Quality of Life  
Affirmative Case by Alisa Stringer



This case aims to ensure that the affirmative has a moral high ground in the debate. The rhetoric specifically questions the ethical validity of a negative position, while suggesting that affirmative better takes in to account the well-being of all people. The case focuses primarily on ideology as opposed to practicality.

The proposed value is quality of life. Other values that would work in the framework of this case would be human rights or general welfare. One possible alternate criterion is of ethical decision making. The case can be run as-is, or the debater can alter the case to better fit their style, with easy alternate values and criterions such as the ones stated above.

This case provides a more flexible structure and can be run with or without a criterion and with or without applications. However, the risk in doing so would be the potential to drop arguments. It will be important in rebuttals to address each aspect of the case that is introduced in the affirmative constructive. It would be better to choose not to run the non-essential arguments if the debater feels that they are likely to be short on time in the rebuttals.

The contentions present two different formats of contention writing. The first contention is split evenly into theoretical harm and an application of that harm. If a debater finds themselves consistently going overtime when running this case, they can choose to save the application for a rebuttal speech. The second contention is less separated and ought to be run together as one coherent thought. Note that the second contention does have evidence, but there is not an actual application presented.

The first thing that negative needs to do when arguing against this case is to prove that their side does not directly lead to abuse. Negative debaters should question the link between free trade and exploitation. There are many alternate theories that even suggest that free trade can be a good thing for struggling low-wage workers, particularly by examining the alternative to free trade work. Negative needs to prove that they benefit both the consumer and the workers who produce the goods in question.

Quality of Life

The Italian Renaissance was a height of Italian culture and political power. This age saw the likes of Michelangelo, Dante, and Niccolo Machiavelli. However, the most powerful people in Italy were not the political revolutionaries or leaders. They were not artists or writers. The most formidable group was comprised of bankers. For example, the Medici family, the Economist writes, “supplied four popes and two queens of France, and ran Florence, with a couple of interruptions, for almost 400 years.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Money is a strong motivator, which means that the economy is the primary source of power. We ought to use that power to improve the quality of life for ourselves and for others; therefore, “When in conflict, government should value fair trade above free trade.”

# Framework

## Definitions

The Oxford English Dictionary defines fair trade as,

“A system of ethical trade in which a company in a developed country pays a fair price to a producer in a less-developed country and seeks to ensure good working conditions and fair wages for the workers involved.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

In contrast, Oxford describes free trade as,

“Unrestricted trade; an unrestricted trading regime; a trade or business which may be pursued without restrictions.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

# Value: Quality of Life

Every economic system should strive to maximize the benefits that can be gained from a set of resources. Improving the quality of life for everyone involved should be the ultimate goal; therefore, the value for today’s resolution is quality of life.

## Criterion: Universal development

In order to improve the lives of individuals around the world, we ought to focus on universal development. There are two questions we ought to ask ourselves. How can we work to make sure that everyone has their basic needs met and how can we create win-win scenarios in international trade? In prioritizing universal development through fair trade, we can achieve a better quality of life for all individuals.

# Contention 1: Unchecked free trade exploits local economies

To be clear, free trade is a useful tool. It should be used to an extent. However, the government ought to favor fair trade over free trade when making its economic decisions. If free trade is left unchecked, there are some major disadvantages. The most obvious is potential exploitation. Free trade makes competition extremely stiff, so tough in fact, that many are willing to cut corners to succeed. If we have unrestricted trade, there is only one goal: cheap production. This encourages sweatshops and unethical labor practices.

## Application: Jordanian sweatshops

Consider how Jordan, a powerhouse of clothing production in the 21th century was said to abuse and exploit foreign workers in order to meet quotas. The New York Times interviewed the executive director of the National Labor Committee who said that,

“These are the worst conditions I’ve ever seen. You have people working 48 hours straight. You have workers who were stripped of their passports, who don’t have ID cards that allow them to go out on the street. If they’re stopped, they can be imprisoned or deported, so they’re trapped, often held under conditions of involuntary servitude.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Free trade does not always lead to these results, but it always increases the risk of such atrocities when left unchecked. Ethical practices, which are encouraged through fair trade, are a necessity if we want to improve the quality of life of individuals around the world.

# Contention 2: Fair trade improves lives

The ideology of fair trade is that we are not the only ones who should benefit from our resources. We ought to use our funds wisely, but that does not mean that we ought to be misers. It is wrong to knowingly choose to obtain cheap products on the backs of overworked and underpaid individuals who are struggling for survival in developing countries. This means that free trade ought to be a secondary objective. Fair trade practices, including reasonable prices, safe working conditions, and child labor laws, ought to primarily guide our economic decisions. Harvard did a study titled *The Economics of Fair Trade*. They concluded that,

“Studies generally find that fair trade farmers receive higher prices, have greater access to credit, perceive their economic environment as being more stable, and are more likely to engage in environmentally friendly farming practices.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Thankfully, the benefits of fair trade are not one-sided. Working under a fair-trade system clearly provides for the workers in developing countries because its stated purpose is toward promoting good working conditions and fair wages. However, this system also benefits developed countries. Producers in developed countries tend to have more strict restrictions concerning worker protection. Regulations and higher wages drive the prices up the prices of goods from developed countries. This means that paying developing countries fair prices while promoting better working conditions has the added benefit of putting the domestic products of developed countries back into competition with the developing countries’ goods.

# Conclusion

Fair trade may not produce the cheapest prices on the shelves, but ethical considerations outweigh this monetary loss. The government ought to act in a way that represents a clear value system built on the belief that every individual has worth and ought to be respected. In order to best develop countries in sustainable and ethical ways that lead to quality of life, we ought to value fair trade above free trade.

Opposing This Case

This affirmative case is centered on the belief that we ought to trade ethically, as opposed to only acting in our own self-interest. There are two major options for refutation. First, argue that free trade is ethical. Second, argue that we ought to act in our own interest.

One way that negative can refute this case is to prove that free trade is an ethical option. Every trade system has risks and both systems can be abused, so these are nonunique arguments. This line of argumentation will provide mitigation of the affirmative claims, allowing negative to follow up with their own separate arguments that tip the scales ever-so-slightly into the negative’s favor. Arguing that the affirmative case is nonunique is a quick and easy way to get the affirmative claims out of the way so that more time can be devoted to negative ground. It is highly recommended that if debaters take this route, they introduce separate argumentation as mitigation only does so much to persuade the judge.

The second option is to argue that it is both ethical and practical to act in our own self-interest in the realm of economics. The founder of modern economics, Adam Smith, put it this way, “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest” (Smith 20)[[6]](#footnote-6). In other words, if everyone acts in their own self-interest then everyone benefits. In the real world, countries cannot assume that other countries will be altruistic. Because everyone has a natural interest in their own survival, the economy should assume that people will act for their own good. As opposed to fighting human nature, governments ought to accept and plan for human nature. Negative should be extremely practical in this section of refutation. In separating the affirmative from reality, the negative sets up free trade as both ethical and practical, which suggests that it ought to be preferred to fair trade.

1. "Those Medici." The Economist, 23 Dec. 1999, www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/1999/12/23/those-medici. Accessed 10 July 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Fair Trade." Oxford English Dictionary, Dec. 2013, www.oed.com.proxy1.athensams.net/view/Entry/67737?rskey=dXaxUq&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid. Accessed 10 July 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "Free Trade." Oxford English Dictionary, Dec. 2013, www.oed.com.proxy1.athensams.net/view/Entry/74434?redirectedFrom=free+trade#eid. Accessed 10 July 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Greenhouse, Steven, and Michael Barbaro. "An Ugly Side of Free Trade: Sweatshops in Jordan." New York Times, 3 May 2006, www.nytimes.com/2006/05/03/business/worldbusiness/03clothing.html. Accessed 10 July 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dragusanu, Raluca, et al. "The Economics of Fair Trade." Harvard U, 10 Sept. 2013. Scholars at Harvard, scholar.harvard.edu/files/rdragusanu/files/jep\_firstdraft\_sept10\_2013.pdf. Accessed 10 July 2018. Typescript. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Smith, Adam. Wealth of Nations. Buffalo, Prometheus Books, 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)