

Exploitation of Man by Man: A Beginner's Guide*

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I. Conceptual Preliminaries

Exploitation requires at least two relata: a subject and an object. Moreover, the subject and object can't be identical (what does it mean to say that A exploits herself, i.e. her own person? You can say that A exploits her own superior

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sporting skills, but that is not her person). So it is always true that, if A exploits, then A exploits B, where B is some person, property or thing.

What values can A take? It is impossible that A exploit B unless A is some sort of agent. A man, or a lion, can exploit his opponent's weakness, but a stone cannot. This does not exclude the possibility that A is an individual or collection of individuals (a nation, a class, and so on).

What values can B take? I can clearly exploit raw materials, e.g. oil resources. I can also exploit another person's attributes or qualities, as when exploiting an opponent's defensive weakness in football. I can also exploit people. In fact the verb 'exploit' comes from old French, and means 'to accomplish' or 'to use' and was typically applied to things and objects. The first well-known usage with reference to a person as an object of exploitation is due to Saint-Simon (see Bazard 1830), who laments, in passing, the *exploitation de l'homme par l'homme*. The apparent transfer of meaning from exploitation as applied to things, to exploitation as applied to humans, and the pejorative turn this transfer represents, shows something about what is wrongful about exploitation. I shall return to this later.

We have two person-variables and a verb: A exploits B. Before we begin the inquiry into the the conditions for exploitation, or attempt to provide a definition, we must attend to certain conceptual and moral nuances. First, note that it is possible that A exploits another person, B, while both are unaware that this is the case. For example, A sells his worthless coat to B, who badly needs it to fend off the cold, for a very high price. A sells dear believing B is an eccentric millionaire, while B buys because he thinks A needs the money more badly than B. Here A does not believe he exploits, and B does not believe he is exploited, but both beliefs seem to be false. A can, moreover, exploit B without A or B knowing each other. A can be an capitalist running a sweatshop factory who has never seen or met the workers, including B.

A further important caveat. Philosophers differ in their beliefs as to whether exploitation of man by man is morally wrong, or morally bad, or in any case a moral transgression. Here is a series of possible views and their implications:

An action is morally wrong if and only if there is a moral reason not to do it (I shall qualify this definition further in a moment). Let's assume exploitation is indeed morally wrong. The fact that A does x , and x is wrongful, does not imply that A is blameworthy for x (A is blameworthy for some action y if and only if it is appropriate for A to feel guilt for doing y). So, for example, it is wrongful not to recycle, but no one can blame A for failing to do so if there

are no institutional provisions for recycling, and one is required to drive to the other side of town to recycle three plastic bottles and a can of beer. So one can maintain that exploitation is morally wrongful and simultaneously absolve exploiters of blame.

Another possibility is that exploitation is not wrongful *tout court*. This position will appeal to those Marxists who believe that Marx held no theory of justice, and therefore did not think the actions of capitalist exploiters unjust. There are two variations on this view. The unsophisticated (and implausible) variation denies that Marx thought exploitation to be unjust, and therefore morally bad, and it also denies that Marx thought exploitation to be nonmorally bad. Nonmoral bads are phenomena like hunger, disease, pain, and so on. The sophisticated (and plausible) version of the Marxist claim that exploitation is not unjust, consists in denying that exploitation is morally bad, while affirming that it is nonmorally bad. It is relevantly like disease or hunger, in that it stifles human potential and deprives people of possibilities for self-realisation (see Wood 2004 for a defence of the sophisticated anti-justice position).

I must ask you to endure the tedium of some further distinctions which are necessary for later. Those who believe to exploit is to wrong, or to commit a wrong, must clarify two further questions. First, they must say if they believe that exploitation is a *pro tanto* wrong or an *all-things-considered* wrong. An act is *pro tanto* wrong if and only if there is a moral reason not to do it. An act is all things considered wrong if one ought not to do it, on the overall balance of reasons. Harming an innocent person may be *pro tanto* wrong, but is not *all-things-considered* wrong if it is the only way to save the lives of millions.¹ Why are *pro tanto* reasons relevant? As we shall see, exploitation can be mutually beneficial. If this is true, then there will be some cases where *pro tanto* duties not to exploit may be outweighed by *all-things-considered* obligations to promote well-being.

Second, given exploitation is wrongful, one must also say whether, and how, nonexploitation duties or obligations are somehow to be enforced. For those of you familiar with Kant's moral philosophy, this is tantamount to

¹ A related distinction is one drawn by the British philosopher W.D. Ross, between *prima facie* duties and *absolute* duties. But the expression '*prima facie*' makes it look as if the original reason retains no weight at all, and it is therefore misleading, for our purposes. To be sure, there are cases where a promise, for example, actually retains no moral weight after all-things-considered deliberation. But many norms do retain some weight even after we decide, correctly, to transgress them (as in the example rehearsed in the main text). See Kagan (1991) for a salient critique of Ross.

asking whether nonexploitation duties are juridical or ethical. In some cases exploitation will be wrongful, and perhaps all-things-considered wrongful. But even in these cases, it remains a further question whether absolute duty should be enforced (by law, or any other means).

II. General Social Features of Exploitation

Most social interaction can be modelled and assessed in light of its consequences. These consequences can be *negative sum*, *zero sum* or *positive sum* in whatever it is that matters. Assume that what matters for the good life of every person is widgets. A negative sum interaction involves an (overall) negative sum of widgets, such as when A shoots B and the gun backfires, severely harming both A and B. A zero sum interaction is one in which the sum widgets is zero. The game of chicken is an example of a zero-sum interaction: if my win of 10 widgets is your loss of 10 widgets then there is no overall gain. This is, by the way, why economic profit cannot be created in the sphere of the circulation of commodities, according to Karl Marx. For here the seller's gain is the buyer's loss (and conversely). A positive sum interaction is one that generates a surplus over and above the sum of widgets the agents would have had had there been no interaction.

Exploitation may be quite common in negative-and-zero-sum interactions. Positive sum interactions make the case for exploitation more difficult to establish, and therefore more interesting. We do not want to make things too easy on ourselves. Positive sum interactions are also the norm in the context of most contemporary economic relations. Human productive power, however measured, has increased more than five-fold over the past 200 years. This growth has nearly always been accompanied by poverty, misery, degradation and inequality. Capitalism does this sort of thing. But no one can fault it for its prodigious appetite for accumulation. Indeed, that's probably the only thing it does really well.

In positive sum interactions what matters is the distribution of the surplus widgets generated in the interaction. Economic exploitation is centrally concerned with the distribution of this surplus in the context of systems of social cooperation. The case for exploitation depends crucially on the distribution of this surplus. A surplus can, of course, be found, not only in the context of the employment relationship. Friendships, families, and other personal relations

generate surpluses in what matters. Exploitation is therefore salient even in the context of these relationships.

Finally, let me just point out that exploitation is an important and central feature of the contemporary world. The global economic surplus is presently shared extremely unequally, and this is sufficient ground to suspect that something is wrong with global economic arrangements. Moreover, the ubiquity of phenomena such as guest workers, sweatshops, trafficking, prostitution, financialisation (the selling of high risk financial packages to the poor), and so on, make the study of exploitation more topical than ever.

III. Deepening the Conception

We now need to know exactly when exploitation of man by man takes place. In other words, we need a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for exploitation, such that:

A exploits B iff

(1) A benefits

How do we know (1) is true? Try to think of a case where there is exploitation of man by man, but the exploiter does not benefit. You can label these cases attempts to exploit. But if exploitation succeeds, then we can be pretty certain, from the armchair, that A has benefited from this particular interaction with B, no matter how short-lived or trivial that benefit might be.

So the benefit must flow not from any actor, but somehow from some sort of causal interaction with B. A can't exploit B if they live in distant worlds, never to have some sort of social relationship. So here's a second necessary condition for exploitation:

(2) from interaction with B

But now we're stuck. For (1) and (2) alone will not do. If they did, then nearly every transaction would be exploitative. That is clearly false, so we need a further set of conditions:

(3) in virtue of _____

To exploit is somehow to benefit at another's expense, and we need to know exactly what 'at another's expense' means. To figure this out we need to fill in (3). And to do that we need a theory. I therefore turn to different conceptions of exploitation, different accounts of how we can complete the canvas.

IV. Exploitation as Harm

Harm is at the centre of all liberal theories. I here follow Feinberg (1987) in understanding harm as setback to interests. If you punch me, then my well-being drops relative to the counterfactual where you don't, and I'm worse off. I've been harmed. Indeed, some believe that the distinguishing feature of liberalism is the so-called harm principle. The harm principle says, roughly, that people should not be interfered with unless they harm third parties (see Mill 1869). In fact it is very likely that this is not the distinguishing feature of liberalism, which is more about a general unwillingness to use coercion in order to enforce some particular conception(s) of the good, rather than about harm to third parties. But I do not want to discuss this here. What interests me is how harm can play a role in the definition of exploitation.

(3.i) A harming B

Now, clearly (3i) does not complete the set of sufficient conditions for exploitation. If A and B participate in a race, where A wins and B loses, B has no complaint of exploitation. It would be, at best, bizarre, for him to say to A 'you're exploiting me'.

It's not necessary either. For consider the following scenario:

A and B live in the commons, earning 5 widgets each (α). One day A has an idea. He will enclose the commons and hire B as a labourer on a sweatshop contract: B will work all day, producing a massive surplus of 96 widgets. A will not work at all. Of this surplus, A will get 95 widgets and B 1 (β). Intuitively, such a contract, and the resulting distribution of the surplus, is exploitative. Indeed, the fact that there is a third possibility in the feasible set, that of sharing the surplus equally (γ), heightens this sense of exploitation.

(payoff_A, payoff_B)

(α) pre-enclosure: (5, 5)

(β) post-enclosure with sweatshop contract: (100, 6)

(γ) post-enclosure equality: (53, 53)

Now, note that, if A exploits B in β , then harm cannot be a necessary condition for exploitation, for B is better off than he would have been in the absence of interaction with A. He is therefore not harmed relative to that interaction. He is harmed relative to another counterfactual baseline (γ), but I shall come to this later.

Some people say that harm, in and of itself, says nothing about wrongdoing. A may harm B with B's consent, as when B indulges in some form of masochism. What matters, they say, is nonvoluntary or nonconsensual harm. Indeed, partisans of this view claim that harm to others is just nonconsensual harm, and that nonconsensual harm is *pro tanto* wrongful. It is this sort of harm that completes our definition.

According to the *harm-based definition*, what is needed to complete the set of sufficient and necessary conditions is:

(3.ii) A causing nonconsensual harm to B

An important question here is: what is consent? Some forms of consent are unfree, as when someone puts a gun in your head a forces you to sign a piece of paper. Other forms of consent are irrational, as when a self-loving person signs his own death sentence under the influence of drugs. Yet other forms of consent are uninformed, as when I sign a piece of paper which, unbeknownst to me, will result in my execution. And so on. The idea of consent we are after is *free, rational and informed* consent, or something like it.

Does the revised definition provide a sufficient condition for exploitation? If someone punches me in the street, and runs away with my purse, the interaction meets (1), (2), and (3ii) but does not count as exploitation. Theft and exploitation are distinct things. Robbery, which is a particular kind of theft, is also not exploitative. If the robber threatens me with a gun to turn in my purse, and I do, he is still not exploiting me. Robbers, by definition, rob, but they do not, merely in virtue of *robbing*, exploit.

Is nonconsensual harm a necessary condition? I think not, for the same reasons as before. The enclosure example shows that the social surplus can be shared extremely unequally even if all parties benefit, and even if all parties fully consent to (β). But (β) still seems exploitative.

Nonconsensual harm is not satisfactory. More generally, it is unlikely that failures of consent or voluntariness will help us understand exploitation. For the latter is an objective phenomenon, in the sense that it has to do with the sort of interaction an agent is engaged in with others and the relations of power between them, and not the subjective conditions of each.

V. Exploitation as Failure of Reciprocity

Another popular attempt to complete the definition of exploitation is through some account of nonreciprocity. Reciprocity is a slippery concept, and care must be given in defining it. A possible construal is:

(3.iii) A receiving something for nothing from B

Such failures of reciprocity are limiting cases of *unequal exchange*. Indeed, some have maintained that Marx (1992) holds an unequal-exchange definition of exploitation. The idea is that Marx's allusions to the labourer 'working *gratis* for the capitalist', or conducting 'unpaid labour' are central to his charge of exploitation.

Let's look at this claim more closely. What is Marx supposed to be saying? According to Marx a part of the working day is spent by labourers working on their own subsistence, which they receive in wages. Assume for a moment that there is a correspondence between the amount of time the labourer spends working and the wages he gets (this assumption relates to a central problem in Marxist economic theory, that of translating labour *values* into *prices*. It is sometimes called the transformation problem. See Cohen (1988) and Roemer (1982) for discussion.) The labourer's wage is worth, or embodies, say, 6 hours of labour time. The capitalist is not, however, going to let the labourer walk away with his 6 hours of labour time earned. If he did, there would be no profit, and no profit means no livelihood for the capitalist. So the capitalist writes it into the labourer's contract that he will work for 12 hours per day. The wage the labourer gets is worth 6 hours' labour, but he works for 12 hours.

He therefore works gratis for the capitalist for 6 hours a day.

Thus Marx defines the rate of exploitation as S/V , i.e. the ratio of unpaid labour (6 hours) to paid labour (6 hours). The rate of exploitation in this example is 100% (see ch. 18 of Marx (1992) for further discussion).

So *unequal-exchange-of-labour definitions* of exploitation have the advantage that they generate quantifiable measures directly usable by social science.

(3) would thus be completed by:

(3.iv) B consuming less labour than he produces, thus generating a surplus, and A consuming consuming that surplus labour

(Recall that A and B can stand for classes, instead of individuals. Note also, that 'consuming' labour here simply refers to the consumption bundle the agent can consume given his wage.)

Useful though the unequal exchange definition is, it is not a sufficient condition for exploitation. For gift-giving is not necessarily a form of exploitation. If B gives A a gift he has made himself, other things equal, A may end up consuming more labour than B. But so what? Marx did not think gift-giving is exploitative. But then what is it that makes unequal exchange exploitative?

At this stage there are two possibilities: we can either say that unequal exchange is exploitative when, and only when, it is forced, or that unequal exchange is exploitative when, and only when, it reflects injustice or unfairness.

I begin by looking at the first claim.

VI. Exploitation as Forced Nonreciprocation

Many Marxists respond to standard rejections of the unequal exchange definition of exploitation by claiming that Marx held no 'technical' account of exploitation. They claim, instead, that exploitation is *forced, unpaid surplus labour* (see, for example, Peffer 1990). This definition has the exegetical advantage that it accords with much of what Marx says about the worker's subjection under the 'dull compulsion of economic relations', and suggests a rough-and-ready wrongmaking feature of capitalist exploitation (a wrongmaking feature of an act or policy is the feature of that act or policy which makes it wrongful or objectionable.)

Before I proceed, let me digress a bit. Force and coercion describe distinct

events. To be forced to do x means to lack a reasonable or acceptable alternative to doing x . Coercion may involve force, in the relevant sense, as when A threatens B 'your money or your life' with a pistol. Here A forces B to give up the money. But the converse does not hold. The wind, for example, can force, but it cannot coerce. Coercion gives a face to force, as it were, for coercion presupposes agency. In light of this distinction we can understand some central contentions of historical sociology.

All social formations since antiquity involve surpluses, generated by social cooperation. But in all social formations human society has seen to this day, it is always a small part of society, one class, that has direct access to, and control over, that surplus.

In ancient societies it is typically the slaveowners who appropriate and control the surplus created by slaves. There exist, of course, other members of society, such as priests, politicians, and the state who absorb a part of the surplus, but they are only parasites of the second order, so to speak. That is, they are parasitic on the class that absorbs the surplus from the direct producers. The first-order parasites are the slaveowners.

Under feudalism it is the feudal serfs that produce the surplus and the feudal lords that appropriate and control it. Serfs spend a proportion of their time labouring for themselves, and another part labouring for the feudal lord. The lord then hires priests, functionaries, and so on. They are also second order parasites.

Under both slavery and feudalism the *mode of exploitation* is through direct coercion (for more on the mode of exploitation see Cohen 1978, ch. 3).

Capitalism is like slavery and feudalism in that the surplus is appropriated and controlled by one class of society, namely the capitalists. But, in contrast with both slavery and feudalism, the capitalist mode of exploitation is not one of direct coercion. No capitalist is permitted, by law, to coerce someone into working for him. And if the law is enforced, as it is in most capitalist countries, then workers have at least formal control over their own labour power.

Many Marxists claim that workers under capitalism are nevertheless forced, by economic circumstance, to work for some capitalist. It is the forced nature of the unequal exchange taking place between capitalists and workers that makes, or breaks, the case for (capitalist) exploitation (see ch. 13 of Cohen 1988 for defence of the claim that workers under capitalism are *collectively* (i.e. as a class) but not *individually* forced to work).

So, according to the force-based definition of exploitation (3) is completed by:

(3.v) B performing forced, unreciprocated labour for A

This view combines unequal exchange with force. Under capitalism, Marxists say, there is still exploitation, even though there is no coercion. Exploitation's causal antecedent, and necessary condition, is economic force. One instrument for domination that preserves and maintains this force, albeit indirectly, is the capitalist state. The capitalist state is also some sort of second-order parasite, but also capitalism's official coercer and propagandist. It is therefore charged both with enforcing capitalist property rights (rendering them 'effective') and with disseminating ideology on a large scale. Through both these functions it ensures that capitalist private property will be maintained and reproduced, and that, therefore, the vast number of working class people will continue to be forced to produce for the capitalists.

What are we to make of this new attempt to complete the definition?

Here's one argument as to why forced nonreciprocation may not be a sufficient condition for exploitation. Societies with welfare states provide welfare to the sick and disabled, among others. Those net welfare beneficiaries receive a net transfer of labour time from the able-bodied. The able-bodied are, moreover, forced, because coerced by the state, to engage in these net transfers. But no one wants to say that the disabled or the sick are exploiters (save perhaps some ideologues for capital). And Marx certainly does not (see, for example, ch. 1 of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*). Someone might here reply that this is an instance of exploitation, but not all forms of exploitation are objectionable. The premise of this reply is questionable: if B says to A 'you're exploiting me', and what A says is true, then it seems to follow that there's something objectionable about what A is doing, or -at least- about what is *happening* to A. But, in any case, the response just pushes the question a step back: we want to know which forms of exploitation are objectionable, and it would seem that the force-based definition does not entail objectionable exploitation, in light of counterexamples.

What about forced nonreciprocation as a necessary condition for exploitation?

Consider an example due to John Roemer (1989): B owns a plot of land that can give him enough to live by: he can lead a decent life just by working

on his own machine. A owns another piece of land, much larger than B's, which he inherited from his grandfather. A's land is much more productive than B's. A offers B to work on A's land, and earn a number of widgets N , where N is greater than what B could have earned in his own land. Any surplus above N accrues to A, who will not work at all. Roemer argues, plausibly, that this interaction is exploitative. But B is not forced to enter into it. Hence force is not a necessary condition for exploitation. To bring things closer to home, consider some worker who chooses to labour for a capitalist, but has the alternative of earning a decent living in a farm, or by staying on welfare (assuming a sufficiently generous welfare system). On the force-based definition he is not forced, and therefore not exploited.

As I said before, A is forced to x iff A does x and there are not reasonable or acceptable alternatives to doing x . What is a reasonable or acceptable alternative to x may vary with time, the general conditions of social development, etc. Yet Roemer's example seems to refute the force-based definitions however 'reasonable' or 'acceptable' are construed. Roemer argues that what is wrong with the two-plots-of-land and unforced-worker examples is injustice in the distribution of alienable assets. Asset injustice provides the cherished necessary and sufficient condition for exploitation.

VII. Exploitation as Distributive Injustice

On the fairness account, exploitation obtains if and only if there is an unfairly unequal exchange between A and B, such that (3) is completed by:

(3.vi) B suffering an injustice

This formulation is too vague. I propose to split the accounts of injustice or unfairness into two categories: those referring to a *fair price* and those referring to a *just distribution of resources*. I believe that the fair price doctrine is either misleading, or it otherwise collapses into the unjust distribution view. We'll see why very soon. But for the moment I must dwell on the fair price view. According to that view, what completes (3) is:

(3.vii) B receiving an unfairly low price from A (for whatever it is that B is selling, including his labour power)

The idea of a fair price goes back to the Scholastics, and formed a large part of the Ricardian socialists' critique of capitalism. Under capitalism, the Ricardian Socialists argued, workers do not get the full product because of monopolies and market imperfections. Remove those imperfections, and they will get the full product, to which they are entitled. 'The whole product of labour' is equivalent to the fair price for one's labour, and the only such price.

A modern variation on the fair price theory has recently been defended by Alan Wertheimer (1999). Wertheimer is a liberal who wants to make sense of exploitation from non-marxist premises. He claims that the answer to the fair price question turns on whether the actual price paid is sufficiently close to the price that would be paid under perfectly competitive conditions. So, for example, If A finds B in a pit and asks for \$100 in return for throwing in a (much cheaper rope), his offer is *eo ipso* exploitative. That is, if the price of the rope, or of a rope-throwing service, is \$5, any price above \$5 exploits.

Is this a satisfactory account of exploitation? Probably not.

It is doubtful that failure to pay the competitive market price is sufficient for exploitation. For A may be a very poor person asking for an abnormally high price from B, who A knows is extremely rich. Intuitively, there does not seem to be something exploitative about this relationship. Similarly, it sounds bizarre to say that, were Senegal to erect tariff barriers to protect its domestic industries by keeping domestic prices artificially above competitive levels, it would thereby be exploiting Canadian tourists in Senegal.

Nor is failure to pay the competitive price necessary for exploitation. For consider a society where women are paid to give birth to babies and where women are in very great abundance, while men are very scarce. Women work arduous long hours, whereas men work very little, but earn high salaries, benefiting from the labour of women. These men seem to exploit, but there are no barriers to entry or competition, in this world, and markets clear. Prices do not seem to be unfair on Wertheimer's view, but it is not implausible to argue that there is exploitation.

The competitive price account looks too conventionalist to capture the normative dimension of exploitation. Another very important variant of the fair price view is the marginal productivity theory, advocated by neoclassical economists (see Clark, 1902). These economists maintain that a competitive market, and only that, will encourage reward to each 'factor of production'

(labour and capital) equal to its contribution to production.² According to these ‘marginal productivity theorists’ the contribution to production should be measured in accordance with each factor’s marginal productivity, i.e. the amount of widgets added to production by adding an extra unit of that factor.

On this view, exploitation takes place when and only when there are monopolies which fail to reward on the basis of contribution, where the latter is measured by marginal product. Now, what is the capitalist’s contribution to production? Owning stuff is not, in and of itself, a productive activity. But all that capitalists do, *qua* capitalists, is own. All productive activity, in other words, is by definition carried forward by labour (incl. idea-generation, production, etc.) The pro-capitalist response is that capitalists take risks with their money, and therefore deserve a reward for doing so. This argument is somewhat reminiscent of the idea that profit is a reward for waiting, which the British economist Alfred Marshall (1890) mentions, with a dose of irony, in discussion of ‘Baron Rothschild’s reward for waiting’.

Perhaps this claim, that capitalists deserve a reward for risk-taking is indeed ideological and therefore false. But we need to ask a prior question: why would anyone deserve a reward for risk if *what he risks with* was not his in the first place? I may create wonders by stealing your coat, or by renting it for profit, but I do not thereby deserve what value I earn, or add to the coat. In other words, if capitalist private property is theft, then no reward legitimately accrues to it. The fair price question thus seems to boil down to the legitimacy of private property.

Advocates of the distributive fairness view, therefore eschew talk of fair prices for talk of assets, or resources:

(3.viii) B receiving an unfair, smaller share in the means of production than A

Among the most ardent defenders of this view are certain analytical Marxists, such as John Roemer and G.A. Cohen.

Famously, Roemer (1985) has argued that exploitation is, at best, a morally secondary phenomenon (if morally significant at all). According to Roemer, the locus of interest should be the distribution of assets. Over the years he, along with Erik Olin Wright, has developed a neat and elegant taxonomy of

²Notice that ‘factor of production’ is a deeply ideological term, because it supposes that capital is actually productive.

social formations, and proven a series of correspondence theorems pertaining to exploitation and asset inequality, or exploitation and class location. Feudal exploitation, for example, is said to consist in unequal ownership of (i.e. *effective power over*) the asset labour power. Capitalist exploitation abolishes feudal exploitation, and is said to consist in unequal ownership of the means of production. Bureaucratic centralist exploitation (or state capitalist exploitation, or degenerated-workers'-state exploitation, depending on which Trotskyist sect you belong to!) is said to consist in unequal ownership of status or organization assets, and so on. I shall focus here on his account of capitalist exploitation.

According to Roemer, exploitation is the causal upshot of injustice in the distribution of alienable assets. Alienable assets are things like cars, machinery, factories, etc. Inalienable assets are things like talents, capabilities, know-how etc. Three questions that animate the more general problem of distributive justice and exercise analytical Marxists like Roemer are:

The question of scope is: over whom does justice apply? Do we owe duties of justice to those distant in space, say, at the other end of the world? Do we owe duties of justice to those distant in time, say, who will live in a thousand years?

The question of pattern is: how should we distribute whatever it is that justice is concerned with? Should we give everyone enough and only enough? Should we give priority to the worse off? Or should we give everyone an equal amount of whatever it is that matters, or an equal opportunity, or access, to it?

The question of metric or currency of justice is: what is it that we should distribute? What is the proper *distribuendum* of justice? Should we be concerned to distribute -in whatever pattern- welfare, resources, capabilities, primary goods, or some combination thereof (each of these views has been defended, respectively, by Arneson 1989, Dworkin 2000, Sen 1991, Rawls 1971, Cohen 1989)?

At this stage we must distinguish between just states of affairs and their causal antecedents. The causal antecedent of justice is whatever social structure, i.e. structure of relations of economic power, will generate or deliver justice. Most egalitarians, analytical Marxist or not, believe that the relevant

pattern is equality, and the relevant metric is some *mélange* of welfare, capabilities and so on. But in order to achieve this pattern, the distribution of alienable assets must somehow be equalised. And, as long as the distribution of assets remains unequal, people will exploit each other in virtue of that inequality.

The distributive account is very promising. It avoids the pitfalls of both the ‘pure’ unequal exchange definition and of the forced nonreciprocity account. It also shows why exploitation is wrongful, for it is always an injustice.

But now consider again the case of the greedy rescuer. A finds B in a pit. A can get B out at little cost or difficulty. A offers to get B out, but only if B agrees to sign a sweatshop contract with A. A signs the contract. There’s clearly an exploitative interaction here: if this interaction is not exploitative then none are. But notice that this judgement and description make absolutely no reference to distributive background, or indeed the justice of that background: what we have is a man, who is being offered bad terms, and which he has to accept, in virtue of a vulnerability he has. If the justice of the distributive background does not matter, as this example seems to show, then distributive injustice cannot be a necessary condition for exploitation.

VIII. Exploitation and Vulnerability

An alternative paradigm to understanding exploitation is to look at how A and B relate to one another, without reference to distributive injustice. What would then make the pit relationship exploitative is the sort of vulnerability B has, and the corresponding power A has *over* B in virtue of that vulnerability. The most general claim here is that A should not (*pro tanto*) enrich himself by taking advantage of B’s vulnerability.

(3.ix) B being in a position of vulnerability relative to A

(3.ix) does not, by itself, complete the set of sufficient conditions for exploitation. But it does shift the emphasis from distributive (in)justice to domination. In effect, on the definition that I am proposing, exploitation is a form of domination for self-enrichment. To exploit another is to somehow use his dependency or vulnerability for your own benefit. This is degrading, since people have, as Kantians are fond of saying, infinite worth and no price. I

shall go into greater length on these features in the next lecture, which will be devoted to the domination account (see Sample 2003 for a kindred attempt).

But let's go back, briefly, to the Marxist complaint against capitalism. On any view of capitalism, capitalists use labourers (by extracting labour time from them) to obtain a benefit (profit) by taking advantage of their vulnerability (their lack of free access to the means of production). The only controversial aspect of the demonstration that all actual capitalists are exploiters consists in showing that they use labourers as mere means. But all actual capitalists are constrained, on pain of survival qua capitalists, to treat their workers merely as sources of profit, just as they treat their machinery. And if exploitation is a sort of instrumental and dominating use of others, then capitalists exploit workers, and the exploitation claim goes through without recourse to distributive-justice premises.

This demonstration is incomplete. It also raises more questions than it answers. It needs to be substantially expanded, for instance, to account for the specifically *economic* form of exploitation. At the centre of that phenomenon stand the relations of production, i.e. material relations of effective power over productive forces and human labour power. What is the connection between these relations and economic vulnerability? How are vulnerability and force related? What is the connection between vulnerability and the extraction of labour time? What is the relationship between need and vulnerability? And so on. I cannot discuss these questions here.

The distributive paradigm, unlike its vulnerability-based counterpart, emphasizes what Marxists call expropriation, or, rather, makes expropriation the dominant morally offensive feature of capitalism. Expropriation is the forced separation of the labourer from the means of production (see part VIII of Marx 1992). Now, since expropriation is an injustice, and since Marx thought that capitalism necessarily involves expropriation, he also thought capitalism to be necessarily unjust. According to the vulnerability account, exploitation may coexist with, and be exacerbated by, expropriation. But it remains a (morally and empirically) distinct phenomenon within capitalist relations of production. Indeed, capitalist exploitation complements expropriation in that it permits and reinforces the reproduction of capitalist relations of production, which make capitalist exploitation ubiquitous, which permits and reinforces... and so on.

The interesting dialectic (or tetralectic!) between exploitation, vulnerability, power, and need must await further examination until our next session.

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