Charity  
Negative Case by Shaylea Sawyers



This case takes the conventional understanding of free versus fair trade and turns it on its head. We typically see fair trade portrayed as extending a helping hand towards the poor, ensuring responsible production. Buying fair trade coffee almost feels like donating to charity.

It's the power of charity that this case attempts to harness. It speaks straight to the idealist, those who want to make the world a better place. You're trying to show them that voting negative will only help them achieve that dream.

If you haven't guessed yet, the value of this case is Charity. The argument is that fair trade does a horrible job of alleviating poverty. If we want to help those who need it most, we need to equip them to prosper independently.

The contentions are very evidence heavy. The idea is to overload the affirmative with so many critiques of fair trade that they spend all their time on your arguments and forget theirs. If executed correctly, this case can give you massive offensive power.

Negative Case: Charity

I was at the register debating whether or not to buy shampoo or a bag of rice,[[1]](#footnote-1) Said Kenneth Lander, recounting his struggles as an impoverished coffee farmer. The New York Times continues: He belonged to a “fair trade” co-op, which guarantees farmers a minimum price, but was making only $1.30 a pound on coffee that retailed in the United States for $12 a pound. His net profit was so low that at one point he was down to $120 that had to last two weeks.[[2]](#footnote-2) Kenneth's plight is one of countless producers who've fallen victim to fair trade's empty promises. The poorest among us need the greatest protections, but fair trade policies provide the opposite. For that reason, I stand

**Resolved: When in conflict, governments should not value fair trade above free trade.**

First things first, we need some

# Definitions

Merriam-Webster defines fair trade as:

to market (a commodity) in compliance with the provisions of a fair-trade agreement.[[3]](#footnote-3)

and Cambridge Dictionary defines free trade as:

the buying and selling of goods, without limits on the amount of goods that one country can sell to another, and without special taxes on the goods bought from a foreign country.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Now that you know what these terms mean, you'll need to know how to weigh them, which brings me to my...

# Value: Charity

We can operationally define Charity as striving to alleviate poverty and its damaging effects. All just societies should have a heart for the poor. In the words of American founder, Patrick Henry...

Unite liberality with a just frugality; always reserve something for the hand of charity; and never let your door be closed to the voice of suffering humanity.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

# Reason to Prefer: Moral Imperative

Charity isn't just valuable because it sounds nice; it's a moral imperative that everyone inherently understands. Even Edgar Allan Poe acknowledged its significance, saying:

…offences against Charity are about the only ones which men on their death-beds can be made - not to understand - but to feel - as crime.[[6]](#footnote-6)

A strong trade policy should encourage charity, but fair trade fails to do so, as I'll explain in…

# Contention One: Fair Trade Makes the Poor Poorer

Fair trade is the idea that trade agreements must include certain standards that ensure production is being carried out in a fair manner, usually by ensuring workers receive decent wages.

It claims charity as its primary motivation, but there's a catch. Let's go back to the story of Kenneth. According to the New York Times, farmers who operate under fair trade are bound to meet environmental and labor requirements. These burdens detract from profit, making bad financial situations even worse.[[7]](#footnote-7)

But that's only the tip of the iceberg. Michael Miller, director of programs at the Acton Institute, questions whether fair trade truly sets workers up for success. He argues

Third, does fair trade help the poor move up the value chain into activities such as processing, roasting, and packaging coffee? Or do the artificially higher prices create incentives for them only to grow the beans, leaving the valued-added work to companies in the United States and Europe? Like agricultural subsidies, this seems like another good way to limit competition from developing nations.[[8]](#footnote-8)

There's plenty of reason to believe fair trade can be systemically uncharitable. It can take those in the depths of poverty from bad to worse. How much worse? In 2015 Justin Rowlatt and Jane Deith with the BBC published an investigative report on the inhumane conditions endured by workers for fair trade tea companies.

They found homes in utter disrepair.

The drains are open and unlined and many clogged with effluent. In some cases, cesspits are overflowing into the living areas of people's homes.

Many homes have no electricity, and on one estate workers had to drink rainwater piped from a stream.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Not only were the buildings wasting away, but so were the people.

Nine out of 10 patients from tea plantations are malnourished, according to the medical director of Assam Medical College, one of the main general hospitals serving the tea region.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Workers suffered from dangerous chemical exposure.

They reported side effects including breathing difficulties, numbness of the hands and face, a burning sensation on the skin and profound loss of appetite.[[11]](#footnote-11)

No one in their right mind would call this charitable. Fair trade is not worth anyone's trust, so how does free trade look in comparison?

# Contention Two: Free Trade Helps the Poor Help Themselves

Free trade removes outside interference, allowing producers to self-govern. The free market dictates their success, not a corporate or government entity ruling over them. Many African nations have adopted free trade in the form of the Continental Free Trade Area, or CFTA. According to Landry Signé, fellow at the Brookings Institution...

The potential for the CFTA is big for both structural transformation and poverty alleviation in Africa. Some studies show that by creating a pan-African market, the CFTA could increase intra-Africa trade by about 52 percent, resulting in an increase of African manufacturing exports. Right now, on average, manufacturing only represents about 10 percent of total GDP in Africa, lagging behind other developing regions. A successful CFTA could reduce this gap by increasing the growth of the manufacturing sector and its value added given the CFTA’s market size of 1.2 billion people and over $3.4 trillion of cumulative GDP.[[12]](#footnote-12)

For those who seek to give the poor a chance to make their own way, free, not fair, trade is the answer.

Opposing This Case

This case has two major holes that, as an affirmative, you might want to exploit.

The first is a hole in the framework. This approach is preferable for those with affirmative cases that aim to benefit the average American and don't focus on the developing world. You can bypass this case's evidence-heavy contentions completely by arguing that they're aiming at the wrong target.

All you have to do is knock down the value. You see, while charity is good, it's not a justification for neglecting your citizens. If a policy helps developing tea farmers but hurts the developed working class, should we really pursue it?

Your job is to show the judge that there is a line between things that are generally good, and things the government's responsibility. While it would be great if we could alleviate global poverty, our first priority is our own people.

Once you've done that, you can dismiss the contentions as well-intentioned, but ultimately irrelevant. Then use your time to reestablish the affirmative narrative, and the round is yours.

The second hole is in the second contention. It's a useful tactic for affirmatives that also focus on alleviating poverty in the developing world. You and your opponent are working towards the same goal, so you need to prove why you do a better job of it.

Notice that, while the first contention is jam-packed with evidence, the second only has one card. The negative spends very little time convincing the judge that free trade is a reliable solution.

Use this omission to your advantage. Briefly acknowledge their attacks on fair trade by pointing out that, of course, any system will have flaws. But why should we believe that free trade will be any better?

Tear down the judge's confidence in the negative side. You can do that with an evidence critique, dismantling their logic, presenting counter-evidence, or any strategy you prefer. The point is to leave the judge with the nagging feeling that the negative is just missing something.

No matter which method you prefer, stick to the crux and you have nothing to fear.

1. Nicole LaPorte. “Coffee’s Economics, Rewritten by Farmers.”The New York Times. Mar 16, 2013. Accessed Jul 31, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/business/coffees-economics-rewritten-by-farmers.html?mtrref=www.google.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Fair Trade.” Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Accessed Jul 28, 2018. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fair-trade> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Free Trade.” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed Jul 28, 2018. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/free-trade> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Patrick Henry Quotes.” BrainyQuote. Accessed Jul 27, 2018. <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/patrick_henry_802870> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Edgar Allan Poe Quotes.” BrainyQuote. Accessed Jul 30, 2018. <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/edgar_allan_poe_166208> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nicole LaPorte. “Coffee’s Economics, Rewritten by Farmers.”The New York Times. Mar 16, 2013. Accessed Jul 31, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/business/coffees-economics-rewritten-by-farmers.html?mtrref=www.google.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Michael Miller. “Does Fair Trade Help the Poor?” The Acton Institute. October 31, 2007. Accessed Jul 28, 2018. <https://acton.org/pub/commentary/2007/10/31/does-fair-trade-help-poor> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Justin Rowlatt and Jane Deith. “The bitter story behind the UK's national drink.” BBC. Sept 8, 2018. Accessed July 30, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34173532> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Landry Signé. “3 things to know about Africa’s industrialization and the Continental Free Trade Area.” Brookings Institution. Nov 22, 2017. Accessed Jul 29, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2017/11/22/3-things-to-know-about-africas-industrialization-and-the-continental-free-trade-area/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)