

## Editorial Note

Concomitant with the surging inequality of recent decades has been the development of exploitation theory, which concerns the form and moral import of transactions between stronger and weaker parties. As capital is concentrated in fewer hands, more people are relegated to demeaning and precarious work. Sweatshops multiply. Labor migrants are denied basic rights. Surrogacy and prostitution proliferate. Such exploitative practices can be consensual and mutually beneficial—they typically are. Yet that does not seem to vindicate them. How precisely should we account for the injustice they exhibit, and how central is that injustice to the capitalist order? The focus of our special issue is Nicholas Vrousalis' recent book, *Exploitation as Domination* (OUP, 2023), which represents a major advance in the debate over these questions.

Vrousalis' argument shifts our focus away from the damaging, disrespectful, or distributively unequal character of exploitative relations, towards the victim's subordination, how her free purposive agency is compromised in ways that no compensatory welfare gains can morally redeem. Exploitation is a species of domination, the wrongful control by one agent over another's power to set and pursue their own ends. By virtue of that control, the powerful extract productive service from the vulnerable, without ever having to extend their own labor service in return. When capital goods are scarce and privately held, as under capitalism, owners of the means of production necessarily possess this dominative control. Workers are not the masters of their own purposiveness. This is a *structural* condition: the unfreedom of workers is administered not only by capital owners themselves, but through an array of mediating regulators, who endow these social relations with their systematic, durable character. And these relations are global in scope. Political communities in the rich world still dominate those in the old colonial periphery, under a pervasive order of neo-imperialism. Whatever globalization's effect on poverty rates, it has not freed the developing world from relations of exploitation. Or so Vrousalis argues.

Our symposium on *Exploitation as Domination* includes critical notices by S.M. Love, Lucas Stanczyk, and Gulzaar Barn, along with a reply to their arguments by Vrousalis. While broadly sympathetic to the aims

and upshot of the book, the contributors each in their own way challenge important parts of its argument.

S.M. Love is concerned with the theory of justice subtending Vrousalis' conclusions. She affirms his conclusions, but thinks they can only be sustained via a specific route. Her article works through the Neo-republican, recognitional, and Kantian approaches to domination, and argues that only the last can consistently explain the wrongmaking features of capitalist power relations. She contends that the first approach is essentially descriptive, so it fails to substantiate the claim that unfreedom is unjust. The second approach, in her view, is properly normative, but it reaches too deeply into an agents' motivational states to support a theory of justice, as opposed to a theory of (im)moral action. Finally, she sustains that the Kantian approach succeeds in incorporating relations of freedom into a theory of public right, and thereby anchors Vrousalis' case against capitalist exploitation on firm normative grounds.

For his part, Lukas Stanczyk argues that the Vrousalian emphasis on power over another's purposive labor does not register salient features of exploitative relations. Something crucial is absent from the domination conception: the normative force of *reciprocity*. In social interactions, people have claims on another that are distinct from their claim to reciprocity as such. It is against this independent moral standard that we should assess whether, in any given cooperative context, the parties are reciprocating appropriately. Where there is a culpable reciprocity failure on that score, there you find exploitation. In an intimate partnership, for example, A can passively accept advantages flowing from B's besotted devotion, but deal coldly with B in return. A is a taker. She exploits B, but without directing B's purposive actions; so unilateral control over purposive action is not—contra Vrousalis—necessary for exploitation. Stanczyk marshals different arguments to show that his reciprocity conception is also to be favored over the harm-based, distributive, and respect-based accounts of exploitation.

To close off the symposium, Barn concedes that the relation between workers and capitalists is exploitative in just the way, and for the reasons, that Vrousalis identifies. But as a general theory of domination, she thinks the book fails to capture aspects of patriarchy that fall outside the category of domestic and sexual labor. The ideological norms that uphold male social power are broader than this category allows, and their effects also harm the dominators. Barn's claim is that Vrousalis neglects this.

Moreover, Barn contends that his account of exploitation, when applied to surrogacy, is problematic. It entails that a vulnerable woman recruited into the practice of renting out her womb, exploits the infertile couple paying her to pursue their familial ends because she possesses the means of sexual reproduction. This implication, Barn maintains, is implausible.

We hope that this collection of contributions, and Vrousalis' book, will stimulate the readers to further discuss the problems that the current economic system is entrenched in, and their putative wrongness.

These papers were presented and discussed in a lively symposium in Rotterdam in March 2023. The editors are grateful to all the participants in that event, to the authors who contributed to this special issue, and of course to Nicholas Vrousalis for having written such a stimulating book. We also wish to thank Gergana Boncheva and James Grayot for assisting us in the editorial work and the Erasmus Institute of Philosophy and Economics and the Erasmus School of Philosophy at the Erasmus University Rotterdam for supporting the *EJPE*.

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