

19 November 2022

Paper 3 Draft

The problem of ‘modern slavery’ can be defined as the ongoing existence of forced labor for profit; a person or group of people act as slaveholders, forcing victims to perform labor for little or no pay, often exerting strict control over their lives and threatening to harm them or their families if they try to escape or cease working. Although the concepts often overlap, ‘human trafficking’ refers specifically to people illegally being held and moved against their will. Forms of forced labor that are legal, such as arguably prison labor, exist in the present day but are often placed outside the scope of conversations of ‘modern slavery’ and would not necessarily be considered human trafficking. To understand human trafficking in the present days, it is essential to think of it in relations to the economy it exists within. As antislavery activist Kevin Bales put it, “No one enslaves another simply out of meanness” (13); he describes “the chance of a profit and a person weak enough and vulnerable enough to enslave” (6) as factors that tend to be present when slavery arises, and both factors can be understood as resulting from economic incentives. For someone whose business relies on other people’s labor, one way to increase profits is to reduce labor costs, sometimes by reducing the amount paid to workers; there is a limit to how low someone can legally pay employees and an even lower one for how much someone might be willing to work with, but someone seeking to spend even less money on their workers might instead find it less expensive to spend what is necessary to force someone to work. Forcing someone to be in conditions barely good enough to remain alive and work costs less than the payment they would willingly take to do that same work, as well as contributes to the “sleep deprivation, hunger, and isolation” used by traffickers to exert control over victims

(Bales 14). While it is relatively straightforward to understand the relationship between economic circumstances and Bales' "chance of a profit" requirement, it is also important to understand a potential victim's vulnerability in an economic context. Traffickers often target people already facing financial difficulties as potential victims, presenting them with 'opportunities' which promise to pay enough to ease those difficulties; said promises serve the purpose of manipulating someone into a position they cannot escape from once they have realized the trafficker does not intend to stand by their promises. Not only is this vulnerability a key factor to how people become enslaved, it also continues to be an issue for the ones who are eventually rescued, who need support including but not limited to housing and healthcare. If victims are even entitled to support, such as child victims of sex trafficking are, they might not receive it for months and their ability to receive it might be conditional on factors such as cooperation with law enforcement (Bales 100-102).

In order to curtail the harm done by human trafficking, it is essential to unconditionally offer people the support they need with regards to food, housing, healthcare, and other resources needed to live. This could be done on the basis of need, with a strong emphasis on rescued victims who need rehabilitation but also being offered to people in vulnerable positions, who are often targeted by traffickers as potential victims. While Bales does mention the need for better support for rescued victims, offering support as unconditionally as possible to anyone who might need it would be beneficial to victims who struggle to get support with current requirements, as well as it would help people who might otherwise be pressured to take the sort of risky 'opportunities' traffickers take advantage of to bring people into slavery. Compared to the solutions proposed by Bales, this one would be relevant specifically for preventing people from becoming enslaved and providing necessary support for people who have escaped from slavery.

For it to be most effective, this solution would ideally be implemented through government action, with well-funded social programs providing for people's needs unconditionally. While a possible challenge to implementing this solution would be a lack of government resources, the more immediate challenge is its unwillingness to utilize resources it already has and its acceptance of people living in poor conditions. While the topic of prison reform is not entirely within the scope of this conversation, it has been compared to historical slavery (Browne, Gilmore, Smith) and can be useful for analyzing government response to the sort of vulnerable people that traffickers target for enslavement. The U.S.' prison population includes a disproportionate amount of people who suffer from poverty, addiction, or mental illness (Gilmore), as well as those who were recently unemployed (Smith). These are situations in which the government did not provide people with support they needed and could not afford, but it did then spend the resources to incarcerate them. While the government does sometimes offer aid to people who need it, requiring someone to fulfill specific conditions inevitably means that some who need it will not receive it, and those who do receive it will have to wait until their need is recognized by the government. The most ideal outcome would be if the government's willingness to aid people based on need alone increased and proper resources were allocated, but such a shift is outside the scope of this proposal. Even without significant government action, people can help implement this solution by supporting local organizations such as food banks, shelters, and mutual aid groups that dedicate themselves to freely providing the sort of help victims need. Circumstances vary between each organization, but generally one could support them via donations or volunteering. Another contingency for the implementation of this proposal is that many victims of trafficking enter slavery outside the United States, and would not be aided by its social programs. This is also an issue whose solution is somewhat outside this paper,

but it would overall require a more egalitarian distribution of resources worldwide, to enable communities everywhere to ensure their own wellbeing. The proportionally high prevalence of slavery in some parts of the world is closely connected with the imbalances in power and resources different countries have; 'neocolonialism' refers to the power dynamics that have risen since decolonization between former colonial powers and former colonies, in which the former continue to exert influence over the latter via economic means (Koshy). It particularly relates to modern slavery in that corporations from wealthy countries ask for low prices for resources produced by poorer countries, who due to competing with each other for business have little power to bargain for fairer prices (Athreya), have to decrease labor costs so that the payment received makes up for production costs (Koshy, Manzo). While a U.S. government solution would be to hold U.S. companies more strongly accountable for profiting from slavery, even if indirectly, that is outside the scope of this proposal. Within its scope, there are ongoing efforts by people living in former colonies where slavery is now prevalent, people who are closely familiar with its nature in their local communities; it is important for people in the U.S. to support foreign communities' efforts while allowing them to advocate for their own needs (Athreya). Foreign producers would have to be paid fairer prices for their labor, which would require some combination of customers in the U.S. accepting higher prices for products and corporations accepting reduced profits.

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