



Ethics: Bioethics (Fall 2014)

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# *Exploiting Vulnerabilities*

Little & Carse

# Coercion

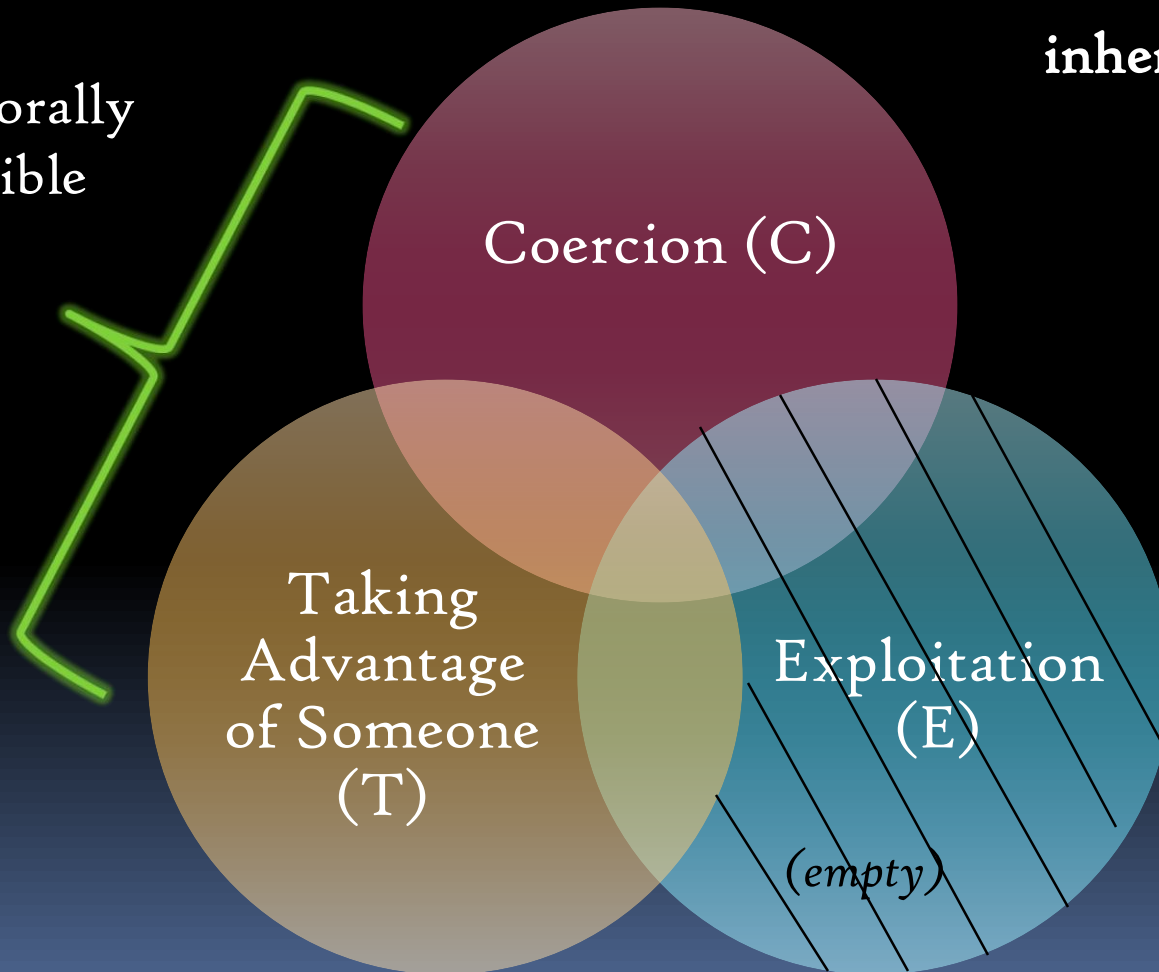
- “is not centrally a matter of producing hurt or harm, but rather of structuring the options available to another. Coercive proposals are designed to produce compliance by making it the condition of avoiding unacceptable consequences, “so they always place severe restraints on victims’ capacities to act” (Onora O’Neill)
- Can be benign or malign, (arguably) intentional or unintentional, fair or unfair, morally permissible or impermissible

# Exploitation

- Wrongfully taking advantage of another's vulnerability in order to exact a benefit
- Can be intentional or unintentional, known by all parties or unknown, voluntary or involuntary!
  - Wrongfulness can still be in degrees– depends on vulnerabilities present and nature of agreement
- Moral intuition: The voluntariness of a transaction *does not settle* the moral permissibility of the transaction.
  - Focusing on moral responsibility of exploiter, not exploitee (exploitee could be acting permissibly and rationally)

# Related Concepts

Can be morally  
permissible



Actions involving E  
are always  
**inherently wrongful**

# Discerning Exploitative Agreements

- *What* is agreed to, but also *why* a problematic agreement has been accepted
  - “in the usual case, people do not agree to morally problematic terms *unless* they are in a position of some kind of vulnerability” (210)
    - → worries about transaction being unfair, degrading
- Contextual –relies on *actual vulnerabilities* of the exploitee
  - Bill Gates & caviar example



# Actual Vulnerabilities (AV)

- People will vary in which AV they have in different contexts
- Some AV will determine moral constraints on transactions for all persons (e.g., extreme destitution)
- Other AV will depend on *normative enterprise*
  - Kind of relationship and activity involved
  - E.g., teacher exploiting student for garden work

# Types of Exploitation

## ■ First:

- Terms are wrongful in their own right (degrading, humiliating, cruel, unfair)
- AND agreed to out of actual vulnerability

Examples?

## ■ Second:

- Terms are not wrongful in their own right
- BUT agreed to out of actual vulnerability that constrains the exploiter in virtue of the context of the normative enterprise

Examples?

# Discussion Groups

- Come up with two cases/examples of exploitation in bioethical contexts, using Carse & Little's definition and analysis as a guide.
- Now provide a challenge to either
  - a) The exchange counting as exploitative or
  - b) The exchange being wrongful

(both kinds of challenge will involve critiquing C&L's conception of exploitation but in different ways)





*Questions? Comments?*

