Ethics  
Affirmative Case by Joel Erickson



This case wins or loses on the framework. Here’s how you argue that effectively.

Ethics either outweighs or subsumes any value your opponent presents. In other words, you can demonstrate that either ethics is more important than your opponent’s value (if your opponent’s value is pragmatic) or ethics encompasses your opponent’s value (if your opponent’s value is moral). The two-value links establish a robust basis for preferring ethics. **Do not neglect the impact that valuing ethics highest means prioritizing whatever is more ethical**.

The resolutional analysis defends an unorthodox yet eminently justifiable position: The resolution juxtaposes regulation with no regulation. When free trade is defined as no restrictions, fair trade necessarily must involve restrictions because (a) debate requires a conflict between the terms and (b) the resolutional wording requires a conflict between the terms. Furthermore, the resolution defines the resolution in the context of a government actor and the only viable mode of prioritization for the government to perform in trade is regulating. Once you’ve proven those elements, the “fairness” component of fair trade indicates that the government regulation has a particular purpose of enforcing fairness—justified logically and intuitively.

You’ve now constructed the following premises:

1. Ethics is the highest goal (so vote for the most ethical option).
2. Free trade is unrestricted (and as a result contains no ethical boundaries).
3. Fair trade is restricted for the purpose of ethics.

The only conclusion is to vote AFF.

Ethics

Pretend you’re a government. You’re tasked with instituting a seismic decision about economic policy—will your nation prioritize fairness or freedom in the context of trade? I affirm the resolution because *you must choose the ethical option.*

Today, I’ll be presenting my arguments somewhat unconventionally. Instead of beginning with definitions of fair trade and free trade, let’s kick things off with the value framework, or the standard by which you’ll be making your decision.

# Value: Ethics

Oxford defines “ethics” as “moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Value Link 1: Universal.

Everyone is subject to ethical obligations. Your gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, nationality, height—nothing about you can alter this reality. Ethics universally constrains humanity. You might be wondering how ethics can be universal if different people disagree on moral standards. Although philosophers like Aristotle, Kant, and Bentham have propounded disparate ethical systems, you’d be hard pressed to find anybody who disputes certain fundamental moral principles—humans must be treated with dignity, contracts ought to be upheld, etc.

## Value Link 2: *A Priori*

Ethical considerations precede all other considerations in importance. Before determining whether something is expedient, efficient, or effective, we must ask if it is *right*.

Now that we’ve established that you’ll be evaluating this round through the lens of ethics because it’s the most foundational and universal standard, I’ll give you a resolutional analysis to explain what the terms in the resolution mean.

# Resolutional Analysis: Regulation vs. No Regulation

We can summarize the fair trade vs. free trade debate as regulation vs. no regulation. Before justifying this interpretation, I’ll offer a few definitions.

* **Trade**: According to Investopedia, “Trade is a basic economic concept involving the buying and selling of goods and services, with compensation paid by a buyer to a seller, or the exchange of goods or services between parties.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
* **Freedom**:According to Oxford, “freedom” is “The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
* **Free Trade**:According to Oxford, “free trade” is “International trade left to its natural course without tariffs, quotas, or other restrictions.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
* **Fairness**: Collins English Dictionary defines “Something or someone that is fair is reasonable, right, and just.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

To recap, trade involves an exchange of goods and services. Freedom involves a lack of restrictions. Fairness involves the idea of justice, presumably necessitating government intervention to enforce justice. Therefore, fair trade vs. free trade equates to regulation vs. no regulation on trade. Why should you use this interpretation? Here’s the reason to prefer:

## Reason to Prefer 1: Only Clear Conflict.

You can’t have a debate when the two sides don’t clash—arguing about triangles vs. purple is pointless—and, in fact, the resolution stipulates the conflict. The regulation vs. no regulation presents the only clear conflict because *if freedom is unrestricted, then the side that opposes freedom must involve restrictions to some degree*. Otherwise, you don’t have a debate. Therefore, *if free trade involves no restrictions, then fair trade must involve restrictions to a degree*. And the word “fairness” suggests that the government is regulating for the purpose of justice.

## Reason to Prefer 2: Government Actor.

The resolution mandates that the government is the entity deciding to value fair trade or free trade. Because governments don’t trade – only corporations and individuals do – the only thing a government can do to act in the realm of trade is to regulate or not. Hence, the regulation vs. no regulation interpretation makes most cogent sense within the context of a government actor.

We’ve determined you’re weighing this round with the standard of ethics. The two things you’re comparing are government-regulated trade for justice and unregulated trade. Let’s talk about why fair trade is better than free trade in one contention:

# Contention: Choose the Only Ethical Option

This argument should be self-explanatory. You’re prioritizing ethics as the highest value in the round. It’s the best value due to its foundation and universality. Once you’re evaluating everything through the idea of ethics, we need to look at whether our options are ethical. Free trade contains no notion of ethics. It’s completely unregulated, which means people can behave however they like independent of accountability. Fair trade, on the other hand, accounts for regulations to ensure fairness. When faced with only one ethical option, your only choice is to choose it.

Opposing This Case

1. Attack the value links. How can we determine that ethics is universal? Delineate multiple conflicting perspectives on ethics to demonstrate that it’s difficult to prove which system of moral principles we should elevate to the status of weighing mechanism. Avoid saying ethics are “relative” or “subjective,” but “nebulous” operates better as a persuasive response—you’re saying that although ethics are a positive thing, it is nonfunctional as a value because of its vagueness. This dismantles the first value link, so you can impact through to the second value link as irrelevant: Even if something is *a priori*, it’s useless if it’s nebulous. This deconstructs the value framework.
2. Propose a counter-value that remains within the purview of ethics but is more tangible.
3. Respond to AFF contention as “no impact” because you’ve refuted the value. You can still preserve concrete ethical principles within your value.
4. Demonstrate that government regulation creates more ethical complications than allowing trade to occur without restrictions.

1. “Ethics,” *Oxford English Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ethics> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Trade,” *Investopedia*, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/t/trade.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Freedom,” *Oxford English Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/freedom> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Free Trade,” *Oxford English Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/free_trade> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Fair,” *Collins English Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/fair> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)