

Book Discussion

Consumer Complicity and Labor Exploitation

GILLIAN BROCK

University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

Are consumers in high-income countries complicit in labor exploitation when they buy good produced in sweatshops? To focus attention we consider cases of labor exploitation such as those of exposing workers to very high risks of irreversible diseases, for instance, by failing to provide adequate safety equipment. If I purchase a product made under such conditions, what is my part in this exploitation? Is my contribution one of complicity that is blameworthy? If so, what ought I to do about such participation? I address these questions at first by applying a comprehensive account recently offered by Chiara Lepora and Robert Goodin, and analyzing the results in light of some important empirical issues.

Keywords: Consumer, complicity, labor exploitation, Lepora, Goodin, wrongdoing and exploitation.

1. Introduction

Many consumers in affluent developed countries are acutely aware of the horrendous levels of exploitation widespread in developing countries. Our iPhones are produced by exposing workers to toxic substances known to cause increased rates of leukemia. Our clothes are sewn by women working long hours, 7 days a week, in shoddily constructed buildings vulnerable to collapse. Children, who are forced by parents lacking income to work instead of attend school, weave the rugs and pillows that make our homes comfortable and aesthetically pleasing.

As a consumer in an affluent developed country, I and like-minded friends are often drawn to ask three questions about our prospective and actual purchases:

- 1) Are we complicit in the labor injustices that are inflicted on workers when we purchase such products?
- 2) If we are complicit, is this complicity morally culpable?
- 3) If so, what ought we to do to avoid or make amends for morally culpable complicity?

Chiara Lepora and Robert Goodin's recent book, *On Complicity and Compromise*, is an immensely helpful resource in addressing such questions (Lepora and Goodin: 2013). This work offers a comprehensive analysis of complicity and related concepts that significantly breaks new ground. This fine account is destined to shape conversations about complicity for some time and is well worth reading for anyone concerned about complicity in the many areas in which it seems to be playing an important normative role. In order to appreciate just some of the rich resources it offers I discuss some of its core ideas that have a bearing on the three featured questions outlined concerning consumer complicity with exploitation. Their book offers a wealth of other useful analysis especially concerning health care workers' complicity with genocide or torture, along with some excellent insights about choosing the least evil option when all the options one faces are bad. Here I focus only on applying their analysis to consumer complicity with exploitation.

2. *Exploitation and Wrongdoing*

For the concept of complicity to be in play, there must be some wrongdoing and actors must have played a part in bringing this about, sufficiently aware of these connections. Here I take the core wrongdoing to be that associated with exploitation in sweatshop labor conditions. Matt Zwolinski defines a sweatshop as "a place of employment in which worker compensation or safety is compromised, child labor is employed, and/or local labor regulations are routinely disregarded in a way that is prima facie morally objectionable".¹ While sweatshops exist all over the world, the focus of concern has been on sweatshops in developing countries. Three common kinds of problems with these sweatshops are often noted: (1) The wages are thought to be "objectionably low" (Zwolinski 2012: 162); (2) worker safety is seriously compromised by exposing employees to high risks of injuries or dangerous chemicals, without being provided with adequate safety training; (3) employers often suppress workers' rights to bargain collectively or unionize, or otherwise make severely unreasonable requests such as requiring employees to work long periods of overtime. The exploitation that occurs in sweatshop labor is a product of other, often prior, injustice. The kind of exploitation that concerns me involves taking advantage of people by

¹ As Matt Zwolinski continues, "This definition captures the role that the term 'sweatshop' plays as a signal of moral disapprobation, while leaving open as a conceptual matter the possibility that sweatshop practices might, on closer examination, be morally justifiable" (Zwolinski 2012: 154–179, 162).

taking advantage of their bargaining weaknesses. It is because people are in poor circumstances with few options for meeting basic needs that they typically find working in sweatshops attractive, compared with their alternatives.

Why does exploitative sweatshop labor count as wrongdoing? Accounts vary. Some argue that exploitation in sweatshops involves benefiting from others through unfairly taking advantage of them or their situation, benefiting from their misfortune or benefiting “disproportionately to their contribution” (Meyers 2004: 324). Or the emphasis could be on how the exploitative interactions can be degrading to those exploited, an affront to their dignity. According to an interesting recent analysis, Jeremy Snyder argues that when exploitative offers do not allow those exploited to make sufficient progress toward a decent minimum of human functioning, these offers can create “demeaning choices” (Snyder 2013: 346). The exploitee’s participation and apparent endorsement of the treatment, contributes to its being demeaning.

Generally, exploitation involves taking advantage of others in a way that is unfair or degrading and so appears to be squarely in the territory of wrongdoing. Some argue however that far from exploitative labor practices counting as wrongdoing they constitute right doing in that we are offering destitute people a way out of their situation. In fact, some argue that there can be forms of mutually voluntary and beneficial exploitation, where the exploitative transaction is beneficial to both parties, even when it is more beneficial to one than the other. Sweatshop labor is sometimes presented as exactly such a case (see e.g. Zwolinski 2012). In response, we might note that actions can be voluntary, beneficial and exploitative. The voluntariness of the exchange and benefits received do not necessarily cancel out or disguise aspects of a transaction that constitute wrongdoing, as wrongdoing may well remain. The very fact that these interactions are voluntary and mutually beneficial may serve to attempt to disguise that the moral wrong of exploitation has taken place. As I discuss in Section 4, a transaction can still be exploitative but all things considered, constitute the best course of action given undesirable alternatives.

However, we should also note that just how bad the wrongdoing is will vary depending on the nature and severity of the exploitation at issue. To focus our attention in this essay we might specify that the principal wrongdoings we are concerned with include cases of: (i) exposing workers to very high risks of irreversible diseases, for instance, by failing to provide adequate safety equipment; (ii) offering wages and/or terms of employment that thwart very basic needs (such as the need for rest or to take bathroom breaks); (iii) employing children in non-beneficial forms of labor that badly thwart their education or development. Here I am going to assume that there are at least some kinds of exploitation in sweatshop conditions that the reader would count as wrongdoing. If she is unconvinced by the examples provided she should

feel free to substitute her preferred examples for the three that I consider clear instances of objectionable wrongdoing.²

At any rate, I aim to address those readers who share my concerns about the kinds of examples described in my opening paragraph. I believe that there are enough consumers who view sweatshop labor exploitation as wrongdoing to make the analysis of interest. We want considered answers to core questions such as: What is my part in this wrongdoing? Is my contribution blameworthy? What ought I to do about my participation in wrongdoing? It is also important to note that the “we” I have in mind is composed of those consumers in high-income countries who have much disposable income with many consumption choices. They also have reasonable capacity to absorb costs because of their greater than average incomes within high-income countries.

3. *Complicity and its cousins*

There are many concepts that are nearby relatives of complicity. Some are much more straightforwardly problematic and easily implicate us in the wrongdoing, including full joint wrongdoing, conspiracy, and collusion. In such cases the culpability for the wrongdoing is easily locatable as there is a plan shared among the principal actors to commit the wrongdoing, to adopt the plan, or to orient behavior around a shared plan. In the cases that concern us, the consumers do not adopt a plan to exploit *as such*. Rather, their contribution to the wrongdoing is more nuanced and therefore more difficult to locate. But locate it we can.

3.1. *Complicity simpliciter*

Consider this passage from Lepora and Goodin:

As suggested by the loosely related legal concept of an ‘accessory’, those who are complicit simpliciter *often perform contributory acts that ‘give access’ to the principal wrongdoing, facilitating it or perhaps even making it possible*. Their contributions, although only ever causal (at most), may be more or less essential to the implementation of the principal wrongdoing. Or they might induce or incentivize the wrongdoing (a thief would not have stolen the painting *if there had not been anyone prepared to serve as the ‘fence’ in selling it*) or encourage it (a demagogic politician ranting against the excesses of banks encourages people to rob them) or make it easier to perform (selling robbers a precision drill, knowing the use they intend for it, halves the time it takes them to crack the safe). Temporally, acts of complicity simpliciter can come before, during, or after the principal wrongdoing.

Agents who are complicit simpliciter may act with more or less (but usually a minimal degree of) awareness of the details of the principal’s plan of wrongdoing. They might actually approve of the plan, or even participate in making it; they might adopt it as their own, and adjust their actions in response to it. But although full involvement in planning the wrongdoing is

² Perhaps these cases involve very coercive conditions; parents forcing their children into slavery-like conditions or prostitution might be of this kind. Sadly, this captures a staggeringly large number of cases in developing countries.

not excluded, *neither is that a necessary feature of an agent who is complicit simpliciter*. In order to qualify as complicit simpliciter, *all that is necessary is that the complicit agent 'knows, or should have known, that by [so acting] he or she will advance whatever intentions the principal has'*. (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 42, emphasis mine)

On reading this passage a few comments might immediately strike us as worth mentioning. First, typical sweatshop labor consumption acts seem relevantly analogous with the stolen painting case. If no one is willing to purchase the products made with sweatshop labor it would not be worth the manufacturer's efforts to engage in these production processes. But manufacturers can be reasonably sure there will be willing consumers because, for many consumers, the price is right. Second, we might want to know more about what is entailed by the phrase "knows or should have known". What do reasonable consumers know or what should such consumers know? There is considerable variation about cases. For instance, when a product is marked "Made in the USA" although every component part is made elsewhere under sweatshop conditions, should the consumer suspect deception? How much due diligence should she show in trying to check marketer's claims about their products? What does the reasonable consumer know and what can we reasonably expect of her in investigating the labor conditions under which all her prospective purchases are made? While these questions constitute an important area ripe for extended analysis, here I simplify by making some assumptions. I assume reasonable consumers are generally informed about the world they inhabit and that they can be expected to have general knowledge of working conditions in a globalized world. So they can be expected to know that many of the products they purchase from stores like Walmart are the product of sweatshop labor.

3.2. *Complicity by collaboration*

When we buy goods made in sweatshops are we collaborating with producers? Collaborators are not co-principals of the wrongdoing. In fact, they need not even adopt plans to commit wrongdoing.

The relationship between the collaborator and the principal is purely that of follower to leader, in regard to the plan. The collaborator takes instructions from the plan and adjusts his own actions to it. Collaboration involves the active and practical engagement of a contributory agent with a plan *that in some way he accepts and acts upon*. But while accepting the plan as a basis for his actions, *he need not actually adopt the plan as his own*. The collaborator's stance toward the plan might be far more equivocal than that. (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 43)

This passage contains an important tension. On the one hand, you might think complicity by collaboration is not relevant as there is no real acceptance of the plan to commit wrongdoing when consumers typically purchase sweatshop labor products. On the other hand, since Lepora and Goodin stipulate that the co-principal need not adopt the

plan as his own, maybe this is not so clear. At any rate, in eschewing the exploitation part of the plan, perhaps thoughtful consumers are not guilty of complicity by collaboration, when they purchase certain kinds of products that result from exploitative labor practices. As the other forms of complicity to be discussed provide much clearer cases of implication in wrongdoing, we need not dwell on complicity by collaboration, which might at most be an atypical case.

3.3. *Complicit acts that (can misleadingly) appear not to involve contributors*

According to Lepora and Goodin, complicity “necessarily involves acting in a way that *could contribute causally to the principal wrongdoing of another*” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 44). While at first it might seem that this cannot apply to what they refer to as “the conceptual cousins” that will be our focus here, namely, conniving, condoning, consorting, or contiguity, this appearance is misleading. In general there can be ways in which actions in response to wrongdoing promote future wrongdoing, so consumers’ actions can have a causal role in wrongdoing after all. I discuss some of the ways in which “complicity’s cousins” can implicate many consumption acts.³

3.3.1. *Condoning*

While condoning isolated wrongs could be wrong, it cannot be so in a *causal* way, since the wrongdoing has already taken place. However, an act of condoning can qualify as a relevantly causal contribution under certain conditions. Such special cases are called “complicity by condoning”. They say: “While you cannot literally ‘condone’ a wrong ahead of it occurring, you can announce ahead of time that you will condone it were it to occur; and that announcement (while itself not literally an act of condoning) can certainly contribute causally to the act-to-be condoned occurring” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 48). Perhaps consumers’ purchasing patterns could count as signaling ahead of time that they will condone exploitative production acts, at least in the sense that they could be construed as announcing that they will purchase the products of sweatshop labor anyhow despite the wrongdoing. Heavily repeated patterns of consumption or strong consumer demand can count as a kind of condoning as consumers thereby seem to be signaling that they accept an ongoing practice of wrongdoing which can contribute in a causal way to subsequent exploitation.

3.3.2. *Consorting*

Complicity by consorting can make a causal contribution to the principal wrongdoing, when “consorting with the wrongdoers, signals one’s

³ These are discussed in likely descending order of normative importance.

agreement with and approval of their actions; and that encourages them in their wrongdoings” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 49). As with complicity by condoning, ongoing patterns of consumption could certainly serve this signaling function. By patronizing and continuing to purchase from suppliers known to perpetrate exploitation, we could reasonably be accused of complicity by consorting.

3.3.3. *Contiguity*

Complicity by contiguity seems quite relevant as well. When principal wrongdoers interpret “the secondary agent’s contiguity as *implicit approval* of a wrong, she might be encouraged in her wrongdoing” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 51). If the secondary agents know (or could and should have known) that their contiguity would be interpreted in such a manner or could have such effects, then their “continuing voluntary contiguity to wrongdoing might constitute complicity with the wrongdoing” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 51). So consumers who repeatedly purchase from the same sweatshop supplier would seem to be complicit by contiguity. Repeatedly purchasing products or showing brand loyalty probably are sufficient to count as complicity by contiguity because reasonable consumers should know that this could be taken as signaling sufficient approval.

3.3.4. *Connivance*

Connivers’s participation can range from ignoring another’s wrongdoing to being in secret sympathy or even encouraging the wrongdoing. While connivers do not participate in making the plan, nor adopting it, they “stand aside to allow others to act on it” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 44). Cases of allowing repeated patterns of wrongdoing can count as connivance when similar situations involving the same agents recur regularly, since “acts of connivance with a wrong committed today may contribute causally to the wrongdoer’s repeating the wrong on the next occasion. It does so by making the wrongdoer confident, on the basis of previous experience, that again in the future onlookers will connive rather than intervening to stop the wrong when they see it occurring” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 46). Perhaps consumers can then be complicit by connivance when they allow exploitative labor to continue and fail to take relevant actions in response to labor injustices. In so far as they “stand aside” in these ways and fail to take actions to end the wrongdoing, they are guilty of complicity by connivance.

3.4. *Examples*

Lepora and Goodin discuss a few salient examples which illustrate how a variety of forms of complicity may occur together, such as that of Oskar Schindler who despite early complicity with the Nazi regime in manufacturing armaments, famously also employed more than 1200

Jewish workers in his factory who were otherwise to be deported to concentration camps and face almost certain death. The other example involves bank robbers enlisting the help of a taxi driver to make a get-away, even though the driver was not involved in the bank robbery itself. Both the post-robbery taxi driver and the Schindler case are quite relevant as you might think the central problems with exploitation are characterizable as either ones of essentially stealing (not compensating workers fairly for their labor) or of saving them from a worse fate (death or further deprivation).

According to Lepora and Goodin in “willingly and knowingly driving away robbers with money that he knows they have stolen in exchange for a share of it” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 56) the taxi driver enlisted after the robbery can rightly be accused of collaborating with the robbers. Arguably, consumers in developed countries, seem to be collaborating with the manufacturers to some extent because they willingly and knowingly purchase the goods mindful that they are a result of exploitative labor practices. We might reasonably argue (as the authors do) that what Schindler did was right and what the taxi driver does is wrong. At any rate, even when we are complicit it is a further question how to evaluate our act of complicity, which brings us to our core normative idea for analysis.

4. Just how bad is it to be complicit in exploitation?

There are several different ways of engaging with the wrongdoing and some make more of a contribution to it. Some are much worse than others. What makes something more of a contribution to wrongdoing? There are two different dimensions: One involves the agent’s role in doing or contributing to the wrongdoing. The second relates to the agent’s mental stance towards the main wrongdoing and towards the plan of action related to it.

For morality to be action guiding, it should “assess the situation in terms of what can be known by the actor at the time she acts” (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 61). So when we conduct moral assessments of actions we should do so on the basis of what consequences might reasonably have been expected at the time of the decisions concerning action, not on the basis of what actually happened. Consumers might have various beliefs about the consequences that can reasonably be expected from their purchases and these beliefs can be relevant to moral assessment of their actions. In particular, consumers might have relevant beliefs about the longer-term consequences of the exploitation, even if they believe that the current exploitation constitutes wrongdoing. Consider two such beliefs:

- 1) Exploitation leads to the long-term promotion of better conditions for workers.

- 2) Accepting an offer to work in exploitative labor conditions is better than having no source of income at all (and no other way to meet one's basic needs).

What would believing (1) or (2) (or both) mean for a moral assessment of our purchase? In order to address such issues we need to discuss briefly the plausibility of such views (which we do in Sections 4.1 and 4.2). Then in Section 4.3 I argue that even if the two views are plausible, we might still be culpable for our part in current wrongdoing, even when participating in current wrongdoing is the best course of action available to us.

4.1. *Does exploitation lead to the long-term promotion of better conditions for workers?*

Economists often observe that exploitative labor practices in sweatshops exist not because there are greedy employers who cut corners for extra profits, but rather for more fundamental reasons. Consider how in Asia, the country wage rate mean is about 44c per hour of labor and in Latin America \$1.34. Why would those in Asia work for much less than those in Latin America? On a standard economic account:

...wages fall within a range limited by the marginal productivity of labor at the high end and the wages offered by the next best alternative available to workers at the low end. Employers will not pay workers more than what the last worker hired contributes to the firm's revenue, and employees will not accept wages lower than they could secure in alternative employment. The actual wage rate paid within that range depends upon the relative bargaining strength of the two sides.

The employment alternatives available to workers are in large part determined by their country's level of economic development. ... Unlike economically developed countries where the percentage of the labor force employed in agriculture typically is around 5 percent, in [developing] countries that percentage is much higher. For the Asian countries, the labor force in agriculture ranges from China's 72 percent to Sri Lanka's 35 percent.

So, the clothing industry (to take an example often implicated in sweatshop labor) has to offer only a slightly higher wage than the one paid in agriculture to attract workers. Garment makers work for much less in Asia mainly because there is an absence of high-paying alternatives that would come from more economic development. The lack of union strength in Asia is also an important factor in why wages there are so low.

One important point that is relevant from this brief excursion into economic theory is that the level of development in the country makes an important contribution to increasing options and reducing exploitative ones. To the extent that sweatshops bring capital, technology, opportunities for knowledge transfer, and so forth to developing countries, they can thereby raise, over time, worker productivity, income,

and growth (and can create other positive externalities), and all of this can contribute to beneficial development over the longer run. If that is correct – and the history of developed countries suggests it well might be – sweatshops might be a necessary evil along the way to the very kinds of better jobs we hope to secure for the world’s most disadvantaged. So, those who engage in sweatshop labor create a better future (in due course) for others. Those who take up such work provide valuable contributions to securing a better economic future for fellow citizens. Perhaps their heroic self-sacrificing actions should be supported.

4.2. Accepting an offer to work in exploitative labor conditions is better than having no source of income at all (and no other way to meet one’s basic needs).

A consumer might have the view that, all things considered, laborers should accept exploitative work when it is better than more dire alternatives, so we should buy goods produced in sweatshops. This casts doubts on whether the exploitation aspect of production is really bad. I am not convinced by such arguments. Consider an analogy closer to our academic experiences, which I call *Teaching Assistant Contract*. Many Teaching Assistants are not adequately remunerated for the number of hours they actually spend on grading and writing comments on students’ essays. As one example, consider contracts that assume graders take no more than 20 minutes to grade each essay when standardly the work involves at least 40 minutes. I can recognize that this component of their contract is exploitative (in the sense that they are not adequately remunerated for their labor) even if, on balance, I think it is better for graduate students to accept these exploitative contracts than not. It still may be better for them to accept contracts at a marginally higher rate of pay doing work that makes better use of their skills and talents than to accept work in (say) a fast food restaurant. So I think we can, do and should make these distinctions about how exploitation is descriptively accurate even when, all things considered, an exploitative contract ought to be accepted.

So, even if we believe the kinds of reasons offered under 4.1 and 4.2—that accepting exploitative work may lead to good consequences or is best given other options—we are still contributing to exploitative acts here and now. These two kinds of relevant beliefs are insufficient to cancel out complicity with exploitation. The real question is about how bad such complicity is.

4.3. Assessing Acts of Complicity: A General Framework

Lepora and Goodin offer a useful formula which enables moral assessment of how blameworthy complicit acts are. The moral assessment

is a function of four things; the moral badness of the principal wrongdoing; whether (and, insofar as it is scalar, by how much) the secondary agent

crosses the threshold of moral responsibility for having contributed to it; how much of a contribution his act made (or might make) to the principal wrongdoing; and the extent to which the secondary agent shares the purposes of the principal wrongdoer. Phrased as a formula:

Pro tanto blameworthiness for an act of complicity = function of (badness of principal wrongdoing, responsibility for contributory act, extent of contribution, extent of shared purpose with principal wrongdoer). (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 98)

A complete assessment of blameworthiness of a particular contributory act also requires assessment of the alternative courses of action. Only such a comprehensive analysis will allow an overall assessment of agent's choices.

Let us then apply this formula to our core case of concern. First, the badness factor. How bad is exploitation? While this can vary a whole lot, in the cases that we are taking as central, it is rather bad. Compare *Teaching Assistant Contract* with working in unsafe conditions that subject one to irreversible debilitating disease. We can make reasonable judgments that exploitation in the latter case is worse than that in the former, since it affects more significant interests and, in eventually affecting quality of life and shortening it, we can judge this as a worse wrongdoing than the wrongdoing involved in *Teaching Assistant Contract*.

Responsibility is determined by a combination of voluntariness, knowledge of contribution, and knowledge of wrongness of principal wrongdoing. For the cases I am taking as typical here, consumers perform contributory acts voluntarily. For an enormous range of cases, such consumers have many consumption options, though interestingly, this may not apply to the purchase of certain electronic goods like cell-phones and laptops, which require the use of hazardous chemicals in the production process. (Of course, even if it is the case that these goods cannot be produced without exposure to hazardous chemicals such as benzene, the safety training and protective equipment offered could be vastly improved over current prevalent levels.) I have suggested that a reasonable consumer should be in possession of general facts about supply chain employment conditions in a globalized world so she should know how she is contributing. And one should be aware that exploitation is wrong, even if all things considered it is permissible in certain cases.

Evaluating contribution to wrongdoing is a bit more difficult. It approximates to "the percentage of badness of that principal wrong that might be causally attributable to the contributory agent, by virtue of her contributory act" (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 106). Contribution is a factor combining a number of variables such as centrality of contribution, reversibility of contribution, temporality, planning role, and responsiveness of contributors to principals. Any particular consumer's consumption choice is not essential or central to the wrongdoing.

Whether or not the contribution is irreversible varies depending on the kind of exploitation. With exposure to toxic chemicals or denying a child proper education, the effects are frequently irreversible. The wrongdoing might be part of an ongoing pattern of similar wrongdoing. So the wrongs may be repeated more-or-less frequently. Consumers are not typically involved in planning the exploitation and do not share the sweatshop owners' purposes. They would prefer to avoid entanglement with exploitation if they easily and costlessly can.⁴

So where does that leave us? It seems clear that our purchases frequently involve morally culpable complicity, especially when workers are exposed to high risks of irreversible damage. What should we do in the face of morally culpable complicity?

5. *Morally culpable complicity: now what?*

Using the comprehensive analysis offered, I have argued that developed world consumers are often culpably complicit in exploitative labor conditions in developing countries. What follows from this verdict? It is not part of the Lepora and Goodin analysis to treat such questions, but let us anyhow consider some possible ways in which we might want to use their account to discuss these issues.

In the case of consumers purchasing products made involving exploitative labor practices there is no straightforward recommendation of what such consumers ought to do to mitigate future culpable complicity or remedy past complicity. We would need to rely on detailed accounts about what courses of action would be effective in reducing exploitation and what remedial actions might be appropriate. Elsewhere I argue that because exploitation in the cases that concern us involve taking advantage of others by taking advantage of their bargaining weaknesses, our aim should be to remedy that background situation that allows these bargaining weaknesses to continue (Brock 2014). There I have suggested we can and should do this in multiple ways, such as by strengthening collective organizational capacity, promoting effective and legitimate states along with active citizenship. There is plenty we can and should do *as citizens* implicated in the poor bargaining positions of those who feel compelled to accept exploitative offers.

But does that mean we have nothing to say specifically about *consumer* responsibilities here and now for limiting culpable complicity? There are things consumers ought to do in their role specifically as

⁴ As they move from considering *pro tanto* to on-balance judgments they discuss a number of useful cases such as the Nazi postman, someone who simply delivers mail for the Nazis. His contribution to wrongdoing is low and the probability that his contribution is essential to wrongdoing is tiny. However, "contribution factor has to be multiplied by the badness factor in assessing the overall *pro tanto* blameworthiness of the postman's contributory acts. And since the badness of the principal wrongdoing, the Holocaust, is so very large, the overall *pro tanto* blameworthiness of the postman for his contribution to the wrongdoing might be quite high, his low contribution factor notwithstanding" (Lepora and Goodin 2013: 119).

consumers (rather than citizens) and these include supporting certain kinds of efforts that are being made to empower and promote the condition of vulnerable workers, including supporting ethical or fair trading initiatives (importantly, those that ensure the gains and risks of trade are fairly distributed, along with respecting people's basic human entitlements) (see Brock 2014). These responsibilities are particularly salient for those I identify as the target consumers of concern. They satisfy a number of salient conditions that mean they have enhanced responsibilities (including having high capacity to assist, being relatively privileged, have benefited greatly from the exploitative practices, and so on).

However, as I have been discussing, there are not always ethical or fair trade options available, especially in the purchase of certain electronic equipment (such as cell phones and iPods). Here drawing our attention to our culpable complicity is nevertheless helpful in building an awareness of the many ways in which living in affluent countries culpably implicates us in practices that perpetuate harm. Here perhaps we are all a bit like Oskar Schindler in that we must choose the lesser evil, though in this case the lesser evil might entail purchasing products that provide the destitute with jobs even while they inflict high risk of irreversible disease. Of course, we have more options than Schindler did concerning how to affect change so the background conditions of severe deprivation do not continue and also so that protections against irreversible effects can be improved.⁵ Mindful of our culpable complicity we should be energized to learn more about how we can and should assist in reducing our complicity in harmful exploitation through our consumption.

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⁵ The situation of Schindler's complicity with the Nazis is not a good model for the range of options available to us today. We are reasonably free to embark on a number of courses of action aimed at eliminating or at least reducing the forms of exploitative labor we find so rampant in the world today. What exactly is the most effective course of action available to us that could end these abuses is an enormous issue and I begin the analysis in works such as Brock 2014.