collectives or social categories. Asymmetry should be analytically disentangled as well from hierarchy, such as in models of *Homo hierarchicus*. Asymmetrical dependency always includes hierarchy, that is, a degree of decision-making power of A over the agency for action and access to resources of B, as a central element; but this does not hold in the other direction: not every hierarchy implies asymmetrical dependency of any actor involved, e.g. forms of purely formal hierarchies do not.

V.8. Pervasive vs. Weak Forms of Dependency

The study of dependence in human relations can be guided and also canalized by a focus on strong or extreme forms, such as slavery in the strict sense of the term. We must make clear whether we can analytically disentangle strong from weak forms of dependence and dependency. What, then, would the opposite of strong dependency be? Weak dependency may lack intensity if observed over a short period of time, but be very effective when viewed cumulatively, as indicated by the expression *weak ties* in social network analysis. We could relate strength to the inexistence of an exit option, indicating that the subordinated person or group cannot escape the locality or structure without, for instance, corporal punishment or other severe consequences, such as illness. Another approach would be to link the strength of a dependency to notions of human suffering. This would allow us to link our topic to discourses of human rights. In relation to individuals, we can distinguish temporary

dependence on the one hand and life-long dependencies, such as in patron-client systems, on the other.

V.9. Time Scales, Social Scales, and Spatial Scales

Dependence appears in different scales and can be studied in different scalar contexts. Some dependency studies relate to specific locales and short periods of time; e.g., studies based on anthropological fieldwork typically have narrow temporal and spatial scales. Other studies will have a large spatial frame, e.g. investigating a landscape or an entire polity or country. Some may even deal with transnational entities such as movements or cultural realms of a sub-continental scope. Others will take a *longue durée* perspective to reflect upon a long-term perspective on dependency in relation to historical periods or regimes, such as modernity, characterized by a project of symmetry and thus systemically restricting options for asymmetrical dependencies. We propose to go beyond this dichotomy between the micro and the macro by admitting moderate, or meso-scale, variants and by linking different scales. Furthermore, the construction of different scales by actors in the very processes of the formation of dependency should be observed. Spatial and scalar aspects also play a role in the specific social configuration of dependency situations and settings, especially with regard to categorical inclusion or exclusion. This is true, for example, when house slaves are considered guests within the house or family, while outside they are classified and treated as strangers.

Thus, it would be interesting to investigate the scalability of various forms of asymmetrical dependency. In contrast to dualist notions of local vs. global, short-term vs. long-term, and agency vs. structure, a perspective informed by scale allows for the contemplation of continuities. The study of the scalability of dependency implies the following approach to examining the scaling practices in the respective actors and their environmental conditions. It would entail beginning with the creation of space (material, representational, and social) in terms of the formation of dependency, in the sense of spaces of dependency. Thus we would ask on the basis of which factors can which relationships of asymmetrical dependency be transferred into which different contexts, and on the basis of which factors do they remain locally limited? Here, e.g. ecological factors may also play a role, if, for example, a form of asymmetrical dependency emerges in the context of the production of specific goods and is fundamentally connected to them. Some goods are more bound to certain local conditions (e.g. climatic, soil conditions) than others. Other forms of asymmetrical dependency can only establish themselves if they can build on specific, historically upstream, and socially widespread relationships and systems of representation, such as the traditional production and assertion of social status through asymmetrical dependency relationships.

V.10. Etic and Emic Dimensions

Who is speaking or writing about dependences? What are their perspective and positioning? The aspects of dependency as a social fact may be described from an outside, analyst's perspective, such as in a source written by a contemporaneous member of another society, a later commentator, or as a concept held by the actors involved in the relation itself as described e.g. by an anthropologist. The structural aspects of relations of asymmetrical dependency can be observable via actions, through documented economic processes and relations, objects of material culture or via material traces. The study of asymmetrical dependency should take into account the emic understandings and interpretations of asymmetrical dependency, as well as conflicts arising from different, contested, or antagonist understandings and worldviews within and beyond the social elements studied.

On the other hand, relations of asymmetrical dependency may only be observable in the language behavior of one or more of the actors involved (or indirectly via documents or material traces). The language used in emic studies may be the actor's own (e.g. in interviews) or that of others who are in contact with the actors. To understand and explain actions and agency it may be important to survey case studies or case histories where the aspects of asymmetric dependency are observable, and also manifest in an emic form, whether through documents, texts, or via interviews or are only present in an implicit or tacit way. On the other hand, to avoid a purely expressive understanding of the relationship between economic and cultural processes, it might important to understand how emic understandings and worldviews are entangled in the formation of economic structures and the formation of relevant social formations.

A specific problem involved in analyzing an emic perspective on asymmetrical dependency is the fact that because the topic is related to power and is normatively charged, we cannot assume that there is a one common view. Contrary to the former anthropological assumption that emics constitute a shared worldview, we should expect multi-faceted emics. We should also be open to the existence of idiosyncratic worldviews (*mazeway*) in any social setting. The distinction between the emic and the etic is pivotal for contemporary studies of dependence, such as anthropological studies on unfree labor. However, it is also generally relevant, as we often have only limited access to emic perspectives, even in studies of contemporary subjects or in case histories. Nevertheless, emic perspectives may be very important for historical studies as well, provided that we look critically at how far the sources allow us to develop the emic perspective. Taking inequality of relations as the default case for our topic, emic perspectives will be selectively represented. We can assume that the emic perspectives of certain historical actors, such as superordinate ones, are overrepresented at the expense of subordinates.

VI. Towards a Processual Typology and Against a Dependency Turn

The field of dependency studies falls along a continuum between extreme forms of asymmetrical dependency, like slavery of the Atlantic type, and other, less extreme forms. Because asymmetrical dependencies are diverse and continuously changing, their Atlantic forms should neither be considered as the default comparative type nor (as noted above) as the main orientating perspective for establishing our *tertium comparationis.* It remains an open question whether slavery is always to be regarded as the most extreme condition of asymmetrical dependence within a given context. Different emic views might be found related to the respective positioning of actors within social relations and within certain specific conditions in certain locales (e.g., a given nutritional situation and built environment). Added to this, the polar contrary, which I think is less interesting as a research field concerning the focus of dependency studies, would be what we might characterize emically as freedom and full autonomy. We seek to reveal insights also into forms and degrees, including partial freedom, autonomy, and agency. Thus, since the BCDSS was intentionally titled "Beyond Slavery and Freedom", this should be understood as beyond slavery *and* beyond freedom.

To develop a middle-range theory with sub-theories, a typology such as that presented in Table 2 might be a good first step. The rows represent the ten empirical aspects described above. This approach can be combined with another strategy, namely the taking of a well-documented entry point to a middle-range theory. In line with the processual approach that this essay suggests, we could begin with processes that seem to be almost universally involved in the production and reproduction of asymmetrical dependency. Indeed, some of the BCDSS' research areas and research groups may provide us with some examples, namely:

(a) Practices, norms, institutions i.e. how practices of asymmetrical dependence result in the normativity and (temporary) institutionalization of dependency.

(b) Semantics, such as the specific meanings attached by different actors to dependence relations.

(c) Labor and spatiality; where labor also implies relations of property, control and exploitation of natural resources etc., and spatiality includes both processes of mobilization and immobilization.

(d) Intersectionality, that is, how gender, age, class, status, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and other markers were and are used as a nexus that is involved in the production and reproduction of asymmetrical dependence/dependency, as well as of autonomy.

(e) Punishment, including multiple practices of asymmetrical dependency.

Aspect	Debt bondage	Convict labor	Tributary labor	Servitude	Serfdom	Domestic work	Wage labor	Clientelism, Patronage	...
4.1									
4.2									
4.3									
4.4									
4.5									
4.6									
4.7									
4.8									
4.9									
4.10									
…									

Table 2: Relations of asymmetrical dependency: A simple typological approach

Other entry points could be added, e.g. debt or spatial fixation. Using the ten characteristics, we could rearrange our research clusters in a more content- and less discipline-oriented way. The advantage of taking these processes as starting point for a median-range theory of asymmetrical dependency lies in the fact that they are broad enough to have a cross-cultural and trans-historical scope while at the same time, as processes, they always lead to different outcomes. In this way, we do not predetermine the outcomes, but leave it to empirical research to tell us what the modes of asymmetrical relations really look like in each context (e.g. processes of the mobilization and immobilization of labor played a role in producing and reproducing asymmetrical dependency in both context A and context B, but in the former they produced a social relation called slavery or indentured labor, which had certain characteristics a and b, while in the second case they produced other labor and social relations).

A possible *dependency turn* within studies of labor today may be understood as a scientific turn toward studying dependence as a general structural pattern within social and societal relations of labor, as social dependence. This would imply the study of relations of work-related dependence that is both (a) systematic and (b) thorough, that is, pertaining to any and all social and areal scales. This would hold both transculturally and trans-historically for early

modern cases and phases, as well as more recent or contemporary examples. This approach would constitute a turn away from a focus on unspecified or equal, symmetric relations.

In relation to theories of *unequal labor and slavery*, this turn would not be restricted to top-down dependence but would also imply an explicit consideration of dependencies of super-ordinate actors on their subordinate partners. Thus, dependence and inter-dependence would be linked. As with other so-called turns, this turn could be based on classic arguments and rationales in historical theorizing, cultural anthropology, and macro-sociological theory but with an emphasis on a new empirical area of focus and a specific theoretical perspective within studies of different forms of unfree labor, such as indentured labor, debt bondage, convict labor, sharecropping, and military service.

This dependency turn would signal the enormous importance and urgency of thinking in dimensions of inherited inequality, and it would therefore be welcome. By using the word "turn", however, I already reveal my reservations about such a program. I do not consider asymmetric dependency to be too insignificant a field to call such a change within it a "turn"; on the contrary, it is too important for this. The word "turn" is used primarily in the humanities and cultural studies as a form of order for debates on theory. While sociology tends to discuss permanent paradigms, such as structures, functions, and evolution, the turns seen in the humanities and cultural studies, especially the latter, usually only last until the next turn. Through the short attention cycles of the humanities and cultural studies, the linguistic turn is replaced by the cultural turn, and the latter by the material turn or the practice turn, followed by the relational and animal turns.

The constant turning is inherent in the metaphor, for a turn need not be a U-turn, but turn away from an established direction. If a new turn is seen as simply one additional perspective, the term would not be necessary. If an orientation has only existed since the last turn, the new turn is a departure from the direction in which the last turn was made. As for our topic, we can already foresee the future proclamation of a "post-dependency turn".

One problem with novel turns is that they may make us all-to-quickly forget earlier gains or insights obtained at great pains. This may be seen even in insights that were achieved in earlier turns. A general example of this may be found in the insights into the effectiveness of language that were gained in the linguistic turn, only to be forgotten in later turns. For example, in the currently popular variants of the ontological turn in cultural studies and ethnology, insights from the material turn for material political-economic and political-ecological contexts of worldviews are forgotten.

Given the ubiquity of asymmetrical inequality, this is also not a matter of simply proclaiming a kind of dependency-oriented mainstreaming in research and institutions, because this would invite routinization. In my opinion, dependency is theoretically too important a subject, the problem it expresses is too relevant and the word dependency itself is too rich in content to leave this as merely another turn.

For further titles see: https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/en/publications

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