General Welfare  
Negative Case by Alisa Stringer



The negative side of this resolution has the unique opportunity to use nearly all the influential economists of history to support its side. While fair trade is a buzz word for the modern age, truly free trade has been the primary philosophy of economists for a long time. This case sets up debaters to use this potential credibility to their advantage.

This case focuses on America. If pressed on having American-centric arguments, debaters can note that, given these debates take place in America and primarily with American students and judges, America is the best known and therefore the best arena for debate. In the economy, knowing all of the variables is extremely important, and the people in the debate room are probably most familiar with the variables of the American economy.

The value presented is of general welfare. As presented in the case, general welfare has long been of interest to all good governments. To better fulfill this governmental duty, this case presents the criterion of growth. While the evidence provided focuses on economic growth, debaters may choose to find indicators of social and moral growth to strengthen their position, particularly within rebuttals.

There are two contentions under the current formatting. The first provides two supporting points, one that is based on expert opinion, the other based on collected statistical evidence. If a debater is consistently finding themselves pressed for time, they may want to cut one of these points. The second contention is purposefully short, as most of the harms of fair trade should preferably be explored under refutation of the affirmative case.

Affirmative may want to combat this case by arguing against the links and broad claims as opposed to the provided evidence. Arguments about how the negative case is non-unique could prove to be particularly effective when it comes to the value and first contention. If the affirmative can disprove the second contention, they have taken away most of the negative impact. Negatives, beware! The second contention is the point that ought to be the most rigorously protected.

General Welfare

Ronald Reagan once said that, “There are no such things as limits to growth, because there are no limits on the human capacity for intelligence, imagination, and wonder.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The urge to grow and become more than we are today is natural. This touchstone of human experience, growth, makes us better as individuals, better as nations, and better as mankind. Free trade leads to growth. Growth leads to general welfare, which the US constitution swears to promote. Today, we refute the resolution and say that, “When in conflict, governments should value free trade above fair 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: General Welfare

When the meaning of the term general welfare was called into question in 1791, Alexander Hamilton (the real one, not the star of Hamilton: The Musical) wrote that, “The phrase is as comprehensive as any that could have been used; because it was not fit that the constitutional authority of the Union, to appropriate its revenues shou'd have been restricted within narrower limits than the ‘General Welfare’ and because this necessarily embraces a vast variety of particulars, which are susceptible neither of specification nor of definition.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The practical beauty of general welfare is that it is not just about one set of needs or wants. General welfare is about prosperity, the good of individuals, the health of the society, and more. In fact, as Hamilton clarified in that same 1791 report, the only restriction on general welfare is that it must be general as opposed to local. We ought to work toward the good of all people in society, not just some.

## Criterion: Growth

The best way that we can promote general welfare is through continual growth, of the economic, moral, and social varieties. From the time we are born, we are constantly learning and growing, and if we grow enough, we are able to achieve an independent, stable, and happy lifestyle. We should also remember what our founders taught us about growth. We have a right to the pursuit of happiness, not happiness itself. This means that we have the right to grow toward a better society, and we ought to make full use of that right.

# Contention 1: Free trade promotes general welfare

It has long been the contention of economists that free trade is better for all the involved parties. Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, wrote that,

“If a foreign country can supply us with a commodity cheaper than we ourselves can make it, better to buy it of them with some part of the produce of our own industry, employed in a way in which we have some advantage” (Smith 353).[[5]](#footnote-5)

However, the benefits of free trade for all parties are not simply speculative. In fact, the University of Paderborn in Germany conducted a study titled *Trade Openness and Economic Growth*. What they found was that,

“The results suggest that the long-run causality between trade openness and growth runs in both directions. This is in line with Harrison (1996) who argues that although more open trade policies do precede higher growth rates, it is also true that higher growth rates lead to more open trade regimes.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

In other words, truly free trade generates growth, and growth leads to more free trade. When we choose free trade, we create a positive cycle that systematically improves the wellbeing of the society. This benefit is unique to truly free trade, as we will see in contention two.

# Contention 2: Fair trade harms general welfare

Fair trade has one important implication: regulations. In a world where we are forever hearing of governmental inefficiency, it is remarkable that we still too often turn to more inefficient regulation to solve our problems. Fair trade is a concept that is impossible to define, much less surround with legal enforcement. As Noble prize winner and economist Milton Friedman explained in an article of free and fair trade,

“To a producer or seller, a “fair” price is a high price. To the buyer or consumer, a “fair” price is a low price. How is the conflict to be adjudicated? By competition in a free market? Or by government bureaucrats in a “fair” market?”[[7]](#footnote-7)

This is where fair trade will always leave us. Either the only way to be fair is to be free, or the subjective idea of fairness imposes on the freedom of individuals. Friedman summed it up well when he said that, “‘Fairness’ is strictly in the eye of the beholder.”7 Fair trade asks for regulation but fails to determine what those regulations should look like. It restricts the populace without reason. Free trade ought to be valued above fair trade.

Opposing This Case

This case presents quite a few ideas in a short amount of time. By necessity, the argumentation jumps from point to point in a rather choppy manner. Affirmative debaters should focus on grouping arguments, agreeing where they can afford to do so, and providing concise four-point refutation to major points of contention.

It will be particularly effective if the affirmative can prove that fair trade does not stifle growth. If debaters can disprove the last contention, they can effectively take down the negative position. The other negative points can be agreed to without any major loss on the affirmative side.

If additional argumentation is needed, affirmative debaters may find it useful to question whether growth will consistently lead to general welfare. Some growth can be bad. Cancer cells grow at a remarkable rate. Pressure negative to prove that their criterion actually leads to the goal that has been provided.

Affirmative rebuttals are notoriously short. Refute the negative case, but don’t spend the majority of the affirmative rebuttal time on negative ground unless it is absolutely necessary. Acknowledge the case, refute what you must, and move on to defending the affirmative case. This will help to ensure that the debate is about the positives of fair trade, as opposed to the possible negatives to free trade. Judges tend to like positive debate rounds.

1. Ronald Reagan: "Remarks at Convocation Ceremonies at the University of South Carolina in Columbia ," September 20, 1983. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40486>. [↑](#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](http://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](http://www.oed.com.proxy1.athensams.net/view/Entry/74434?redirectedFrom=free+trade#eid). Accessed 10 July 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "Alexander Hamilton, Report on Manufactures." *The Founders Constitution*, U of Chicago, <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1_8_1s21.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Smith, Adam. Wealth of Nations. Buffalo, Prometheus Books, 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gries, Thomas, and Margarete Redlin. Trade Openness and Economic Growth: A Panel Causality Analysis. Washington University, <http://faculty.washington.edu/karyiu/confer/sea12/papers/SG12-112%20Redlin.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Friedman, Milton. "Fair versus Free." *The Future of Freedom Foundation*, 1 Feb. 1992, [www.fff.org/explore-freedom/article/fair-free/](http://www.fff.org/explore-freedom/article/fair-free/). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)