

Defending Sweatshops

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

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 position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

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

Optional: Blattman, C., & Dercon, S. (2017, April 27). Everything We Knew About Sweatshops Was Wrong. *New York Times*. Retrieved October 19, 2017, from <https://nyti.ms/2poGH7L>.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Aisha Kazi (BA, 2018) for sharing the article by Blattman & Dercon (2017), which challenges some of Maitland's (1997) claims about sweatshops.

Comment

To help us better understand Ian Maitland's argument and to connect it to other arguments we will see in this class, I offer a couple of definitions.

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

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

I do not claim that these are perfect definitions (there is actually a lot of philosophical debate about how to precisely define these terms), but they are sufficient for my purposes in this class.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

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, Ian Maitland claims that (A) sweatshop workers are making a free choice and (B) the workers' 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 exactly 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?
(There is some evidence that may challenge Maitland's assumptions, which you may consider by doing the optional reading by Christopher Blattman and Stefan Dercon.)

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

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.