

conventions cannot be true. But this is to take a stand on a very controversial meta-ethical issue about the nature of well-being judgements, and they owe us arguments for this radical form of conventionalism. No such argument is presented or hinted at in their book.

We would like to end on a positive note. Even though we have some concerns about the third part of the book, it is important to stress that the other parts are very rewarding. As we pointed out in the beginning, the first and second parts provide a historical survey that neatly summarizes the measurement debate from Bentham to Harsanyi. In addition, the role of psychophysics is explored in the context of utilitarianism.

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*Exploitation as Domination: Why Capitalism is Unjust*, Nicholas Vrousalis, Oxford University Press, 2023, 224 pages.

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In *Exploitation as Domination*, Nicholas Vrousalis brings philosophical discussions of exploitation full circle back to capitalism. In the tradition of analytical Marxism,

exploitation has always been a central focus; it is central to understanding how capitalism works, what its central social conflicts are, and what is wrong with it. G.A. Cohen, one of the founders of this tradition and Vrousalis' mentor, explored the problem of exploitation primarily to establish the moral grounds for a philosophically consistent critique of capitalism. Following the collapse of state socialism, Cohen argued that Marxist philosophers needed to go 'from facts to norms' – back to philosophical basics – to unburden themselves from the weight of their controversial theory of class conflict by emphasizing egalitarian moral principles (Cohen 2001). His view on exploitation as a downstream effect of inequality in productive assets reflected this shift in emphasis.

But the philosophical debate on exploitation did not remain focused on the distinct sort of class exploitation that interested Cohen. This debate became increasingly far removed from capitalist political economy, moving in the direction of a much more general moral argument about moral reciprocity, advantage-taking and social vulnerability to predation in a myriad of cases, like those of organ donors, gestational surrogates and sweatshop labour (Wood 1995; Wertheimer 1999; Arneson 2016).<sup>1</sup> All of these cases have to do with poverty and inequality, but philosophers did not necessarily discuss them in a way that indicted capitalism on the whole. It is refreshing that Vrousalis points out how politically anaemic such moral accounts of exploitation can be when they are not contextualized in a capitalist setting. The system matters because it explains why people are exploited in the way that they are.

Vrousalis argues that what is wrong with exploitation is that it is a form of domination. In his view, exploitation is unilateral control over another's purposive activity. For instance, employers want to turn a profit and employees do their bidding for profit to materialize. This unilateral control entails servitude. If A exploits B whenever A controls the purposive activity of B, then B not only serves, but is a servant of, A. Put differently, domination is a relation of servitude and exploitation is the dividend of that servitude, or the benefit that accrues to the dominator that enables them to continue to dominate. For an economic relationship to be non-exploitative, then, it must adhere to the Non-Servitude Proviso, which posits that no one should have unilateral control over the purposiveness of others. Capital dominates labour because it violates the Non-Servitude Proviso, even if the exploitative relationship is positive-sum. In one way, everyone benefits because they are better off than they would be without engaging in the relationship to begin with (the exit options may be quite poor for labour), but in another, more normatively fundamental way, the relationship is still one of domination.

With domination Vrousalis finds an intersection with more classical forms of Marxian critical theory. Domination has historically been the normative core of Marxian critiques of capitalism, though as Vrousalis points out, it often goes by other names, such as alienation or reification. In fact, he organizes reification, alienation and exploitation together around the charge of domination. 'Reification' occurs when persons treat other persons as things, whereas 'alienation' is the sense of estrangement people can have from themselves, others

<sup>1</sup>For examples of these case studies, see the bulk of the essays in Deveaux and Panitch (2017).

or society as a whole. These concepts can all be put under the heading of domination if they emerge from a condition of servitude. So, one might treat another as a thing if one primarily views that person as instrumental to getting a sufficient return on one's investment. Further, one might feel alienated from oneself and others if one is used in this way.

The obstacle to recognizing that domination is the normative thread that unites these other concepts into a coherent critique of capitalism has been that accounts of alienation and reification have tended to deal with exploitation in a cursory way. The problem of underspecifying the role that exploitation plays in this mix of critical concepts leads to either conflating critiques of capitalism with those of modernity as such or conflating a critique of capitalism with critiques of Western values, norms and culture. Capitalism is not mutually interchangeable with these other targets of criticism and historians contest the role that they played in capitalism's historical development, even in the advanced capitalist societies of the West. The idea of exploitation as domination helps to create a link between economic process, cultural pathologies and normative ideals.

At the same time, readers might be interested in how Vrousalis pushes the boundaries of Analytical Marxism. Vrousalis pushes exploitation into conversation with alienation and reification, but I am not sure if the critical theorists will reach back across the aisle. Critical Theory descends from a tradition of 'Western Marxism' that philosophizes under the auspices of the Hegelian Marx. Its canonical figures include Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, *et al.*, and they were not keen on the analytical style. They called it 'positivism'. Their use of this term is vague, but it implies that the intersubjective conditions of human reason are being ignored in favour of the normative philosopher taking a view from nowhere and pronouncing upon social relations in a way that uncritically reflects the ideological distortions that emerge from those social relations. This tradition has not taken kindly to the late Cohen's attempt to evacuate socialist political philosophy of the controversial social theory that animates it.

On the analytical side, Hegelian Marxism is thought to be full of philosophical fluff, with lots to say in the abstract about dialectic of history and the social totality, but little to say by way of concrete propositions that one can actually assess as true or false. In fact, one of Cohen's early intellectual flexes was to start his 1979 book *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* by summarizing the Hegelian philosophy of history in a highly analytical way so as to demonstrate (by virtue of his own performance of the task) that one need not deploy highly metaphysical notions such as 'dialectical' to get to the substance of what Marx was talking about when he tried to explain all preceding history as the history of class conflicts (Cohen 1979). Analytical Marxists thought that they could deploy standard forms of normative argumentation to reinforce the basic tenets of Marxist, socialist and communist thought.

The irony of this analytical project is that it led to the opposite in many cases, which is what makes Vrousalis' project stand out. In the move from facts to norms, Analytical Marxists entered the more mainstream normative debates in political philosophy by making egalitarian arguments for redistributing the ownership of productive assets. In this movement, class conflict took a back seat to distributive justice. In brief, the Marxists pushed the liberals to the left, which led to a convergence between egalitarian liberalism and socialism. Exploitation

was a part of these debates insofar as it helped to make this case, but figures such as John Roemer and G.A. Cohen argued that exploitation is primarily a distributive problem; it is unequal ownership of productive assets that makes exploitation interesting (Roemer 1986; Cohen 1995). A case in point is that Roemer, for instance, concluded that one ought not to have an interest in exploitation at all. If the root of the problem is a distributive one, then there is no reason to analytically prioritize exploitation (Roemer 1985).


Vrousalis insists on the normative importance of exploitation *and* shows that it has a wider range than Roemer thought. He argues that the domination formula works for patriarchal and colonial relations, so one can say that there is a common core to what is harmful about the economic basis of these relations. If a man controls the purposive activity of a woman, then he exploits her by making her his servant; if one state unilaterally controls the purposive activity of another state, or capitalists in one country control the labour of another, it is exploitation and thus domination. By showing that there is a common core to these unjust relationships, one can start to theorize rights and duties attached to what the exploited have in common. Vrousalis argues that exploited people have a right to resist domination, but there is also a corresponding duty to be in solidarity with those exercising that right. One of the more ambitious arguments of the book is on behalf of working class internationalism.

This perspective is warmly welcomed. Most philosophical analyses (both analytical and critical theoretical in nature) take the labour aristocracy thesis for granted, almost as an article of faith. This thesis claims that the working classes are exploited by their own national capitalist classes but in rich countries they also exploit the working classes of poor countries. Vrousalis accepts the first claim but denies the second. Workers in rich countries do not, in fact, unilaterally control the conditions of labour of workers in poor countries. They may benefit from it in some cases, but they do not necessarily exploit. If cross-national exploitation of labour by labour does not follow as an entailment of how exploitation works, then solidaristic relationships by class emerge as desirable over and against those of nation. In my view, this perspective is welcome because it undermines a predominant ideological tendency among political theorists to think in terms of national conflict – the Global South versus the Global North – rather than the parasitic rich of both against the poor everywhere.

In sum, Vrousalis shows that the analytical method can range quite a bit wider than what is normally assumed. The book does, however, remain within the analytical orbit by stopping short of backing up the claims in the book with a theory of history, conflict and change. These are the key points of methodological contention with the Hegelians, who look at historical development as the working out of the immanent contradictions of a social system, characterized by conflict. The analytical method looks at historical development through an external lens, applying abstract models to evaluate existing conditions and to justify political change from an external point of view. In my view, this difference in perspective is not irreconcilable. But many think that it is, so it is important to point out that either methodological approach shapes how one thinks about change within systems or transitions from old systems to new ones. This problematic is central if one wants to theorize about a transition from an exploitative, dominating society to a free one.

The contenders in the normative debate about alternatives to capitalism are universal basic income, property-owning democracy, market socialism and economic democracy.<sup>2</sup> Vrousalis argues that none of these alternatives eliminates exploitation, so political philosophers should instead pursue a hybrid model of the latter two options. Economic democracy and market socialism must come together for a model that Vrousalis calls ‘democratic socialism’. The label implies that the emancipated economy marries democratic planning with some limited market mechanisms, devolving the power of investment to the public while ensuring that socialist firms remain productive and efficient.

Vrousalis may be right about the economic alternative, but the Hegelian-Marxist question is, and I suspect will always be, ‘How? By whom?’ For that reason, one needs some account of class conflict to accompany a theory of exploitation as domination. Without it, it will not be clear why working people should not only resist domination but engage in class politics to do so. The rising inequality and unaccountability involved in capital’s growing economic power in the contemporary period demands that philosophers turn their attention not only back to exploitation, but from exploitation to politics, alternatives, and hopefully, a future beyond capitalist domination. Vrousalis’ book brings us to the brink of that project, which is nothing less than a revived critique of political economy, rather than a new theory of distributive justice.

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<sup>2</sup>For examples of each view see Roemer (1994), van Parijs (1995), Schweickart (2011) and Thomas (2017).