

BUSINESS, SOCIETY & ETHICS

Defending Sweatshops

As you read the material for our next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the reading:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Maitland, I. (1997, September). The Great Non-Debate Over International Sweatshops. *British Academy of Management Annual Conference Proceedings*, 240–265.

Comment

To help us better understand Maitland's argument and to connect it to other arguments we will see in this class, I offer a couple of definitions. First, for purposes of this class, I will define coercion as follows:

Coercion: *A coerces B* when *A* influences *B* to choose option *O* by making all the non-*O* options less desirable to *B*.

Second, I will define exploitation as follows:

Exploitation: *A* exploits *B* when *A* benefits by denying *B* something to which *B* is legitimately entitled.

Questions

1. Sweatshops are often accused of being coercive. Following my definition of coercion (above), this means that a critic of sweatshops might claim that sweatshops are coercive because businesses influence people to choose to work in sweatshops by making all the alternatives (to working in a sweatshop) worse.

In response to such accusations of coercion, Maitland claims that (A) sweatshop workers are making a free choice and (B) the worker's alternatives (to working in a sweatshop) are not being made worse. How does Maitland justify each of these claims?

2. Sweatshops are also often accused of being exploitative. Following my definition of exploitation (above), this means that a critic of sweatshops might claim that sweatshops are exploitative because businesses benefit by denying their sweatshop workers something to which those workers are legitimately entitled.

According to Maitland arguments, why are businesses not exploiting their sweatshop workers? To what does Maitland believe these workers are legitimately entitled?

3. In the end Maitland concludes that "the best cure for the ills of sweatshops are more sweatshops" (p. 264). What justifies this claim?