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## How exploiters dominate

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### ABSTRACT

This paper argues that exploitation is a form of domination, domination for self-enrichment. In a slogan, exploitation is a dividend of servitude—a benefit the powerful extract by converting the vulnerable into their servants. The paper argues that what makes exploitation wrong is that it constitutes domination-induced unilateral service to others; that this form of servitude is necessarily cashed out in terms of labour time or effort; that competing accounts of exploitation fail to do justice to the servitude dimension; and that what distinguishes capitalism historically is the way it reproduces a structural dilemma between dominated work and no work.

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This article argues that exploitation is a form of domination, domination for self-enrichment. In a slogan, exploitation is a dividend of servitude—a benefit the powerful extract by converting the vulnerable into their servants. The article elaborates on this idea, defends it against criticism, and argues that it is superior to competing contemporary accounts of exploitation. More specifically, theorists of exploitation face three urgent questions. First, what is the *metric* of exploitation complaints, the yardstick for their individuation and measurement? Second, what are their *wrongmaking* features? Third, what is the *modality* of these features under capitalism, that is, what gives exploitation under capitalism its historical specificity? Liberal political philosophy couches its answer to the metric question in terms of (access to) welfare, goods, capabilities, or a combination thereof; to the wrongmaker question in terms of coercion, rights or fairness; and to the

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modality question by appeal to the mutually consensual nature of transactions by reciprocally situated commodity owners. This article offers better answers to these questions, inspired by the Marxist tradition. I argue that what makes exploitation wrong is that it constitutes domination-induced unilateral service to others; that this form of servitude is necessarily cashed out in terms of labour time or effort; that competing accounts of exploitation fail to do justice to the servitude dimension; and that what distinguishes capitalism historically is the way it reproduces a structural dilemma between dominated work and no work.

The article has six sections. [Section 1](#) discusses the metric, or currency, of exploitation complaints, focussing on seminal work by John Roemer. [Section 2](#) studies wrongmakers; it argues that exploitation is domination-induced unequal exchange. [Section 3](#) discusses structure; it argues that what makes capitalist exploitation historically specific is its mode of reproduction of dominated labour. [Section 4](#) situates exploitation complaints squarely within a domination account and discusses its implications. [Section 5](#) and [6](#) show that the domination account is superior to two competing contemporary liberal accounts, one based on vulnerability (due to Allen Wood) and one based on fairness (due to Richard Arneson).

## 1. Metrics

Exploitation theory is largely concerned with the control and distribution of the surplus from positive-sum transactions. What makes such transactions particularly interesting is that they are typically mutually consensual and beneficial. Contrast theft: both exploitation and theft are forms of wrongful taking, but theft is necessarily involuntary and typically zero-sum. Exploitation, by contrast, need not be involuntary<sup>1</sup> and is often positive-sum. Indeed, mutually beneficial and consensual transactions are the normative standard to which defenders of capitalism usually appeal. If anti-capitalist critique is to have any bite, it must be able to explain why such transactions are, mutual benefit notwithstanding, objectionable.

This section studies how exploitation gets cashed out in mutually beneficial transactions between consenting adults. Consider:

*Pit* - A, B and C are alone in the desert. A and C find B lying at the bottom of a pit. A proposes to extract B, on condition that B works for A for a wage of \$2/day for the rest of B's life. C also proposes to extract B, on condition that B works for C for \$1/day for the rest of B's life. B accepts A's offer.

The *Pit* case involves a proto-labour–market relation. Complying with C's offer of \$1 or with A's offer of \$2/day is a significant improvement over B's pre-

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<sup>1</sup>Need not: slavery is exploitative, but involuntary.

proposal situation of, say, \$0/day. In addition, each of A and C have the assurance that, were B to reject one offer, she could still get out by accepting the other.

*Pit* involves exploitation; the question is why. The answer I offer is that it matters, from the point of view of freedom, who serves whom and why. I begin by showing that, for all the criticisms levelled against the idea of unequal exchange of labour, it remains conceptually indispensable to understanding why A exploits B in the context of economic relationships.

### 1.1. Unequal exchange of labour

One of Marxism's enduring legacies to exploitation theory is a set of definitions based on the *unequal exchange of labour* (UE). UE offers a specifically labour-based interpretation of what it means to take advantage of another.<sup>2</sup> On this definition, A exploits B only if B unilaterally serves A, or, equivalently, A extracts unreciprocated labour flow from B, where A and B may be individuals, groups, or classes.<sup>3</sup> Let  $L_i^G$  stand for the amount of labour time agent  $i$  expends, or gives, in production, and let  $L_i^R$  stand for the amount of labour  $i$  receives through her consumption bundle. Then UE between A and B obtains if and only if:

$$(UE) L_A^R > L_A^G \text{ and } L_B^R < L_B^G$$

The UE definition has some compelling features. Suppose A owns two slaves, B and C. B is very productive: she produces a surplus  $S$  over and above what is necessary for her subsistence. A appropriates  $S$ . C, on the other hand, is not very productive: she produces just enough to keep herself alive. A does not appropriate any surplus from C, and hence does not benefit at C's expense. It is plausible that A exploits B, but not C. The UE definition resonates with this intuition.<sup>4</sup> The UE definition also allows that the labour contribution variable,  $L_i^G$ , is defined as a proportion of total labour expended. The upshot is that one can use it to construct a general

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<sup>2</sup> People can be exploited without extraction of labour. Selling your kidneys, or your blood, can be exploitative. Although these transactions would fall under the generic definition of exploitation offered in this paper—domination for self-enrichment—they would not involve labour extraction. The more limited purpose of this paper is to explain how the generic definition applies to social reproduction, that is, to the reproduction of social structures through the objectification of human mind and muscle. On this, more limited, ambition, blood and kidneys do constitute objects of social reproduction.

<sup>3</sup>Unreciprocated labour flow is therefore a generalization of the Marxian idea of the extraction of surplus labour. The *locus classicus* here is Roemer (1982). Roemer showed that, under certain assumptions about original endowments and preferences, total labour time in the economy will decompose into a group of agents who optimize by consuming more labour than they produce (presumptive exploiters) and a group of agents who optimize by consuming less labour than they produce (presumptive exploitees).

<sup>4</sup>In this case,  $L_A^R > L_A^G = 0$  and  $L_B^R < L_B^G$ , while  $L_C^R = L_C^G$ . Note that UE is uncontaminated by assumptions about the determination of the value or price of *individual* commodities: it neither entails nor presupposes such a theory. It is therefore orthogonal to the *Ricardian* labour theory of value (see Roemer 1982 and Cohen 1988 for discussion).

equilibrium theory of exploitation, that is, a structural account of the distribution of labour flow and its forms of reproduction.<sup>5</sup>

A further advantage of UE is that it can be straightforwardly related to the notion of effort. Instead of representing actual or counterfactual labour time,<sup>6</sup> the designated labour contribution variable  $L_i^G$  might represent the amount of effort  $i$  expends, or the amount of effort discounted by the amount  $i$  can expend. Call the discounted form of effort *relative effort*. Absolute and relative effort are measures of how intensely  $i$  endeavours to serve herself and others, that is, *provide effort* for them.

By way of illustration, suppose that C is less productive than B, such that  $L_B^G > L_C^G$ , where this inequality is exclusively due to B's superior talents. Then it is possible to define  $e_i^G$  as a relative effort variable, such that  $e_i^G$  expresses, say, the quantile within the effort distribution of  $i$ 's talent *type*.<sup>7</sup> This removes the influence of talent heterogeneity, thereby equalising C's contribution with that of any other (more or less talented) agent in the same quantile. In the case where the inequality in labour given is exclusively due to talent inequality, we get:  $e_B^G = e_C^G$ . More generally, unequal exchange of *effort* between A and B obtains if and only if:

$$(UE') e_A^R > e_A^G \text{ and } e_B^R < e_B^G$$

These are different ways of thinking about unequal exchange, that is, what it means for B to serve A without A serving B. This failure of reciprocity seems to provide a necessary condition for exploitation. It does not, however, provide a sufficient condition. For suppose that one social group *freely* optimises by gifting whatever goods it creates, through its collective efforts and with its own labour power, to another group. Then, intuitively, the resulting unequal exchange is not exploitative. Unreciprocated or unilateral service, in and of itself, does not constitute exploitation. On the domination view defended in this article, UE constitutes exploitation if and only if it issues from domination: it is A's *domination* of B that converts B's unilateral service to A into servitude. So unequal exchange, on this view, is merely the *currency* of servitude.

Now, Roemer (1994, chapter 3) disputes this conclusion: he claims that UE is neither necessary nor sufficient for exploitation. Since I agree with Roemer about sufficiency, I only discuss his argument against necessity.

<sup>5</sup>If the product of labour, in the economy as a whole, has a monetary expression, as it does under capitalism, and if capitalism presupposes a separation between propertied capitalists and propertyless workers, then it can be shown that the UE definition satisfies certain attractive axioms, such as the "new interpretation" of the labour theory of value. See Foley (1982) and Duménil (1984) for the new interpretation, and Veneziani and Yoshihara (2018) for the proofs.

<sup>6</sup>Actual labour time is the amount of time B spends producing. Counterfactual labour time is the amount of time B would have worked, had she produced at the average rate of productivity. Marx's notion of socially necessary labour time is a counterfactual magnitude.

<sup>7</sup>On types, see Roemer (2000). On relative effort, see Roemer and Trannoy (2016).

## 1.2. Roemer on unequal exchange

According to Roemer, UE is not necessary for exploitation because asset-rich people—presumptive exploiters—may give more labour or effort to asset-poor people—presumptive exploitees—than they receive from them. Consider:

*Domestic Servant* - A is rich and B is poor. A hires B as A's domestic servant for the rest of B's life. A's and B's preferences over work and leisure jointly imply that, in equilibrium, labour flows from A to B. That is, B will receive more labour than she gives and A will receive less.

Suppose that, in the context of *Domestic Servant*, A dominates B. By the UE definition, however, labour flows the wrong way, from A to B. So A does not exploit B. On Roemer's view, *per contra*, A *does* exploit B. Starting from this intuition, Roemer infers that Marxists should *not* be interested in labour flow and, by implication, in UE-type exploitation. Marxists should focus, instead, on distribution and property relations. Roemer's alternative, non-UE definition of capitalist exploitation goes as follows. For any coalition of agents A and its complement B, A exploits B if and only if:

- (i) were B to withdraw from the society, endowed with its per capita share of society's alienable property (i.e., produced and nonproduced goods), and with its own labour and skills, then B would be better off (in terms of income and leisure) than it is at the present allocation;
  - (ii) were A to withdraw under the same conditions, then A would be worse off (in terms of income and leisure) than it is at present;
  - (iii) were B to withdraw from society with its own endowments (not its per capita share), then A would be worse off than at present.
- (Roemer 1994, p. 40)

Roemer calls this the *property relations definition*. The definition entails that labour flow is irrelevant to exploitation: whether labour flows from A to B or vice versa, as long as (i)–(iii) are satisfied, it is A who exploits B. Roemer's argument for the definition, and hence for the irrelevance of labour flow, is invalid. For it is precisely because of the nature of the *flow* that we should be interested in the transactions Roemer censures as unjust. That is, Roemer's examples are insensitive to the kind of power A's wealth confers upon A, and the kind of vulnerability B's wealthlessness confers upon B. The rest of this section elaborates.

## 1.3. Why unequal exchange is indispensable

Consider the *Pit* case. Suppose there is an inegalitarian distribution of ropes, such that A has a rope, which B lacks; the distribution of ropes confers power on A over B. That power, in conjunction with A's disposition to use

it, ensures that B will find it costly to leave the pit, that is, do what she has reason to do independently of A's power. So when A's offer gets accepted, A's rope-conferred power gets channelled into B's conditions of action. It is, I think, the nature of this power, not the background distribution which *confers* it, that makes the relationship between A and B objectionable.

To focus intuitions further, consider an example due to Cohen (1995, chapter 8). There is unequal gun ownership, such that the highwayman, A, owns a gun, but the rambler, B, does not. Cohen writes: 'Highway robbery is unjust because it is a transfer of money *for the wrong reason* (to wit, in this case, the victim's fear that the highwayman will kill him)' (Cohen 1995, p. 206). But then the objectionable feature of robbery is, once again, the nature of the normative landscape that gun inequality creates—including the fact that A can now get B to act for gun-given reasons—not the fact of unequal gun distribution.<sup>8</sup> A hinders B's acting for reasons independent of the gun-given reasons, which is what makes A's transaction with B unfree.

Of course, sometimes unequal gun ownership does not lead to robbery. There is, as a consequence, no unequal exchange of labour. In these cases, there is no exploitation. It does not follow, however, that the relationship between A and B is unobjectionable. That is, if A uses his gun-conferred power to get B to respond to the reasons that power grounds, then A dominates B. So A can dominate B, even if B does not provide unreciprocated service. Suppose that Cohen's highwayman, A, changes his mind in the last minute, removing the gun from B's forehead. Given A's gun-conferred power, B remains unable to respond to reasons she has, independently of that power. As I will explain in Section 3, this constitutes domination. If I am right, then the conclusion carries over to cases like *Domestic Servant*. That is, although there is no exploitation in these examples (because surplus labour flows in the wrong direction), the wrongmaker—A's domination of B—survives.

In response to this set of objections, Roemer (1994, chapter 5) softens his opposition to UE. He considers the following example (which he attributes to Erik Wright):

*Rich and Poor* - Consider the case of two agents, Rich and Poor, who are initially endowed with 3 and 1 units of capital, respectively. This distribution is unfair: suppose that the fair distribution is egalitarian. Rich wants to consume prodigiously, while Poor only wants to subsist and write poetry. Rich works up all his capital stock, but wants to consume even more than what is thereby produced, and so Poor hires Rich to work up Poor's capital stock, paying Rich a wage and keeping enough of the product to enable him to subsist... I previously wrote that Rich did exploit Poor in this example, but I now do not think so. Therefore I would substitute, for clause [(iii)], the following: *[A] gains by virtue of the labor of [B]*. (Roemer 1994, p. 106, emphasis added)

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<sup>8</sup>For discussion of Cohen's own vacillations on the significance of labour flow for exploitation, see Vrousalis (2015, chapter 4).

Since Rich would be worse off if Poor withdrew with her *actual* share, and given that Rich would be worse off if Poor withdrew with her *per capita* share, Roemer's property relations definition implies that Rich exploits Poor. But this is counterintuitive, Roemer concedes: the counterfactuals in his definition do not tell us enough about the nature of the relationship between Rich and Poor to pick it out as exploitative.<sup>9</sup> He emends the definition accordingly. But now the question arises: *why* is it that, on Roemer's emended definition, A must gain 'by virtue of B's labour'? What is so special about gain from labour?<sup>10</sup>

The answer, I submit, must have something to do with relations of dominion and servitude: *who serves whom and why*. By reintroducing labour into his definition, Roemer smuggles something like a domination account into his conception of exploitation. It is significant, in this connection, that an early version of the property relations definition (Roemer 1982, p. 195) replaces term (iii), the 'withdrawal with one's own share' condition, with: 'A being in a relation of *dominance* to B'. If I am right, Roemer's conception of exploitation has come full circle; from 'dominance' (Roemer 1982) to maldistribution (Roemer 1985) to domination (Roemer 1994).

There is, therefore, some justification for thinking about exploitation in terms of unequal exchange, especially when it comes to economic relationships. In what follows, I assume that exploitation complaints must be cashed out in terms of labour time or effort. More precisely: A exploits B only when A receives unilateral service from B, in accordance with some variant of the UE definition. UE is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for exploitation. I now show how domination completes the set of sufficient conditions.

## 2. Wrongmakers

### 2.1. The general account

I begin by sketching an account of domination. Suppose A has power over B and is disposed to use it. These are two power-facts. Power-facts are reason-giving: a doctor has power over her patient, a teacher over the student, a coach over an athlete, and so on. When things go well, the motivations of the patient (in taking the medicine), of the student (in reading the book), and of the athlete (in running the marathon), do not reflect the power-facts. That is, their actions are performed for the sake of values independent of the dispositions of doctors, teachers, and coaches, respectively. Contrast the power of the slaveowner over the slave, of the highwayman over the rambler, of the husband over the wife in the patriarchal family. Here things

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<sup>9</sup>The case can be made that Poor exploits Rich. I discuss this possibility in the Appendix.

<sup>10</sup>In Section 2.3, I ask whether there is something special about labour *tout court*.



are not going all that well. That is, all three cases seem to involve relations of dominion and servitude, or a relation between an overdog and an underdog. What explains the difference between the two sets of cases?

The answer is that in the latter set of cases (slaves, ramblers, wives), B's normative reasons to do what the proposer proposes constitutively track considerations that are dependent on the power-facts. That is, B has no reason to do what slaveowners, highwaymen and husbands propose, independently of what *they* want B to do, are interested that B does, or are disposed that B does. Moreover, all three proposers are, by existential necessity, out to get B to *take these power-facts as her reasons*. Contrast doctors, teachers and coaches: when things are going well, their relationship to patients, students, athletes helps the latter track normative requirements independent of the former. So, when things are going well, the proposer's power merely facilitates action *for* the power-independent consideration; the proposer empowers the proposee's recognition of, and reaction to, that consideration.<sup>11</sup> More succinctly: the nondominator's power is *self-effacing* in favour of power-independent, objective values; the dominator's is not.<sup>12</sup>

On this view, there exists a class of wrongs that consists in A getting B to take her power over B as a reason for B to perform the power-directed act. Exploitation is a subset of this set of wrongs; it obtains when the power-directed act, performed for the power-given reason, is geared towards A's enrichment. Exploitation, by implication, is domination for self-enrichment; the dividend A extracts from B's servitude.<sup>13</sup> The rest of this section discusses exploitation's connections with vulnerability, on the one hand, and with domination, on the other. I then take up several important conceptual implications of the domination view.

## 2.2. *The place of vulnerability*

Exploitation entails the instrumentalization of vulnerability, the using and playing on another's weakness. But what is vulnerability? Vulnerability is sometimes conceived as a two-place relation between a person (including the person's well-being) and an object: for example, B is vulnerable when B stands under a boulder, such that the boulder is likely to fall, harming B. What one might call *social vulnerability*, on the other hand, is a three-place relation. Social vulnerability involves at least two agents, A, B, and an object. Here A has her finger on a button, which controls the boulder, or

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<sup>11</sup>For the idea of acting for reasons, see Korsgaard (2008) and Julius (2013).

<sup>12</sup>I defend the idea of non-domination as self-effacing power in 'Domination as self-effacing power', which is available from me upon request. Some may demur that my argument depends on an idiosyncratic or even implausible account of domination. In what follows, I urge them to plug in their favoured theory of domination: liberal, republican or feminist.

<sup>13</sup>For a recent attempt to formalise some of these ideas in a systematic way, see Skillman (2018).

the first aid kit; A therefore possesses the wherewithal to remove B from harm's way, or to ameliorate any harm that befalls B.

These relational properties—vulnerability-to, and dependence-on—are irreducibly social forms of powerlessness: they imply that some agent has a measure of control over the vulnerable party's actions, abilities and well-being. Any complete theory of exploitation must, in principle, be able to construct a composite index incorporating these diverse dimensions of disempowerment into a single metric of social vulnerability.

What is the relationship between social vulnerability and social power? On my understanding of that relationship, they are extensionally equivalent. Call this the *equivalence claim*.<sup>14</sup> Equivalence explains the sense in which B is vulnerable, and A powerful, in the *Pit* case. On this explanation, vulnerability is to power what defeat is to victory. This analogy does not preclude the kind of structural relationship between the powerful and the vulnerable, where one group or individual dominates another. For example, the victory of one army may be constituted by the defeat of many, just as the defeat of one army may be constituted by the victory of many. By the same token, the power of individual or group A may be constituted by the vulnerability of many Bs, and the vulnerability of B may be constituted by the power of many As. These conceptual configurations are all consistent with what may be called *structural* domination, which I discuss in [Section 3](#).

Now, the instrumentalization of vulnerability is necessary but not sufficient for exploitation. What completes the set of sufficient conditions is a specific kind of instrumentalization, that is, A getting B to take B's vulnerability as her reason for action. If vulnerability and power are equivalent, as I have argued, then B's taking her vulnerability as a reason is tantamount to B's taking A's power as her reason. This has important implications for the putative logical and moral priority of domination, which I discuss presently.

### **2.3. The priority of domination**

If to exploit is to benefit through the domination of others, then exploitation is a form of domination. More precisely, the order of explanation goes as follows:

- a. A exploits B.
- So

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<sup>14</sup>The equivalence claim can be thought of as the non-normative parallel of the Hohfeldian relation between liability and power. According to Hohfeld (1919), if A possesses a normative power, then A can change B's first-order Hohfeldian incidents (B's claims, permissions, and so on). Conversely, if B possesses a liability, then A can change B's first-order incidents. Normative liabilities and normative powers are logically equivalent.

- b. A benefits through A's domination of B.  
So
- c. A dominates B.

What needs to be shown is that (b) is the best explanation for the wrongness of (a). This section and the next make the positive case for this inference. Sections 5 and 6 rebut two alternative popular explanations, both of which contradict the inference.

Exploiters, I argued, must treat weakness as an opportunity for self-advancement. In terms of the phenomenology of this treatment, A, the exploiter, arrogates to herself a kind of superior status: whether by action or omission, she treats her own needs as superior to B's and steers B towards treating her own needs as inferior. Consider the *Pit* case again. Here, A's offer seems to degrade B's needs, ranking them as less urgent than A's. At the same time, B's needs are taken as a feature of A's situation to be played on, indeed instrumentalized, to yield a benefit for A. B, on the other hand, can only improve her own lot by accepting this ranking, indeed by seeing herself as someone whose desires and needs lack priority. When B takes A's *Pit* offer as a reason to serve A, B responds to the power-facts, as such, which is what A wants. And since, by assumption, this power-induced transaction involves unequal exchange, it is an instance of exploitation.

There is another way to state this. In *Pit*, A's proposal effectively says to B: 'You are weak, I am strong. Take my power (to press your labour-power into my service) as your reason (to serve me)'. When the ploy succeeds—that is, when the proposal has uptake—both A and B come to treat B as smaller than she is, to wit, as someone who takes her mere features (in the *Pit* case, her labour-power) as a reason to serve A. B is treated as smaller than she is, in the sense that she cannot do what she has reason to do (work, sleep, write poetry) *by responding to these reasons as such*—that is, work, sleep and write in response to the justificatory content of these activities, independently of B's power. Instead, B's normative identity is reduced to responding to A's control over those mere features and abilities of B that A finds useful. A knows this; indeed, she culpably uses her power to bring it about. A's disposition, in this sense, is the disposition of a master.

In response to this argument about the explanatory priority of domination, a question immediately arises about the moral relevance of labour. There is an ancient Marxist belief, dating back at least to Plato's *Republic*, according to which labour—the exertion of mind and muscle to affect worldly outcomes—is, in some sense, special. This specialness inverts the order of explanation from (a) to (b), such that the domination of person by person is derivative or metaphysically subordinate to exploitation. On this view, to exploit someone's whole person is to treat that person *as* her mere features, that is, to treat her as less than

*she* is. So, for example, to exploit a woman sexually is to treat her as if she were her genitals; to exploit a manual worker is to treat her as if she were her body; to exploit a mental worker is to treat her as if she were her brain, and so on. Call this the *exploitation-first view*.

On the exploitation-first view, exploiters necessarily treat exploitees as fragments, not of their own body, but of their own person.<sup>15</sup> A person is thereby reduced to the hands and legs and brain and genitals that serve her master. Domination, on this view, is exploitation *minus* the domination-induced benefit to the exploiter. There is no space to discuss this view here; I merely flag it as a conceptual possibility cognate to the view I am defending. And even if the exploitation-first view is sound, the currency and modality questions remain.

I now discuss modality.

### 3. Structure

This section offers an answer to the modality question: what features make capitalist exploitation historically specific? I argue that capitalism betokens a specific form of structural domination; capitalist reproduction systematically confronts its purveyors, the working class, with a choice between no labour and undominated labour. The principal locus of dominated labour is the labour market. Wage-labour, the commodity bought and sold in that market, is dominated labour.<sup>16</sup>

I begin by offering a definition of structural domination. After explaining how the capitalist labour market satisfies that definition, I elaborate on the role of agential dispositions in the reproduction of capitalism.

A social structure *S*, a reproducible set of power relations, betokens structural domination just when *S*'s reproduction is explained, in part, by the systematic removal of undominated options from the option sets of agents in *S*. Patriarchy, for example, is a social structure whose reproduction depends on systematic restriction of access to undominated options in women's choice sets. By the same token, capitalism confronts workers with a dilemma, structurally homologous to that faced by women in patriarchy: choose between dominated labour and no labour. I explain how capitalism reproduces that dilemma presently.

#### 3.1. Unfreedom in the market

Economists distinguish between two roles of markets: allocative and distributive. The allocative role consists in communicating relative scarcity to

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<sup>15</sup>Contrast Marx's famous discussion of Menenius Agrippa in Marx (1976, 481).

<sup>16</sup>This section rehearses some ideas defended extensively in "The Capitalist Cage: Structural Exploitation and Collective Agency in the Market", which is available from me upon request.

appropriately situated agents. Leon Walras famously described markets as spatiotemporally extended auctions, in which the auctioneer announces the relative scarcity value of widgets, given total demand for all marketed goods. In its allocative role, under Walrasian assumptions, the market seems morally unobjectionable; it merely signals relative scarcities. It is different with its distributive role. Consider the capitalist labour market. Its existence presupposes the separation of workers from the means of production. The question then becomes whether P, the owner of these means, helps Q, the non-owning worker, act for reasons independent of P's dispositions and power. If P helps Q in this way, then her power is self-effacing and she does not dominate Q. If not, then her power dominates Q.<sup>17</sup> I now argue for the latter conclusion.

Note, first, that the separation between capital and labour confers on owners power over workers. To possess a power over someone is to be able to get her to do things, by giving her incentives. Suppose Q, a propertyless cook, is hungry. Cookshops are privately owned. Q must therefore work for the cookshop-owner, P, or go hungry.<sup>18</sup> Therefore P possesses an ownership-conferred power over Q's cooking ability. What must be shown is that this power gets Q to respond to the power-facts (and not the power-independent facts that justify the content of the activity, such as Q's nutrition, the quality of the food, etc.). Insofar as P's role is distributive, that is, consists in providing nonmoral *incentives*, it clearly does. For, in the capitalist labour market, P's relation to Q is exclusively mediated by power, through offers, threats and throffers.<sup>19</sup>

These uses of power are, moreover, deliberate—you don't make a profit by fluke. In fact, they are explicitly aimed at extracting a maximum surplus from Q's labour. So here is what it means to be a cook under capitalism: that you *must* cook even when you are not hungry, and that you *can't* cook, even when you are. The capitalist cage, in other words, obstructs both cooking (if you are unemployed) and cooking for the reasons that justify cooking (if you are employed). These two hindrances are, moreover, existentially connected: by dint of her propertylessness, the employed cook is subject to the *threat* of being unable do what she has reason to do, namely cook, while the unemployed cook, by dint of her joblessness, is subject to the *offer* of cooking for the wrong, power-determined, reason (assuming she is lucky enough to receive such an offer!). It is therefore built

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<sup>17</sup>Republicans, such as Pettit (1997, 2012) would ask whether P's power is 'arbitrary' or 'unchecked'. The rest of this section can be read as an argument that capitalist power is always arbitrary, in the relevant sense.

<sup>18</sup>I leave it open, for the moment, that P and Q are individuals rather than groups.

<sup>19</sup>Offer: 'If you cook for me, I'll raise your wages'. Threat: 'If you don't cook for me, I'll fire you'. Throffer: 'If you cook for me, I'll raise your wages. If you don't, I'll fire you'.

into the structure of labour markets that P should ensure that the power-facts have uptake.<sup>20</sup> When they do, P dominates Q.

So capitalist reproduction systematically reproduces a situation in which Q has to choose between no work and dominated work—being paid to obey. Capitalism is, in this sense, structurally homologous to certain forms of patriarchy, which restrict the options of women to dominated sex and no sex.<sup>21</sup> Structural domination systematically restricts and, in the limit, eliminates the undominated option of free, mutually affirming activity.

There is, however, a way that markets can be made to serve freedom, as opposed to domination. To illustrate this, I now register one way of drawing the distinction between the allocative and the distributive function of markets.

### 3.2. Freedom in the market

Joseph Carens (1981) defends a system of market-based, profit-maximising firms, whose profits get redistributed after production, such that the post-tax distribution is egalitarian, in the appropriate metric. Carensian socialism enlists a set of moral incentives in production, which, in conjunction with redistribution, engender equality. Unlike some of Carens' defenders (e.g., Cohen 2009), I do not take this to be a representation of an idealised form of socialism. Rather, Carens presents a stylised picture of how we might harness the allocative function of markets without the distributive; that is, have market structure without capitalism. In this picture, it is false that powerful market actors have dominating power over others; they only act as traffic regulators of sorts. Let me explain.

Contrast a boss under capitalism (P) with a boss under Carensian socialism (R). P and R issue instructions to Q, who does the cooking: 'make the omelette with mushrooms, not tomatoes'. This instruction gives Q reasons to prefer mushrooms to tomatoes regardless of whether P or R utters it. But P's utterance has a different speaker meaning from R's. When P utters the instruction, Q understands that, if she uses mushrooms, she might get a pay-rise; if she uses tomatoes she might get fired. Q proceeds to make the omelette by responding to the power-facts, that is, by responding to P's power to raise wages or fire Q. When R utters the instruction, however, Q

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<sup>20</sup>Some economists maintain that the existence of power relations in the market requires dropping the assumption of perfect competition or market clearing (see, e.g., Bowles and Gintis 1992). This move confuses *economic* with *market* power: perfectly competitive and clearing markets are compatible with inequalities of wealth. Such inequalities, in turn, help constitute commodity-based wealth as an alien power over and above the direct producer. See Roemer (1982, chapters 1–3) for a seminal argument to that effect.

<sup>21</sup>See Frye (1983) and MacKinnon (1989) for discussion of the 'double bind' of patriarchal relations.

understands that, if she uses mushrooms, she is saving social resources; if she uses tomatoes, she is wasting them.

Under Carensian socialism, prices and wages possess a signalling function only: all they do is communicate relative scarcities.<sup>22</sup> It is as if the Walrasian auctioneer jumped out of the eggs, yolks running down his forehead, shouting: 'Make it with mushrooms!'. Under capitalism, by contrast, markets assume the form of an alien power, standing over and in opposition to the direct producer; the worker and the means of production are not immediately reconcilable through the familiar Walrasian mechanism—assuming we live in a Walrasian universe. So when R utters the instruction, R merely helps Q act for reasons independent of R's power and dispositions. When P utters it, P gets Q to take these dispositions as reasons to perform the power-directed act. This is why P's power, unlike R's, dominates Q.

### 3.3. *Structural vs. interpersonal domination*

On the account defended in this paper, domination is existentially dependent on P's dispositions, namely her disposition not to efface the power-facts from Q's conditions of action. This is what it means to treat another as a servant. But if capitalist economic structure excludes agential dispositions—in the sense that it only refers to the optimising behaviours of propertyless workers and propertied capitalists—then capitalist behaviour need not constitute domination. That is, domination generically requires *agential* dispositions of a certain kind, and since these dispositions are not necessarily part of capitalist structure, capitalist structure does not necessarily involve domination.

This objection rides roughshod of the distinction between two kinds of agential dispositions: *interpersonal* and *structural*. Interpersonal agential dispositions are dispositions of agents that are interpersonally grounded; they pertain to contingent relations between agents and groups thereof. Structural agential dispositions, on the other hand, are dispositions of agents whose conferral is connected to structure by way of reproductive necessity. More precisely, structural domination differs from interpersonal domination in that only the former contributes to, and is necessary for, its own reproduction. By the definition of structural domination, the power-disposition bundle necessary and sufficient for domination must contribute to the reproduction of that very domination. No such contribution is necessary for interpersonal domination.

Consider two examples. Take, first, prison structure: its reproduction requires certain dispositions on the part of the prison guards—that they enforce discipline, that they keep inmates in line, that they discourage

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<sup>22</sup>On the communicative value of market offers, see Harrison Frye (2017).

them from organising, and so on. Insofar as these dispositions are necessary for prison reproduction, in the sense that they figure ineliminably in the explanation of that reproduction, they are instances of structural domination. The excessively violent prison guard—‘excessively’ in the sense that her violence is unnecessary to prison reproduction—dominates the inmate, but only interpersonally.<sup>23</sup>

Now take patriarchy: suppose its reproduction requires a minimum amount of misogyny and a minimum amount of sexism, distributed across a population of sexist and misogynistic agents that includes women.<sup>24</sup> Suppose also that misogyny and sexism are measurable on a cardinal scale. It is then possible to define the ‘average misogynist’ and the ‘average sexist’ as any agent whose disposition, shared equally across the existing population of sexists and misogynists, would suffice to reproduce the existing patriarchy. The set of acts and dispositions that fall under that description would count as structural domination. The complement of that set, those acts of misogyny or sexism that exceed the reproductively necessary average, would then count as interpersonal domination.

I now apply these ideas to capitalist economic structure. Capitalists dominate workers by using their power over workers to extract maximum surplus labour—that is, maximum unilateral service—from them. Insofar as this power-disposition bundle is *reproductively necessary* for capitalism, it betokens structural domination. Insofar as it is reproductively unnecessary, it betokens interpersonal domination. As a reproducible structure of domination, capitalism requires certain agential dispositions on the part of both capitalists and workers.<sup>25</sup>

I now offer refinements to the domination view, by considering important implications and objections.

## 4. Implications

### 4.1. Master and servant

Wood (1995) argues that instances of pilfering, looting and small-scale manipulative extraction show that servants can exploit masters.<sup>26</sup> But

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<sup>23</sup>The idea of structural domination, thus defined, implies a notion of ‘surplus repression’, that is, the possibility of domination surplus to what is necessary for social reproduction. See Cohen (1978, chapter XI), Geuss (1981, pp. 17–18) and Roemer (1982, chapter 9) for different accounts of surplus repression.

<sup>24</sup>Manne (2017) discusses how these two variables might interact.

<sup>25</sup>The *intentions* of capitalists are irrelevant here. The kindly capitalist, who gives away all her profits to charity, is still disposed, on pain of competitive disadvantage, to extract as much labour as she can from her workers at the point of production. In her structurally-conferred disposition, she is no different from Henry F. Potter.

<sup>26</sup>See his subtle discussion of Doyle Lonnegan, the main gangster antagonist in the movie *The Sting*.



servants do not, by definition, dominate masters. Therefore exploitation does not entail domination. It follows that the domination account is false. More precisely:

( $\alpha$ ) If A exploits B, then A dominates B.

( $\beta$ ) Servants sometimes exploit their masters, *despite* the fact that masters dominate servants.

( $\gamma$ ) A dominates B, then it cannot be the case that B dominates A.

Claim ( $\alpha$ ) is the domination account; claim ( $\beta$ ) is Wood. Claims ( $\alpha$ )–( $\gamma$ ) are not jointly assertable. Crucially, if one affirms ( $\beta$ ) and ( $\gamma$ ), then it follows that ( $\alpha$ ) is false; the domination account fails. In defence of ( $\alpha$ ), I will argue that ( $\gamma$ ) is false. I note, in passing, that ( $\beta$ ) can be challenged. That is, *pace* Wood, it is possible to construe pilfering, looting, and manipulative extraction by servants merely as forms of *resistance*. This is one conceptual strand in James Scott's (1987) magisterial account of peasant resistance in *Weapons of the Weak*. Scott's account seems to imply that servants cannot exploit their masters. Rather, pilfering and looting merely attenuate the exploitation of servants *by* masters, giving the former a modicum of control over their own lives. This line of argument is promising, but I will not pursue it further. Instead, I will show that ( $\gamma$ ) should be rejected.

In general, the ascription of a power relationship is time- and context-sensitive, where context includes information about the resource distribution and background structure. Suppose Goliath possesses power over David across times  $t_1$  and  $t_3$  in contexts  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ , whereas David only possesses power over Goliath during time  $t_2$  in context  $C_3$ . What enables David to destroy Goliath, if he does so, is not his powerlessness, but his (temporally and contextually circumscribed) power over Goliath.

If this description of the Goliath–David relationship is sound, then Goliath's power over David is compatible with David's power over Goliath. And since such power might well involve domination, ( $\gamma$ ) is false. In other words, it is conceptually possible that B possesses *local* mastery over A, such that A is B's local servant. A possesses *global* mastery over B if A possesses a sufficient amount of local mastery, that is, possesses dominating power over B in a sufficiently large set of (temporally and contextually indexed) contexts. 'Reciprocal servitude' is therefore not an oxymoron. This revision gives the lie to ( $\gamma$ ) and renders ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ) compossible: master-exploiting servants possess *local* mastery over their *globally* servant-dominating masters.

#### 4.2. Exploiting billionaires

The *Pit* case, and examples like it, encourages the belief that exploitation is possible only if the exploitee is in dire need, lacks reasonable or acceptable

alternatives, or is in circumstances of deprivation or duress.<sup>27</sup> That belief is false. Consider:

*Lawn mower* - Zuckerberg knows a secret of Gates's that Gates does not want known. Zuckerberg has no moral obligation not to reveal it, despite the harm it will inflict on Gates, and no moral obligation to reveal it. Zuckerberg asks Gates to mow his lawn for the year, in return for nonrevelation of the secret. Gates grudgingly agrees.

In *Lawn mower*, Zuckerberg does not threaten Gates with something independently impermissible—he is permitted to reveal the harmful information. But he does *do* something impermissible, namely exploit Gates. This judgement goes through independently of Gates's basic needs or functionings. That is, *whatever* the threshold for basic-needs satisfaction and reasonable alternatives, Gates meets it, even by his own reckoning, both before and after the sensitive information is revealed. So, if Zuckerberg exploits Gates, then complaints of exploitation go through independently of claims about basic needs. It suffices that Zuckerberg has power over Gates—power enough to get Gates to perform some drudgery, such as mowing Zuckerberg's massive lawn for a year—and that Zuckerberg's power does not help Gates act for reasons independent of Zuckerberg's lawn-related dispositions. Gates performs domination-induced unilateral service for Zuckerberg; he is exploited.

Of course, needs matter. But that mattering is the mattering of moral *weight*, not the mattering of moral *ground*. That is, Zuckerberg's exploitation of Gates is much less morally urgent than Foxconn's exploitation of Shenzhen workers: there are very weighty reasons to try to attenuate the latter but not the former. This does not, however, affect the ground of the complaint, which is, in both cases, the conversion of Gates and the Shenzhen workers into someone's servant.

### 4.3. Lucrative offers

Now consider:

*Lecherous Offer* - A is a lecherous billionaire; B earns the median wage. A says to B: 'If you sleep with me, I'll give you \$1,000,000.' B accepts the offer.

Suppose that *Lecherous Offer* is an instance of domination. Does A exploit B? On the definition of exploitation offered in this article, the answer is: 'it depends'. There is a good theoretical reason for this ambivalence. Normally, the *labour content* of \$1,000,000 is higher than the labour content of sexual intercourse. This means that, in *Lecherous Offer*, labour time may

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<sup>27</sup>Variants on this idea have been defended by Sample (2003) and Snyder (2008), among many others.

be flowing the wrong way—from A to B, rather than vice versa. The rest of this section elaborates.

Suppose that the domination account is true, such that exploitation is domination-induced unequal exchange. Suppose, further, that *Lecherous Offer* involves domination, in the sense I have already mentioned. If A is to exploit B, then the amount of total labour given by B must be greater than the total labour given by A. Suppose the labour content of sexual intercourse is 8 hours. In the contemporary United States, the labour content of \$1,000,000 in 2018 prices is about 14,000 hours.<sup>28</sup> In other words, if the \$1,000,000 represents A's labour, and if A's labour is average labour, then *Lecherous Offer* involves A giving 14,000 hours and getting 8. Labour flows the wrong way, from rich to poor, in which case A seems not to be exploiting B.

Three remarks are relevant here. First, *Lecherous Offer* is an extreme case of a very widely observed phenomenon that generally *does* involve exploitation, namely sex work. Sex workers provide sex in return for a market-determined price. In general, these prices will be lower than \$1,000,000—otherwise demand would be negligible—and tend to reflect a labour content lower than the median or average wage. This implies that sexual labour will, in general, tend to flow from poor to rich—sex worker to client. The domination account *does* dub these cases as exploitative. Second, in the case of *Lecherous Offer*, it matters whether these 14,000 hours—and the \$1,000,000, which is its monetary expression—were accumulated by A through his own labour, or through the labour of others. The intuition that A exploits B may ride on the idea that these 14,000 hours are not *his* to give. If, for example, these hours are the fruit of prior exploitation, then A may yet be exploiting B. Third, whatever the source of these hours, A dominates B, even if he does not exploit her.

Now, these individualistic quibbles may be socially irrelevant to judgments of exploitation, because they ignore structure. That is, in order to ascertain whether A is an exploiter and B an exploitee, we need to know how much labour each contributes and receives as a proportion of *total* social labour, what property relation explains their share, and how that relation is reproduced. So, although it is conceivable that A does not exploit B in *Lecherous Offer*, there is no conceivable capitalist society in which that eventuality is realised. For, as a matter of structural necessity, capitalism confronts workers with a dilemma: choose between dominated work—such

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<sup>28</sup>The monetary expression of a unit of average labour is given by the ratio between net national product and total hours worked to produce it. My assumption in making the labour-content calculation is that the monetary expression of labour in the contemporary USA stands at about \$70/hour. On the very idea of the monetary expression of labour, see Foley (1982) and Dumenil (1984).

as wage-labour—and no work. Sex workers, like all workers, grasp the first horn of this dilemma.<sup>29</sup>

This concludes my exposition on the domination account. I now offer further refinements, by contrasting it with, and defending it against, competing theories of exploitation.

## 5. Against the vulnerability view

One account of the wrongmaking features of *Pit* is the *vulnerability view*.<sup>30</sup> On this view, A exploits B if and only if A treats B's vulnerabilities as opportunities to advance her own interests (Wood 1995, p. 136). A's *Pit* offer qualifies as treating B's vulnerabilities as opportunities to advance her own interests. Therefore A wrongfully exploits B. Richard Arneson maintains that the vulnerability view expresses sentiments that are 'too high-minded' (Arneson 2016a, p. 10). He asks us to imagine:

*Cancer treatment* - I live in an isolated rural region, in a region in which health care insurance is unavailable. There is only one qualified surgeon in the territory. After a routine check-up she informs me that I have a cancer that will swiftly kill me unless surgery is done. Only she can do the surgery. I'd be willing to give everything I own in exchange for the needed surgery, but the actual price she charges is modest, better than fair. This is business as usual for the surgeon. She makes her living by striking bargains like this with people in conditions like mine. She makes a good living. (Arneson 2016a, p. 10)

Arneson maintains that there is nothing exploitative about the surgeon's behaviour in this example. Yet she *does* take advantage of the patient's vulnerability, or treats it as an opportunity to advance her own interests. The vulnerability view thus generates false positives.

Richard Miller has recently argued, along similar lines:

Allen Wood... has claimed that capitalist exploitation is, *prima facie*, wrong because it derives from workers' weakness or vulnerability and all benefits derived from another's weakness or vulnerability are, *prima facie*, wrong. But the latter description of the tainting feature leads to the absurd conclusion that oncologists and personal trainers are engaged, *prima facie*, in a morally shady enterprise. (Miller 2017, p. 23)

I now argue that the domination view does not take the surgeon or the personal trainer to be exploiting, for it is not a variant of the vulnerability view.

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<sup>29</sup>See Section 3 above. I discuss this account of capitalist reproduction in "The Capitalist Cage: Structural Exploitation and Collective Agency in the Market". Wollner (2018) offers a cogent defence of structural exploitation and its modal implications.

<sup>30</sup>This section borrows extensively from Vrousalis (2016).

The first thing to note is that the original *Pit* case and the *Cancer treatment* case are importantly distinct, as the latter involves stipulation of a ‘modest, better than fair price’ (Arneson 2016a, p. 10).<sup>31</sup> How is this fair price determined? On Arneson’s view, exploitation necessarily violates a fairness baseline, the distributive outcome that maximises some responsibility-constrained prioritarian value function. Call this the *fairness view*—I will discuss its plausibility later. For the moment, it suffices that the domination view, much like the fairness view, can discriminate between *Cancer treatment* and *Pit*. For *Cancer treatment* does not imply that A, the surgeon, dominates B, the patient. Let me explain.

In Section 2, I argued that a necessary condition for domination is that A subordinates B, or treats B as a servant. These notions are vague, but are suggestive of how the domination view and the vulnerability view part ways. Suppose that A dominates B just when A gets B to perform the power-directed act for the power-given reason. This condition is not clearly satisfied in Arneson’s and Miller’s examples. In order to ascertain whether domination supervenes, we need more information about background structure and about the concomitant dispositions it confers on A and B. So the domination view does not generate the kinds of false positives that Arneson attributes to the vulnerability view. By implication, the former is generically more discriminating than the latter.

Arneson charges the domination view with overgenerating exploitation complaints in another class of cases. Consider:

*Comeupance* – For a time my wife is unemployed, and her bargaining position when it comes to family interactions is weak. I successfully demand that we watch a steady diet of horror movies and grade B action films. The tables are suddenly turned. She now has a good job and I have no steady income. She now drives a hard bargain when the question arises, what movies to see. We end up watching a stream of romantic comedies, which she likes far more than I do. (Arneson 2016a, p. 11)

In this connection, Arneson claims that ‘the transaction as described contributes toward an overall just outcome (more just than would occur if the transaction did not occur) and does so in a way that is not procedurally unfair or wrongful’ (Arneson 2016a, p. 15). It therefore does not involve exploitation. Now, two of these three judgments—namely, that *Comeupance* is procedurally innocuous and that it is not exploitative—are questionable. Suppose that A prefers horror and B prefers comedy. They arrive at the following arrangement: B will be A’s slave on Mondays and A will be B’s slave on Tuesdays. Monday slavery implies that both watch

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<sup>31</sup>I note, in passing, that ‘modest’ entails nonzero price, a position that is not argued for by Arneson.

horror—satisfying A’s preference—and Tuesday slavery implies that both watch comedy—satisfying B’s preference.

This trading-place-slavery is surely objectionable, procedurally and otherwise. It is also exploitative. So *Comeupance* and trading-place-slavery seem to share a wrongmaking feature, namely mutually beneficial reciprocal domination.<sup>32</sup> I argued in favour of the conceptual coherence of reciprocal domination, in [Section 4.1](#), above. On the domination view, therefore, both cases involve exploitation.

Arneson offers a ‘reciprocity’ version of the same example, in which A and B take turns, alternating between horror and comedy. He maintains that B’s power over A ‘ensures this fair result occurs’. When this happens, ‘[s]he brings about a just outcome by a not unfair means’. (Arneson 2016a, p. 19) Thus, although B possesses power over A, and B benefits from that power, B does not exploit A.

Arneson’s amendment is too underdetermined to yield his conclusion. For surely it matters whether B gets A to watch comedy through credible threats of enslavement, beating, or death, *even if* A can credibly threaten similar sanctions should B not watch horror. In other words, when the rotation occurs in such a way that A and B dominate each other, the outcome—whether fair or unfair—is tainted. That outcome is more like trading-place-slavery and less like a kingdom of ends: it is a reciprocity of servitude, not of freedom. On the domination view, to exploit is to benefit by constituting such servitude. Arneson’s examples, as presented, seem compatible with exploitation, in that sense.

## 6. Against the fairness view

I now turn the tables against Arneson, Cohen and Roemer.<sup>33</sup> I do this by vindicating the domination view against the fairness view. On the fairness view, A exploits B if and only if A takes unfair advantage of B, where the unfairness baseline is decided by background distribution. I will adhere to one influential formulation of this view, due to Arneson, and raise two objections: one from *lenience* and one from *trivialisation*. According to the lenience objection, the fairness view is too lenient on predatory, but prudent, proposers. According to the trivialisation objection, the fairness view trivialises the concept of exploitation, making it a mere upshot of distributive injustice.

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<sup>32</sup>One important difference between the two examples is that *Comeupance* originally involves patriarchy—the structural domination of women. This feature could be assumed away if both agents in Arneson’s example were male.

<sup>33</sup>This section develops a line of argument from Vrousalis (2013).

### 6.1. The lenience objection

Arneson subscribes to a luck egalitarian definition of the fairness baseline, according to which we ‘maximize a function of human well-being that gives priority to improving the well-being of those who are badly off and of those who, if badly off, are not substantially responsible for their condition in virtue of their prior conduct’ (Arneson 2000, p. 340). Equality in the relevant metric is desirable if and only if it is responsibility-constrained. Now consider:

*Ant and Grasshopper* – Ant works hard all summer and has ample provisions for the winter. Grasshopper lazes about and in January has an empty cupboard. Without interaction, Grasshopper will end up with welfare level two, which amounts to dire misery, and Ant with three, bare sufficiency, and in this scenario Ant is comparatively more deserving; the gap between the welfare level Ant has and what he deserves is far greater for him than is the comparable gap for Grasshopper. Ant proposes to sell some provisions to Grasshopper at a very high price. Grasshopper accepts the deal, though he would prefer to pay less and get more. With this deal in place, Grasshopper ends up with welfare level three and Ant with twelve. Even after this transaction, Ant’s welfare level is less than he deserves, by comparison with the situation of Grasshopper. (Arneson 2016a, p. 11)

Arneson claims that ‘there is nothing *prima facie* wrongful’ in what the Ant does when she charges for (costless) provisions at a very high price. He thinks this conclusion follows from the unfairness view. This valid argument shows why the fairness view is false. More precisely, if the *Pit* case involves exploitation, then so does *Ant and Grasshopper*. Suppose, for example, that by failing to accumulate provisions, Grasshopper finds herself incapable of fighting soil erosion. This lands her at the bottom of a pit. Ant walks up to her to offer work for \$1/day for the rest of Grasshoppers life, when she could have offered costless shelter. The possibilities, in the relevant metric, are:

(Ant, Grasshopper)

(i): Do nothing: (10, 0)

(ii): Sweatshop: (11, 1)

(iii): Shelter: (10, 2)

Now, it is plausible to think that Ant has an obligation to help Grasshopper. But one need not have a view on *that* to believe that (ii) is morally worse than (iii). That is, if Ant decides to help (decides to do something other than (i)) then she must not opt for (ii), in part *because* doing so constitutes exploitation. I take the widely shared intuition expressed in this consequent as evidence that the domination account is plausible. But now note that, if (ii) involves exploitation, then distributive injustice furnishes no

necessary condition for it. For, according to Arneson, all of (i), (ii), (iii) are equally acceptable at the bar of distributive justice.<sup>34</sup>

Arneson—and, indeed, Roemer—has nothing to oppose to such a cleanly generated capitalism on exploitation grounds, and this is an embarrassment to his claims to offering an egalitarian theory of exploitation.<sup>35</sup> The result generalises, I believe, to *any* theory of exploitation that posits some defensible account of distributive injustice as a necessary condition for exploitation. According to the domination view, Ant's behaviour in *Ant and Grasshopper* is no different from A's *Pit* behaviour: both prey on the weak for self-enrichment, when both have the (costless) option of helping without so preying.<sup>36</sup> Both thereby muster the power-facts to convert others into their servants and, in so doing, exploit them.

Arneson rejects this conclusion. He believes that the fairness view will not always take 'excessive' offers to be exploitative, independently of the historical sequence of events that led to them. Luck egalitarianism is, after all, a historical entitlement theory of justice (see Cohen 2011, chap. 6). But then his view lets some forms of predatory behaviour, such as Ant's, completely off the hook. This is the *obverse* of Anderson's (1999) famous complaint that luck egalitarianism is too harsh on weak, but imprudent, proposal-recipients. That is, whether or not Anderson is right, *luck egalitarianism is too lenient on predatory, but prudent, proposers*. In treating such proposers too leniently, the fairness view generates false negatives.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>(ii) is, after all, an upshot of Grasshopper's own choices or faults. One can construct examples where the demands of distributive justice are not only unnecessary for, but also *contradict* (what are, intuitively) claims of exploitation.

<sup>35</sup>Arneson, Cohen and Roemer can respond that a cleanly generated capitalism faces exploitation-independent objections. But this is beside the point: what makes cleanly generated capitalism interesting is precisely the pit-like nature it shares with its dirty cousins.

<sup>36</sup>Take another prominent example: leximin. Leximin does indeed dub (iii) as the most just distribution of widgets, and therefore seems to give the intuitive answer. But the result is misleading. Suppose the shelter outcome turns out to provide no substantial improvement in Grasshopper's condition, as follows:

- (Ant, Grasshopper)
- (i): Do nothing: (10, 0)
- (ii): Sweatshop: (11, 1)
- (iii): Shelter: (10, 1)

In this case, leximin dubs (ii) as the most just distribution, and therefore produces the same counterintuitive result (and so does maximin, which recommends choosing between (ii) and (iii') on a coin toss). Exploitation and distributive injustice again part ways.

<sup>37</sup>Arneson's attempt to soften the harshness of luck egalitarianism by appeal to a desert-based, as opposed to a choice-based, specification of luck egalitarianism, or by acceding to a pluralist understanding of its well-being requirements (p. 11), is moot in cases like *Ant and Grasshopper*. For Grasshopper is not merely imprudent; she is completely undeserving (absolutely or comparatively, pluralistically or monistically). And yet exploiting her still seems wrongful.



## 6.2. The trivialisation objection

There is another, more general, problem with the unfairness view, namely that it trivialises the concept of exploitation. Consider:

*Free riders* – Farmers take turns standing sentry at night, or are asked to pay a fair share of the costs of maintaining the sentry scheme, which provides safety for all neighborhood residents as a kind of public good. For residents of the neighborhood, if anyone gains sentry scheme safety, all residents must gain some of this good... Some residents decline to pay their fair share of the costs of maintaining the scheme. They do this in order to free ride; they understand that others will continue to supply the good even if they decline to contribute. This is unfair taking of advantage, I would say, and exploitive. But the free riders are not plausibly viewed as possessing social power over the other cooperators. (Arneson 2016b, p. 6)

In this example, the non-cooperators exploit, but do not possess power over the cooperators. The former *a fortiori* do not dominate the latter. Therefore, Arneson maintains, exploitation does not presuppose domination.

Now consider a variant of *Free riders*: the cooperators are those, and only those, who live on the periphery of the village. When bandits attack, they will mainly harm those on the periphery. Cooperators therefore have more to lose than non-cooperators. Indeed, this is why they cooperate. On the fairness view, both the original and the amended *Free riders* cases involve exploitation. On the domination view, however, only the amended case involves exploitation. For only in the amended example do the non-cooperators possess a power over the cooperators; it is, after all, their noncooperation that affects the interests of the latter so adversely. If that power dominates, and if the non-cooperators benefit through that power, non-cooperators exploit cooperators.

Of course, the domination view is consistent with thinking that the non-cooperators treat the cooperators unfairly in the amended variant of *Free riders*. But nothing is gained, and something is lost, if the wrongmaking features of the latter case are assimilated into the former. For the amended *Free riders* case does not involve *mere* unfair advantage-taking: there is a wrongmaker surplus to that feature. The surplus consists in the possession, by noncooperators, of dominating power over cooperators, which the former use to extract unreciprocated service—in the form of security—from the latter. The power of noncooperators allows them to treat cooperators as their servants. Put differently, exploitation is the dividend that noncooperators earn from the servitude of cooperators.

The moral of this story, I think, is that *not all unfair free riding counts as exploitative*. To make this clearer, consider another example. Suppose B is fleeing persecution. She enters A's boat and hides under the sails. B free rides on A's rowing effort, which moves the boat from one side of the river

to the other. It is plausible that B takes advantage—perhaps *unfair* advantage—of A. On the domination view, however, she does not exploit. Only power-grounded advantage-taking constitutes exploitation, on that view.

On the fairness view, by contrast, ‘unfair treatment’ and ‘exploitation’ are used interchangeably. What is the extra purchase of saying that A *exploits* B, on this view? Arneson’s answer is ‘not much’. Indeed, he uses ‘unfair treatment’ and ‘exploitation’ as synonymous. His recent essay on the topic concludes as follows: ‘I come empty pockets when asked, what moral principle or standard determines what makes voluntary exchange fair or unfair, exploitative or nonexploitative’ (Arneson 2016a, p. 28). Perhaps, on Arneson’s view, exploitation terms serve to *categorise* fairness terms. It is unclear how they do even that. But suppose that Arneson is right about the concept of exploitation, whose contours are defined by the fairness view. I claim that there is a concept distinct from Arneson’s, call it *shmexploitation*, whose contours are defined by the domination view, which takes cases like *Pit* and *Ant and Grasshopper* as instances of wrongful advantage-taking. If I am right about these instances, then *shmexploitation* captures instances of wrongful advantage-taking that are surplus to exploitation: *shmexploitation* is explanatorily superior to exploitation in that respect. We should think of cases like *Pit*, *Ant and Grasshopper*, and *Comeupance* in terms of *shmexploitation*, not exploitation.

There is, I conclude, a fundamental disagreement between advocates of the fairness view and advocates of the domination view as to the bigger picture: the latter takes exploitation claims to be about relations of domination and servitude. The former takes them to be about unfairness and maldistribution. On the one hand, the fairness view gives the wrong verdict on cases like *Ant and Grasshopper* and *Pit*. If the lenience objection is sound, then the fairness view generates false negatives. On the other hand, the fairness view is unable to account for the distinctive wrongmaking features of naked instances of unfair treatment—such as *Free riders*—as opposed to cases involving abuse of power—such as the amended version of *Free riders*. If the trivialisation objection is sound, then the canonical liberal view deprives exploitation claims of any distinctive moral bite. It should be rejected for these reasons.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that exploitation is a form of domination, namely domination for self-enrichment. According to the domination account, such self-enrichment involves the power-induced extraction of unilateral service from others. I have argued that this account of exploitation is distinct from competing theories of exploitation; that it gives rise to a plausible account

of structural domination; that it captures intuitions about predatory behaviour and about the special explanatory function of exploitation complaints surplus to these theories, and that it is superior to these theories for these reasons.

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## Appendix: Rich and Poor

In Section 1.3, I broached Roemer's *Rich and Poor* example. The example is important, because it implies that labour flow is indispensable to any account of exploitation. Yet the example seems to involve domination-induced unequal exchange, *on the part of Poor*. Are we to infer that Poor exploits Rich, in Roemer's example? I think we should. Here's why.

In Roemer's setup, Rich and Poor's respective endowments of 3 and 1 are not proportional to the power each of them has over the other. Indeed, in *Rich and Poor*, Poor has more power over Rich rather than vice versa. And if Poor can use that power to get Rich to provide unilateral service to Poor, then Poor exploits Rich. This is a palatable conclusion because Roemer's world is not our world. In our world, wealth is normally proportional to power over others. This has to do with the specific form that wealth assumes here.

Our world is well-described, as a first pass, by this sentence: 'The wealth of those societies, in which the capitalist mode of production reigns, presents itself as an "immense heap of commodities."' (Marx 1976, p. 125). If this is true, if wealth is power-conferring, and if enough social relations are commodified, then social wealth will confer power on those who possess enough commodities. That power, which is called *capital*, consists in the ability of the wealthy to command the labour of others. So either *Rich and Poor* does not represent a capitalist society—in which case Roemer's endowments are *not* capital—or Rich is not really rich and Poor is not really poor, in the relevant sense.