The Consensus  
Negative Case by Drew Magness



Be the most credible debater in the room. That’s how you win with this case, when your opponent brings up anecdotal examples and feel-good quotes, you want to be the one who shows the judge the truth. Fair Trade doesn’t work. Free Trade does.

IF you can, agree with the affirmative value and definitions. Your ideal beginning to the speech is, “I agree with my opponent’s definitions and value. Let’s jump into my case.”

Your contentions should take a solid 5 minutes of your 7-minute speech. Crush strategic control here and show the just why your side is the only side that matters. Your response to any affirmative case should be “outweighed” or “No impact” by showing why your data, analysis, and facts should be upheld.

Familiarize yourself with the economic reasoning behind free trade so that you can explain it well in cross-ex and the rebuttal. The easiest way for someone to lose with this case is to neglect good explanation. Don’t let that happen.

The Consensus

In debate, we often have to make predictions. Those predictions could be inaccurate. But the great thing about this resolution is that we don’t have to guess. Economists have evaluated free trade for hundreds of years. And according to the American Institute for Economic Research, “The economics profession continues to show a consensus in favor of unfettered international trade, as 83 percent agree and only 10 percent disagree that the United States should eliminate remaining tariffs and other barriers.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The people who have been studying trade for decades know a bit more about it than my opponent and I. That’s why I stand with them and against the resolution. Let’s make sure we’re on the same page with some

# Definitions

Fair Trade is defined by Merriam Webster as “a movement whose goal is to help producers in developing countries to get a fair price for their products so as to reduce poverty, provide for the ethical treatment of workers and farmers, and promote environmentally sustainable practices.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Free Trade is also defined by Merriam Webster as “Trade based on the unrestricted international exchange of goods with tariffs used only as a source of revenue.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

How should you choose between the two sides? To answer that question I provide you with my

# Value – General Welfare

General Welfare is operationally defined as: “The overall health, happiness, and success of people.” Here’s why this is the best way to measure the resolution:

Reason to Prefer: Comprehensive Measure  
We’re talking about what governments that dictate the lives of millions of people should prioritize. That’s a very broad resolution that touches almost every aspect of the lives of people in those nations – and beyond, into the rest of the planet. General Welfare is a value broad enough to keep up with the resolution, giving you the best chance of making an accurate decision.

# Contention 1 - Fair Trade Destroys General Welfare

Fair trade advocates often argue that it is equitable and charitable. But it’s neither. The word fair is ambiguous and meaningless, as anyone who’s ever seen a kindergarten class interact knows. But it sounds good. When we go to whole foods and buy a chocolate bar that says “Fair Trade Certified” we can feel like we’ve done our good deed for the day. After all, we bought ethical chocolate instead of that evil exploitation chocolate.

But Fair Trade does far more than satiate Western guilt. It destroys the very people it sets out to help.

## Application 1 – Coffee

Fair Trade’s most well-known endeavor is in the coffee industry. If anything about fair trade should be successful, it’d be this. According to The Property and Environment Research Center in 2011,

“That fair-trade cup of coffee we savour may not only fail to ease the lot of poor farmers, it may actually help to impoverish them, according to a study out recently from Germany’s University of Hohenheim. The study, which followed hundreds of Nicaraguan coffee farmers over a decade, concluded that farmers producing for the fair-trade market “are more often found below the absolute poverty line than conventional producers. Over a period of 10 years, our analysis shows that organic and organic-fair trade farmers have become poorer relative to conventional producers.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

This makes sense. Fair Trade producers have to pay substantial certification fees. The rich farmers can afford to pay those fees and so they reap the benefits of selling a premium priced product while the poorest lose out.

Fair Trade feels good, but it doesn’t do good. But there is hope.

# Contention 2 - Free Trade Promotes General Welfare

Free Trade allows people to sell at the prices they choose. This allows the market to function competitively and farmers in developing countries to choose how much they should pay. Remove the feel-good policies of fair trade and we get real results.

I’m going to read to you multiple studies that show us the benefits of free trade. Don’t worry about writing them down. I’m doing this to show you how conclusive the evidence for free trade is.

According to the Heritage Foundation in 2017,

“The Heritage Foundation’s [2017 Index of Economic Freedom](http://www.heritage.org/index/pdf/2017/book/index_2017.pdf) shows that removing tariffs and other trade barriers leads to a number of tremendous benefits. The creation of freer trading conditions establishes a mutually beneficial relationship between both parties—people voluntarily trade with each other only if it is in their own interest. As a result, those who have greater opportunity to participate in the global exchange of goods and services find themselves with increased prosperity and diminished poverty.[[5]](#footnote-5)

According to the Director-General of the World Trade Organization in 2000,

“This report confirms that although trade alone may not be enough to eradicate poverty, it is essential if poor people are to have any hope of a brighter future. For example, 30 years ago, South Korea was as poor as Ghana. Today, thanks to trade led growth, it is as rich as Portugal.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

According to the Minneapolis Federal Reserve in 2015,

“Increasing world trade is an example of the tension between policies that help those in developing countries versus those that help those lower in the income distribution in developed countries. According to a World Bank Study, in the three decades between 1981 and 2010, the rate of extreme poverty in the developing world (subsisting on less than $1.25 per day) has gone down from more than one out of every two citizens to roughly one out of every five, all while the population of the developing world increased by 59 percent.[8](https://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications/the-region/on-the-ethics-of-redistribution" \l "_ftn8) This reduction in extreme poverty represents the single greatest decrease in material human deprivation in history. But this decrease in extreme poverty in the developing world has coincided with a marked increase in income inequality in the developed world, and the latter has received much more attention, at least from policy analysts in these richer nations. One possible cause of both trends has been the increase in international trade, which lessens the market value of less-skilled labor in developed countries while increasing its value in developing countries.[9](https://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications/the-region/on-the-ethics-of-redistribution" \l "_ftn9) If one uses a behind-the-veil criterion focused only on developed countries, then the increase in trade has made things worse. If instead one considers the entire world, then the trade increase has made the world phenomenally better.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Almost done. Two more.

According to the IMF in November of 2001,

“Policies that make an economy open to trade and investment with the rest of the world are needed for sustained economic growth. The evidence on this is clear. No country in recent decades has achieved economic success, in terms of substantial increases in living standards for its people, without being open to the rest of the world.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

According to the Economist in 2013,

“ But the biggest poverty-reduction measure of all is liberalizing markets to let poor people get richer. That means freeing trade between countries (Africa is still cruelly punished by tariffs) and within them (China’s real great leap forward occurred because it allowed private business to grow). Both India and Africa are crowded with monopolies and restrictive practices.[[9]](#footnote-9)

I could keep going. There are dozens more studies that come to the exact same conclusion. Now, some say that these economic benefits solely go to the rich. But the experts studied that question as well. According to the World Bank,

“One possibly surprising result in Table 5 is the lack of any evidence of a significant negative impact of openness to international trade on incomes of the poor.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

The position of fair trade is entirely refuted. Free trade is the proven answer. Let’s base our policy off of facts, not platitudes.

Opposing This Case

This is a strong case. To beat it, you need to really understand the argument behind fair trade. Fair Trade proponents can often argue that the increase in economic growth that occurs because of free trade disproportionately benefits the wealthy and often leaves the impoverished out to dry.

The study from the world bank that says this isn’t true is actually in opposition to a plethora of other studies that all come to the opposite conclusion. Research that.

You don’t have to disagree with the consensus that free trade creates growth. All you have to disagree with is the idea that this growth actually helps those who need it. Emphasize to the judge that you don’t actually disagree with the economic consensus. You disagree with how your opponent is using those numbers.

Do your research, add some spikes to your aff case, and you’ll be good to go.

1. <https://www.cato.org/blog/super-majority-economists-agree-trade-barriers-should-go> Daniel Griswold, September 18th 2009, “A Super-Majority of Economists Agree: Trade Barriers Should Go” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fair-trade> Merriam Webster, 2018, “Fair Trade Definition” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/free-trade> Merriam Webster, 2018, “Free Trade Definition [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.perc.org/2011/05/14/fair-trade-coffee-producers-often-end-up-poorer/> Lawrence Wilson, May 2011, Property and Environment Research Center “Fair Trade Coffee Producers Often End Up Poorer” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.heritage.org/trade/commentary/how-free-trade-and-economic-freedom-help-the-poor-0> Bryan Riley, March 2017, Former Jay Van Andel Senior Policy Analyst in Trade Policy “How Free Trade and Economic Freedom help the poor” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres00_e/pr181_e.htm> World Trade Organization, June 2000, “Free Trade Helps Reduce Poverty, says New WTO Secretariat Study” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications/the-region/on-the-ethics-of-redistribution> V. V. Chari, Christopher Phelan, Consultants for the Minneapolis Federal Reserve, September 30th 2015, “On the Ethics of Redistribution” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2001/110801.htm#ii> IMF Staff, November 2001, “Global Trade Liberalization and the Developing Countries” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2013/06/01/towards-the-end-of-poverty> The Economist, June 2013, “Towards the End of Poverty” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <http://kisi.deu.edu.tr/muge.tunaer/22015_Growth_is_Good_for_Poor.pdf> Aart Kraay, David Dollar, March 2002, World Bank “Growth is good for the poor” Aart Kraay is an economist in the Development Research Group at the World Bank. He joined the World Bank in 1995 after earning a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard University (1995), and a B.Sc. in economics from the University of Toronto (1990). David Dollar is a senior fellow in the John L. Thornton China Center at the Brookings Institution. From 2009 to 2013, Dollar was the U.S. Treasury’s economic and financial emissary to China, based in Beijing, facilitating the macroeconomic and financial policy dialogue between the United States and China. Prior to joining Treasury, Dollar worked 20 years for the World Bank, serving as country director for China and Mongolia, based in Beijing (2004-2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)