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*What is Fair Trade?*¹

Abstract: This paper categorises the emerging conceptualisations of Fair Trade and explores which of them offers the best characterisation of the project. It introduces Fair Trade and establishes a set of desiderata to guide the process of conceptualisation. It is argued that the practices and rhetoric of the project suggest it is best characterised as an attempt to establish a form of interim global market justice in a non-ideal world. Three alternative conceptualisations are explored, some including sub-categories. In each section a description of the view is outlined and it is argued that each such alternative is either an unpersuasive account of Fair Trade or cannot better the one already defended. In the final section the normative debate surrounding Fair Trade conceptualised as an attempt to establish interim global market justice in a non-ideal world is introduced. It is suggested that there are avenues for the project's ethical defence but it is concluded this can only be settled with further research.

Keywords: Fair Trade; Ethical Consumerism; Development; Trade Relations; Market Justice

Introduction

Fair Trade is a project attracting increasing attention in both public and academic domains. Despite this growing interest, however, there is a lack of clarity regarding how we should conceptualise Fair Trade. There is no settled understanding of how the present Fair Trade project (its motivating goals and existing facets) is best characterised. In essence, there is no established answer to the question "What is Fair Trade?" A number of possible answers have been proffered (or at least implicitly suggested), but little attempt has been made to evaluate them or identify the most plausible construal of the movement.² In order to develop a complete and valuable understanding of Fair Trade this shortcoming must be rectified. Here I will address this task by identifying a catalogue of possible conceptualisations and assessing their coherence. It will be argued that Fair Trade is most appropriately conceptualised as an attempt to establish interim global market justice in a non-ideal world.

Before I begin it is important to distinguish between two ways in which the question "What is Fair Trade?" could be interpreted. First, it could be understood in the empirical sense outlined above, concerned with identifying the best characterisation of the existent Fair Trade project. This will be the focus here. It should not be confused, however, with the question "What is 'fair trade'?" This question, which pertains to the normative issue of what forms of trade should be considered just or fair, is a separate matter. Failure to distinguish these questions distorts the answers that might be given to either of them and is probably one reason for the confusion regarding the empirical matter with which I am concerned here. The normative question is an interesting and important one, but not one that I shall address here. There is a more relevant hybrid question of "Is Fair Trade 'fair trade'?" that warrants attention in connection to the former of the two. I will make some comment upon this in the final section of the paper, but finding an appropriate conceptualisation of Fair Trade is the necessarily prior task.

The Conceptual Framework

While the task of conceptualisation is, for obvious reasons, a fairly free-ranging one, certain rough boundaries can be gleaned to guide it. As the concern here is with conceptualising an

existing phenomenon a broad framework can be outlined by noting some of its central components and it is possible to identify certain areas of data with which a conception should be consistent. In this section I will outline some of Fair Trade's core facets from which I will design a scheme of desiderata that each conceptualisation must follow and identify the data sets from which it must draw evidence if the view is to be substantiated.

Given its title it is clear that Fair Trade partly defines itself in relation to some other form of trade. This, of course, is the present international trade system. Forming an understanding of the project can usefully begin, therefore, by introducing an example of the context in which it exists. Consider, for instance, the contemporary coffee industry, often deemed representative of agro-food networks. It involves a buyer-driven commodity chain where power rests with an oligopoly of roaster corporations which, due to various developments in technology and transportation, are able to exercise control and promote price competition by demanding 'just-in-time' delivery and using 'mix-and-match' blending.³ Alongside other technological improvements and market restructuring this downward pressure on prices resulted, in 2006, in a forty-year low.⁴ In such a situation producers must often accept the first offer they receive for their produce; a position exploited by intermediary exporters.⁵

The effects on producers have been dramatic. Due to primary goods being price elastic, and thus suffering regular price fluctuations, there is already an environment of economic (and livelihood) insecurity.⁶ Falling prices have meant that producers now cannot even cover the costs of production.⁷ Many have gone bankrupt and been forced to migrate, thus disrupting local communities.⁸ Those that have remained in the industry have faced increasing poverty: large numbers of farmers have been classified as nearly starving, children are malnourished and often withdrawn from education, and few have the money to invest in adequate health care.⁹

FINE (an umbrella organisation linking the major Fair Trade actors: the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO), the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO), the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA), and the Network of European World Shops (NEWS!)), defines the project as a response to these issues, describing it as follows:

Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, disadvantaged producers and workers, especially in the South.¹⁰

The response to the above problems, in other words, is to alter trade relationships in some fashion to make them better for producers. This is perhaps most visibly manifest in the Fair Trade certification criteria, with which actors must comply if they wish to qualify for the label. There are standards set for producers and traders.¹¹ Supplier organisations must be democratically structured groups marginalised by the world economy who uphold basic human rights (in terms of working and living conditions) and environmental criteria. Distributors must offer a Fair Trade minimum price and premium (to be used for business or social development projects), pre-financing, long-term contracts, business and market assistance, and transparent business practices, and also campaign and raise awareness on behalf of Fair Trade.

Although alone these facets cannot establish a comprehensive account of Fair Trade, they do set parameters within which any conceptualisation must operate. They establish that Fair Trade should be understood, in broad terms, as a project seeking to assist producers in developing countries by addressing problems of the present trading system. This suggests

that any coherent conceptualisation of the movement must, in some way, meet two desiderata. It must offer:

- I. An account of the criticisms Fair Trade makes of the present market system.
- II. An account of the manner in which Fair Trade assists producers.

Given the aim here is to find the correct characterisation of the project in its present form it is clear also that a response to these two points must draw on specific types of data. In particular, the explanations must be consistent with:

- i. Fair Trade's practice.
- ii. The espoused aims of Fair Trade actors.

With these qualified desiderata in place, I will now turn to the various ways in which Fair Trade has been conceptualised to see which can offer the most coherent account.

Fair Trade as Global Market Justice

The conceptualisation of Fair Trade I wish to defend in this paper is that it is a project seeking to establish some form of global market justice. There are two ways in which this idea could be formulated: the *Complete Ideal Account* and the *Interim Account*. In this section I will introduce the empirical data that can be used to support the view, outline the two formulations, and identify why I believe the latter is the appropriate conceptualisation of Fair Trade.

While few authors mention the idea of trade justice in connection to Fair Trade in anything more than a loose sense, a number offer accounts that suggest such contentions. The view offers an explanation of the assistance Fair Trade offers to producers by suggesting that the various tools it employs are attempts to re-shape dimensions of the trade relationship that seem to suggest injustices. The demands for direct-as-possible trade relations and pre-financing can be understood as attempts to remove the exploitation of middlemen.¹² Similarly, the pre-set long-term contracts should reduce the instability of producer livelihoods.¹³ Producer welfare is also aided by the guaranteed minimum price, human rights protection, and business and community development projects (which enhance access to education and health care).¹⁴ Assuming we can consider a lack of exploitation and minimum levels of economic security and personal welfare reasonably probable components of a just institutional order (which is surely not implausible) these factors can be thought to demonstrate that Fair Trade's methods of assistance can be understood in this regard. As noted, the idea can be formulated in two ways.

The Interim Account: On this view Fair Trade is a temporary measure designed as a second-best proxy in the absence of the wider implementation of justice at the global level. The core idea is as follows. In writing on domestic social justice it is common to accept that markets are, in principle, consistent with justice provided certain background conditions are present (such as a fair distribution of wealth, equal opportunity, and so on). We have now reached an age of global markets. However, this has not been accompanied by the development of a global application of the standard background conditions usually thought necessary to make markets compatible with justice. We live, that is, in a non-ideal world. It is possible to think of Fair Trade as a project seeking to correct for this fault. While Fair Trade does not constitute justice itself (this is a much grander project that requires international organisations with sufficient power to enforce political and redistributive rights), it does offer a form of justice-emulation or justice-promotion in the absence of justice

being institutionalised at the global level. It is an interim corrective establishing just trade relations between persons living in a non-ideal world, necessary only until justice is realised in the wider context.

The Complete Ideal Account: A slightly different understanding of the above points is that the tools Fair Trade employs are themselves constitutive of ideal trade arrangements.¹⁵ This view contends that, while markets are *prima facie* acceptable, they must be structured in a certain way in order to be just. This does not require any major departure from fairly conventional market practices, but some refining is necessary. The tools Fair Trade employs, such as those noted above, should be seen then as constitutive of an ultimate end in trade relation structures. In short, it is global market justice.

Both versions of this thesis can, I believe, account for the market-critical position of Fair Trade. The idea is not that markets themselves are unjust, but that they need certain structural constraints. This seems to fit with the tools employed by the movement, which all appear to be directed at dimensions that suggest injustice but do not break from the conventional system to any great extent. It is also consistent with the rhetoric of Fair Trade actors, who, following FINE, support the idea that the project ‘seeks greater equity in international trade’ and ‘better trading conditions’.¹⁶ There is nothing in these statements that suggests a stronger objection to markets and yet there is an implicit objection to the present system. Fair Trade conceptualised as an attempt to create global market justice (in either formulation) can account for this well by acknowledging a problem in the contemporary world without objecting to the market as an institution.

What should lead us to favour the *Interim Account* are the exact tools employed by Fair Trade, which are difficult to imagine as possible components of any ultimate scheme of justice. For example, in a world where every individual was furnished with a fair share of resources or had reasonable access to credit, pre-financing would surely be an unnecessary stipulation of trade regulation. The idea that this and other features are temporary measures which can be phased out if and when background structures reach an adequate standard can make much clearer sense of this. If the essence of Fair Trade is captured by the minor alterations suggested above, it is much more coherent to think they are interim correctives necessary in circumstances which do not meet the standards required to justify allowing a freer market.

There is, then, good reason to conceptualise Fair Trade as an attempt to establish interim global market justice in a non-ideal world: it can explain the market-critical stance of Fair Trade and provides an account of the assistance it offers producers, both consistent with the empirical realities of the project in practice and the rhetoric of its actors. There remains a question regarding Fair Trade’s success in achieving these aims and it also faces a number of normative challenges, some of which will be touched on in the final section of this paper. Neither of these issues, however, raises any doubt that it is appropriately understood in this fashion. In order to address this matter directly I shall now consider some alternative conceptualisations.

Fair Trade as Ethical Consumerism

One common idea about Fair Trade is that it is intricately linked with the notion of ethical consumerism. This could be interpreted in a number of ways, but a specific variant suggested in the literature is the notion that Fair Trade is a response to contemporary globalisation trends which have created a consumerist mentality demanding products offering certain ethical guarantees. To frame this argument Renard suggests that the inevitable evolution of globalisation driven by market forces creates certain ‘interstices’ (gaps generated by the process but which reflect contrasting ideas).¹⁷ One such phenomenon is the increasing

concern for worker health and safety in the operations of corporations overseas. As a result of this interest, market niches are opening up for products sporting social and environmental guarantees. Supply will inevitably follow demand and thus projects such as Fair Trade have arisen. In other words, Fair Trade is a project generated by a demand for ethically-labelled goods. As Levi and Linton assert, ‘ethical consumers are the initiators of the campaign’.¹⁸

There is evidence that would support this conceptualisation. The rise in ‘ethical consumerism’ is a well-documented and broadly accepted concept which undoubtedly does create niche markets.¹⁹ The presently limited demand for Fair Trade from ideologically-committed (rather than price-orientated) consumers would add further credence to the idea.²⁰ Moreover, a number of Fair Trade proponents have highlighted links to international civil society networks and speciality markets.²¹

Yet, there are two major faults with this view. First, it is empirically inaccurate. There is little evidence to suggest Fair Trade arose due to the demands of ethical consumers in a global age. Goods sold along the lines of the Fair Trade model appeared before the onset of contemporary globalisation (usually thought to originate around the 1970s or 1980s).²² And, as LeClair notes, non-governmental organisations were the dominant actors in designing and promoting these initiatives (the early examples including Oxfam’s use of the approach in their post-Second World War relief efforts) and in orchestrating the ensuing evolution.²³

Second, even if it were historically correct, the view would still seem to offer a rather unconvincing answer to the question “What is Fair Trade?” Suggesting that it is merely a product of ethical consumerism would offer no direct comment – none, that is, which derives clearly from the core facet under discussion – on how Fair Trade assists producers. Nor can it account for many of the other activities of Fair Trade actors, such as their campaign efforts.²⁴ An account of what Fair Trade is, in other words, does not seem exhausted by reference only to ethical consumption.

Advocates of this position may respond by suggesting that although the view does not offer a direct account of these dimensions, their core thesis is indispensable to whatever complete answer is given to the question “What is Fair Trade?” Perhaps by adopting some form of historical institutionalism they could argue that whatever features Fair Trade exhibits, they will be the product of its past. They will be inexplicable without acknowledging the origins and forces (that is, globalisation and ethical consumption) that shaped the movement.

We have already seen reason to doubt the thought that these origins are in ethical consumerism so the thesis would still not be a strong one, but the argument would also be problematic for two further reasons. First, even if it were true that we cannot explain or understand the features of Fair Trade without reference to the past, this insight still tells us nothing about the content of these features. The view would be confusing the question “What are the features of Fair Trade” with “What explains the features of Fair Trade?” The latter question may be interesting and historical evidence may be indispensable in answering it, but it is of no relevance, and it is logically subsequent, to the former. Second, the argument commits what is known as ‘genetic fallacy’. This is the mistake of believing that something’s origins necessarily have implications for its present analysis. Such reasoning, however, is erroneous. It is tantamount to saying that because the German Chancellor was a member of the Hitler Youth aged three, his current policies must be fascist.

Fair Trade as a Development Initiative

Another common conception of Fair Trade is that it is a development project designed by non-governmental actors seeking to support and advance the welfare of poor producers. This idea is proffered in two different forms: the *Business View* and the *Comprehensive View*. In

this section I will outline each in turn. The former is deemed too narrow to capture the realities of Fair Trade while the latter is deemed an incomplete conceptualisation.

The Business View: On this account Fair Trade is a development project offering marketing and technical assistance as a means of enabling producers to compete in the global market.²⁵ Globalisation is again largely taken as a given and Fair Trade is seen as an orchestrated means of aiding poor producers directly within its structures. It is something akin to a training program from which producers hopefully will ‘graduate’.

Evidence can be found to support this stance. FINE’s definition includes a reference to development and it is unquestionable that the project is concerned with assisting those in need. There are key aspects of Fair Trade aimed at training producers, such as the business assistance requirement, and amongst the reported benefits of Fair Trade projects, business and human capital development are commonly acknowledged.²⁶ In addition, the notion of ‘graduating’ producers can be observed in Comercio Justo, one of the earliest supplier groups, that has begun its own Fair Trade initiative.²⁷ Many others have sought independent deals with transnational companies and enhanced market access is an often recognised gain.²⁸ Studies suggest that Fair Trade’s success in providing development assistance in these areas is mixed.²⁹ However, a mixed success record is no reason for thinking this view does not offer an account of the assistance Fair Trade offers producers consistent with the tools employed. The idea may still capture the aims correctly even if these are not always realised in practice.

The conceptualisation is, however, too narrow: it does not provide a full account of the manner in which Fair Trade assists producers. While business assistance is part of what Fair Trade does, it certainly is not all it does. Some of the criteria, such as the demand for environmental protection, cannot plausibly fit within this framework in anything other than a very indirect sense (or we would need to define ‘business assistance’ so widely that it would lose any interesting meaning). Moreover, few of the project’s advocates focus so narrowly on its business dimensions. Most highlight a much more comprehensive agenda.³⁰ This suggests that, at the least, this conceptualisation of Fair Trade must be formulated a little more widely.

The Comprehensive View: Fair Trade on this account is still understood as a development initiative, but one with a more inclusive notion of ‘development’. This agenda can be witnessed in the tools and alleged successes of Fair Trade, which include the enhanced level of economic security provided by the minimum price and long-term contract,³¹ the building of social capital (valuable in social security but also in promoting democracy) through the demand for cooperatives,³² improvements in health care and education through the premium price funds,³³ and a general sense of social empowerment given by a trading relationship that treats all participants as equal and with respect.³⁴ On this wider agenda too, studies suggest that Fair Trade’s record is one of mixed success.³⁵ Again, though, this is no reason for thinking Fair Trade’s assistance to producers is not well captured by the idea of aiding development.

The view, however, has two shortcomings. The first can be seen by comparing it to the account defended in the second section of this paper. Although it might be difficult to distinguish between tools employed to aid development and those necessary for interim market justice, it is not so difficult to see how justification for the two would differ and here the evidence rather contradicts an aid-based account. Fair Trade actors have been quick to assert that their project is not a charity.³⁶ It is much more focused on ideas of protecting rights and reforming the market context in such a way that everyone gets to participate on fair and equal terms. The rhetoric of the project, that is, fits more succinctly with the aim of realising justice. Second, the view is incomplete because it does not offer any account of the market-critical rhetoric of Fair Trade actors. In fact, the lobbying efforts advocating reform

would not even make logical sense if the project were targeting nothing more than increased access to an unchanged market economy. This is not to argue that Fair Trade should not be thought to have had a valuable impact on development; rather that the rhetoric of the movement (both in terms of how it perceives the assistance it offers producers and how it views the global economic system) suggests this should be understood more in terms of promoting market justice in a non-ideal world.

Fair Trade 'In and Against' the Market

A final conceptualisation I will review is one often proffered in academic literature: that Fair Trade operates as a challenge to the conventional market economics. This thesis can be construed as a purely empirical claim but it is often conjoined with normative assertions. For clarity I will first outline two versions of the normative underpinnings: the *Revolutionary Thesis* and *Revisionist Thesis*. I will then identify the empirical claim that Fair Trade adheres to the aims of the latter of these. Within this conceptualisation I will distinguish between the *Practising Change Account* and the *Aspirations Account*. Both accounts, I shall argue, are mistaken.

The normative component of this thesis states that markets (at least in their present form) are dehumanising. They involve forms of alienation and commodification that degrade persons acting within them. They should, as such, be replaced with a different economic system. The *Revolutionary Thesis* claims that such goals cannot be achieved while the present system prevails; rather a completely separated construction *founded* on different principles is required.³⁷ Fair Trade should seek, then, to establish a different mode of economic interaction operating in a parallel economy.³⁸ The *Revisionist Thesis*, on the other hand, believes these goals can be achieved by working from within present market structures. On this view Fair Trade can be part of the process of change by working 'in and against' the market. Neither of these normative assertions is of direct interest here and they will be left unexamined. Of greater import is the claim, made by some, that Fair Trade should be perceived as a project embodying these aims.

Since mainstream retailers and caterers are now responsible for most Fair Trade sales, it would be difficult to suggest that Fair Trade in its present form should be characterised as an example of the *Revolutionary Thesis*. However, some have argued that Fair Trade should be conceptualised as an existing form of the *Revisionist Thesis*.

Fair Trade 'in and against' the Market: Advocates here believe that Fair Trade does (or at least aims to) remodel trade relations.³⁹ Raynolds, for instance, asserts that Fair Trade links consumers and producers through multidirectional information flows about livelihoods and production, thus creating associative relationships.⁴⁰ It 're-embeds' trading relations to incorporate considerations for the social and environmental dimensions of goods.⁴¹ These features, respectively, remove the obscuring of social relations in production and the reduction of a product to its material worth, thus overcoming the problem of commodity fetishism.⁴²

We can distinguish between two versions of this claim. The *Practising Change Account* holds that Fair Trade does, in fact, achieve these ends. The *Aspirations Account* holds only that the aims of Fair Trade actors (judging by their rhetoric and practice) are best understood in this way (whether or not they are making progress on them). Both versions are at fault for exaggerating or distorting the realities of the Fair Trade project. I will now show this to be the case for each in turn.

The Practising Change Account claims that Fair Trade creates associative relations, that the obscurity of social relations in production is unmasked, and that the project moves away from the market approach to valuing goods. Empirical evidence, however, corroborates

none of these points. Regarding the first, studies suggest that significant power-imbalances still exist in the trade relationship: there is a troubling trust deficit between producers and consumers and many producers feel it involves the same top-down imposition common to conventional markets.⁴³ As Shreck points out, even if they offer better terms and conditions, the forces governing the re-direction of trade relations still emanate from a control tower in the north and this is no more associative than what it would be replacing.⁴⁴

Neither are social relations in production particularly unmasked. Realistically, Lyon asserts, the awareness dissemination is mostly one-way where consumers learn about a 'representative' example of Southern livelihood and working conditions while, at the opposite end of the supply chain, producers still understand little of 'Fair Trade', their role within it, or the people that purchase their goods.⁴⁵

Finally, it is doubtful whether Fair Trade does much to move away from the standard materialism of the market. There is an increasing tendency to undertake joint ventures with actors, such as transnational companies, that are very much 'in' the market and the system is still governed by consumer demand and product quality.⁴⁶ As Shreck puts it, this suggests that in moments of truth 'in the market' trumps 'against the market'.⁴⁷

So much then for the *Practising Change Account*. None of these points, however, challenge the *Aspirations Account*. They are merely evidence of a mixed success record, advocates can say. They do not prove Fair Trade's aims are not captured by the idea of restructuring trade relations. The rhetoric and methods point in this direction even if the outcomes do not.

The evidence, however, does not validate this point either. Consider commodity fetishism. This, it is argued, Fair Trade can challenge by imbuing consumable goods with a sense of production history. However, as Hudson and Hudson note, commodity fetishism is a problem rooted in the alienating experience of a person *qua* labourer, not *qua* consumer.⁴⁸ Any attempt to breach this must attack the problem at its root in the lives not only of producers in developing countries, but also in the lives of workers *qua* workers in richer countries, which Fair Trade does not.⁴⁹ Moreover, there is more to commodity fetishism than alienated labour and materialism. As Lyon notes, it is partly related to the general 'mystical character' of a product; an issue which Fair Trade largely ignores.⁵⁰ In fact, Lyon continues, a major selling point is made by taking advantage of the West's infatuation with concepts of the (mysterious) 'other'.⁵¹ In short, Fair Trade does not even have the right form to begin to address two of the most fundamental components of commodity fetishism. To think its tools are best conceptualised as aimed at doing so is, therefore, either naïve or a matter of wishful thinking.

Moreover, the *Aspirations Account* is not supported by the rhetoric of Fair Trade actors. There is no pretence among these actors that the increasingly mainstream market approach is accidental, temporary, or regrettable.⁵² Neither does it seem that they think altogether alternative economic institutions are appropriate or even necessary. According to the FINE definition introduced early in this paper, the espoused goals of the movement are that it 'seeks greater equity *in* international trade' (emphasis added) and 'better {not alternative} trading conditions'.⁵³

The problem, in essence, is that this conception, in either of its forms, has taken the idea of being 'against the market' too literally. This stance appears far more radical than the project's aims or realities. The idea that it seeks to improve the present situation not by departing from conventional markets but by placing them within better constraints while background justice is not present, on the other hand, can capture the essence of a market-critical stance without needing to suggest anything more drastic or show any discomfort about an increasingly mainstream position. Judging by the realities, tools, and rhetoric, then,

we have reason to reject the idea that Fair Trade is ‘in and against’ the market, and instead favour the view that it seeks to establish interim global market justice in a non-ideal world.

Non-Ideal Global Market Justice: A Project in Need of Defence

Fair Trade, then, is best understood as an attempt to offer interim global market justice in a non-ideal world. The empirical realities of its existence and an analysis of its aims suggest this characterisation shows the closest fit of the conceptions so far suggested. Nothing said thus far, however, provides any normative defence of this project. This task needs to be addressed. Although I will not provide any conclusive comments on it here, I will close the paper by introducing a number of normative challenges Fair Trade faces and hint at possible avenues for defence. I will discuss two challenges that focus on the proposed ends. These are liberal and Marxist critiques. I will also identify a question raised about the means employed to reach the ends.

The liberal objection is that Fair Trade is creating false markets that are hindering progress.⁵⁴ Taking the example of the coffee industry Lindsay argues that the troublesome situation of many producers is merely the result of the market functioning efficiently. The downward pressure on prices is largely due to oversupply and technological improvement. Inefficient producers are losing out from this but the answer is not to support them artificially; rather they should be encouraged to pursue new areas of production in which they have a comparative advantage. Essentially, it is argued, Fair Trade is actually offsetting efficient market processes by delaying and hampering this process.⁵⁵

The Marxist critique defends an almost exact opposite contention. In essence the position asserts that the very idea of attempting to reconcile the market with justice is a misnomer because it is capitalism itself that is the problem. Fair Trade may mitigate some of the worst effects, but it will not ultimately resolve the difficulties producers face within the market without challenging the overarching structural forces, such as power-imbalances and exploitation.⁵⁶ At best then, this critique asserts, Fair Trade will act only as a palliative; at worst it perpetuates the very structural problems of the capitalist system from which it claims to protect producers.

Comprehensive evaluation of these critiques is not possible here. Let me, however, outline two potential responses available to Fair Trade advocates. Both critiques, in essence, defend the following thesis, which includes a normative premise (P) and a (supposedly) derivative conclusion (C):

P: Fair Trade does not aim at or cannot achieve ideal ends.

∴, C: It is an erroneous project.

I shall address the validity of P presently, but it is worth noting that, even if it is deemed accurate, C does not follow. It might plausibly be asserted that, even if some other market approach may be preferable, there is still no reason to think that we should be unconcerned about the welfare of producers as well or in the meantime. The protection of human rights and promotion of welfare alone, Singer and Mason argue, are reason enough to endorse Fair Trade regardless of whether it endorses the right long-term goals.⁵⁷ As Singer and Mason continue, ‘it is a mistake to think that because a proposal cannot solve a very big problem it cannot do any good at all’.⁵⁸ In other words, imperfection should not be misconstrued as worthlessness.

Moreover, it is at least questionable whether P should be deemed correct on either critique. As noted above, it is now common to think of the market as being broadly consistent with justice. There are, to be sure, still Marxist critics of this view. Most,

however, now hold that the basic institution can be made compatible with justice provided certain constraints are put in place or at least that we are now forced to accept that the market has proved itself indispensable for efficiency purposes.⁵⁹ There is, then, reason to doubt the Marxist construal of P. Similarly, we are unlikely to be persuaded by Lindsay's critique if we think there is more to social constructs than efficiency. That we do think this is fairly uncontroversial and the point is well established by Rawls who stressed that principles of justice are 'lexically prior to the principle of efficiency'.⁶⁰ If Fair Trade promotes these principles, then, Lindsay's criticisms are unlikely to present much challenge to it.

Another possible criticism of Fair Trade is that, even if its aims are appropriate, its methods of achieving them are not. If we should now be in pursuit of global market justice, it is plausible to think that these concerns are properly addressed at the level of global governance.⁶¹ Fair Trade could again respond with some claim regarding short-term humanitarian concern, but it is possible that this will not be sufficient here. Lyon argues that attempting to draw people into the struggle for social and environmental justice in their role as product purchasers elevates consumer concerns above the politics of citizenship rights. It 'individualises responsibility'. By making this shift, Lyon continues, the perceived importance of collective duty is belittled, which would be a direct detraction from the commitment to the platform of necessary political action.⁶²

There are, I think, two ways in which Fair Trade advocates might respond to this. First, they might point to empirical data regarding Fair Trade consumers and argue that the idea such people would commit to the ideal in private life but not in public is inconsistent with the evidence. It has been noted already that most are largely motivated by an ideological commitment to purchase the products and, as voting and activist engagement are essentially the result of devotion to specific principles, this would provide good reason to believe that the key market demographic to which Fair Trade caters would not shirk their political and collective responsibilities on the basis that they also have a chance to promote the cause in their everyday lives. Second, it would be possible to appeal to more theoretical ideas regarding the flow-direction of political change. In feminist thought, for example, it is often contended the key disjuncture for gender equality is not forcing standards in public but changing attitudes in the private sphere.⁶³ The problem, in other words, is not getting personally committed citizens to acknowledge their principles in their political lives. It is exactly the opposite. Obtaining personal commitment is conducive, if not a prerequisite, to augmenting civic support. Far from thinking that private realm loyalty would detract from public commitment, then, it seems possible that greater numbers of committed Fair Trade consumers would equate also to more political proponents for the related matters of human rights protection and world welfare.

I do not pretend that these few paragraphs are sufficient to establish a normative defence of Fair Trade. This is not least because there are many questions still to be answered. For example, should we try to defend Fair Trade as a deontological requirement, aimed at establishing constraints on our interactions with others? If so, how stringent are these constraints and are they more important than other constraints some suggest we are violating in the contemporary world?⁶⁴ Alternatively, does the defence of Fair Trade rest on more consequentialist considerations, such as its success in reducing poverty? If so, can it be shown that it is better at promoting a more just world than, for example, greater levels of corporate social responsibility from transnational companies, the money invested in development by corporate philanthropy or conditionality agreements placed on foreign direct investment, or even simply more donations to charity? These questions and a more detailed normative investigation of Fair Trade must await future research.

However, having determined that Fair Trade, in its present existence, is appropriately conceptualised as attempting to establish interim global market justice in a non-ideal world,

we are, at least, now situated to engage in this task more fully and these points provide an introduction to the major issues of contention. A more complete evaluation is, in other words, now possible and can now be addressed coherently.

¹ I owe thanks to Matthew Clayton and Dominic Kelly for extensive comments on this paper.

² It is duly noted that one attempt to address this disjuncture was made in G. Fridell, 'Fair Trade and Neoliberalism: Assessing Emerging Perspectives', *Latin American Perspectives*, 33: 6 (2006), pp. 8-28. Fridell's taxonomy, however, must be seen as incomplete because it does not acknowledge a number of possible conceptions identified in literature, including the one ultimately defended here.

³ P.L. Taylor, 'In the Market But Not of It: Fair Trade Coffee and Forest Stewardship Council Certification as Market-Based Social Change', *World Development*, 33: 1 (2005), p. 133; Oxfam, 'Mugged: Poverty in your Coffee Cup', (2002), available at <http://www.maketrade4fair.com/en/assets/english/mugged.pdf> Accessed 30th December 2009, pp. 25-27.

⁴ Oxfam, 'Mugged', p. 9, pp. 16-19 & pp. 28-30.

⁵ A problem acknowledged prior to the establishment of Fair Trade networks by J. Aranda & C. Morales, 'Poverty Alleviation through Participation in Fair Trade Coffee Networks: The Case of CEPCO, Oaxaca, Mexico', (2002), available at <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/Sociology/FairTradeResearchGroup/doc/cepcoco.pdf> Accessed 30th December 2009, p. 7; V.E. Méndez, 'Fair Trade Networks in Two Coffee Cooperatives of Western El Salvador: An Analysis of Insertion Through a Second Level Organisation', (2002), available at <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/Sociology/FairTradeResearchGroup/doc/elsal.pdf> Accessed 30th December 2009, p. 5; M. Levi & A. Linton, 'Fair Trade: A Cup at a Time?', *Politics and Society*, 31: 3 (2003), p. 412; P.D. Rice & J. McLean, 'Sustainable Coffee at the Crossroads', *White Paper Prepared for The Consumer's Choice Council* (1999), available at <http://www.greenbeanery.ca/bean/documents/sustainableCoffee.pdf> Accessed 30th December 2009, p. 22.

⁶ A. Hira & J. Ferrie, 'Fair Trade: Three Key Challenges for Reaching the Mainstream', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 63: 2 (2006), pp. 112-113.

⁷ Oxfam, 'Mugged', p. 9.

⁸ Oxfam, 'Mugged', p. 10.

⁹ Oxfam, 'Mugged', pp. 9-11.

¹⁰ EFTA, 'Fair Trade', available at <http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org/observatory/index.php/fairtrade> Accessed 30th December 2009.

¹¹ Information here drawn from FLO, FLO, 'Generic Fairtrade Standards for Small Producers' Organisations', available at http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/SPO_Aug09_EN.pdf Accessed 30th December 2009; FLO, 'Generic Fairtrade Standards for Hired Labour', available at

http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/HL_Aug09_EN.pdf Accessed 30th December 2009;

FLO, 'Generic Fairtrade Trade Standards', available at

http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/GTS_Aug09_EN.pdf Accessed 30th December 2009;

WFTO, '10 Standards of Fair Trade', available at

http://www.wfto.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2&Itemid=14 Accessed 30th December 2009.

¹² W. Young & K. Utting, 'Fair Trade, Business and Sustainable Development', *Sustainable Development*, 13: 3 (2005), p. 140.

¹³ G. Moore, 'The Fair Trade Movement: Parameters, Issues and Future Research', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 53: 1-2 (2004), p. 78.

¹⁴ On which see Moore, 'The Fair Trade Movement', p. 78; on the third see B. Doherty & S. Tranchell, 'New Thinking in International Trade? A Case Study of the Day Chocolate Company', *Sustainable Development*, 13: 3 (2005), pp. 173-174; C. Bacon, 'Confronting the Coffee Crisis: Can Fair Trade, Organic, and Speciality Coffees Reduce Small-Scale Farmer Vulnerability in Northern Nicaragua?', *World Development*, 33: 3 (2005), p. 506.

¹⁵ This seems to be the view of the authors from whom the above examples were drawn, as suggested in Young & Utting, 'Fair Trade, Business, and Sustainable Development', p. 139; Moore, 'The Fair Trade Movement', p. 74. Other authors that make similar suggestions include Z. Boda, 'Conflicting Principles of Fair Trade', *Business Ethics Papers*, 3 (2001), p. 22; A.J. Nicholls, 'Strategic Options in Fair Trade Retailing', *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 30: 1 (2002), p. 7.

¹⁶ This quote is taken from the FINE definition introduced in the first section of this paper. The same idea is supported by a number of other Fair Trade actors, including People Tree, 'About People Tree', available at <http://www.peopletree.co.uk/about.php> Accessed 30th December 2009; Divine Chocolate, 'About Divine', available at <http://www.divinechocolate.com/about/default.aspx> Accessed 30th December 2009; Traidcraft,

'What is Fair Trade', available at http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/about_traidcraft/faq/fair_trade/what_is_fair_trade.htm Accessed 30th December 2009.

¹⁷ The following line of thought is taken from M-C. Renard, 'The Interstices of Globalisation: The Example of Fair Coffee', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 39: 4 (1999), pp. 484-500.

¹⁸ Levi & Linton, 'Fair Trade: A Cup at a Time?', p. 407.

¹⁹ See, for instance, S. Lockie et al., 'Eating 'Green': Motivations Behind Organic Food Consumption in Australia', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42: 1 (2002), pp. 23-39; K. Bird & D.R. Hughes, 'Ethical Consumption: The Case of "Fairly-Traded" Coffee', *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 6: 3 (1997), p. 159-167; C. Arnot et al., 'Do Ethical Consumers Care About Price? A Revealed Preference Analysis of Fair Trade Purchases', *Canadian Journal of Agricultural Studies*, 54: 4 (2006), pp. 555-565.

²⁰ Arnot et al., 'Do Ethical Consumers Care About Price', pp. 561-563. Whether this commitment is completely steadfast is, of course, questionable. As Fridell notes, even amongst committed consumers we must admit that ethical considerations remain just one influence on choices and it would be an exaggeration to think nothing could alter their priorities. On this see G. Fridell, 'Fair Trade and the International Moral Economy: Within and Against the Market', *Cerlac Working Paper Series*, (2003), available at

<http://www.yorku.ca/cerlac/documents/Fridell.pdf> Accessed 30th December 2009, p. 7. However, that

consumers show some special commitment is sufficient to justify the basic connection to ethical consumerism.

²¹ B.D. Parrish et al., 'What Tanzania's Coffee Farmers can teach the World: A Performance Based Look at the Fair Trade-Free Trade Debate', *Sustainable Development*, 13: 3 (2005), p. 187; Bacon, 'Confronting the Coffee Crisis', p. 506.

²² M.A. Littrell & M.A. Dickson, *Social Responsibility in the Global Market: Fair Trade of Cultural Products* (California: Sage, 1999), pp. 16-17.

²³ On the general point see M.S. LeClair, 'Fighting the Tide: Alternative Trade Organisations in the Era of Global Free Trade', *World Development*, 30: 6 (2002), p. 950; on the Oxfam initiative see WFTO, 'Where did it all begin?', available at

http://www.wfto.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10&Itemid=17&limit=1&limitstart=1 Accessed 30th December 2009.

²⁴ On which see, WFTO, 'Awareness raising, campaigning and advocacy', available at

http://www.wfto.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10&Itemid=17&limit=1&limitstart=4 Accessed 30th December 2009.

²⁵ J. Wempe, 'Ethical Entrepreneurship and Fair Trade', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 60: 3 (2005), p. 213. A similar idea is offered by Littrell & Dickson, *Social Responsibility in the Global Market*, p. 14.

²⁶ See for instance A. Tallontire, 'Challenges facing fair trade: which way now?', *Small Enterprise Development*, 13: 3 (2002), p. 15; N. Udomkit & A. Winnett, 'Fair Trade in Organic Rice: a Case Study from Thailand', *Small Enterprise Development*, 13: 3 (2002), pp. 48-51; Aranda & Morales, 'Poverty Alleviation through Fair Trade Coffee Networks', p. 6; Méndez, 'Fair Trade Networks in Two Coffee Cooperatives of Western El Salvador', p. 9; L. Raynolds, 'Poverty Alleviation through Participation in Fair Trade Coffee Networks: Existing Research and Critical Issues', (2002) available at

<http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/Sociology/FairTradeResearchGroup/doc/rayback.pdf> Accessed 30th December 2009, pp. 19-20.

²⁷ D. Jaffie et al., 'Bringing the 'Moral Charge' Home: Fair Trade within the North and within the South', *Rural Sociology*, 69: 2 (2004), pp. 184-186.

²⁸ On the former see Taylor, 'In the Market But Not of It', p. 134; on the latter see Aranda & Morales, 'Poverty Alleviation through Fair Trade Coffee Networks', pp. 5-6; Méndez; 'Fair Trade Networks in Two Coffee Cooperatives of Western El Salvador', p. 8; Doherty & Tranchell, 'New Thinking in International Trade?', p. 173; Raynolds, 'Poverty Alleviation through Participation in Fair Trade Coffee Networks', p. 22; E. Paul, 'Evaluating Fair Trade as a Development Project: Methodological Considerations', *Development in Practice*, 15: 2 (2005), p. 148.

²⁹ See, for example, Rice & McLean, 'Sustainable Coffee at the Crossroads', p. 83; LeClair, 'Fighting the Tide', p. 955; B. Thomson, 'Lessons for Fair Trade', *Small Enterprise Development*, 10: 4 (1999), p. 59; A. Tallontire, 'Partnerships in fair trade: reflections from a case study of Café 'Direct'', *Development in Practice*, 10: 2 (2000), p. 173; Parrish et al., 'What Tanzania's Coffee Farmers can teach the World', pp. 187-188.

³⁰ See for instance, L. Humphrey, 'Which Way to Market? Exploring Opportunities for Marginalised Producers in Developing Countries to Supply Mainstream Commercial Companies in the UK', *Traidcraft Policy Unit Report Series 1* (2000), available at

http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/Resources/Traidcraft/Documents/PDF/tx/policy_which_way_to_market.pdf

Accessed 30th December 2009, pp. 5-6; Traidcraft, 'What is Fair Trade?'; People Tree, 'About People Tree';

Starfish Fair Trade, 'About Us', available at http://starfishfairtrade.co.uk/About_Us.html Accessed 30th December 2009.

³¹ Raynolds, 'Poverty Alleviation through Participation in Fair Trade Coffee Networks', p. 19; Aranda & Morales, 'Poverty Alleviation through Fair Trade Coffee Networks', & pp. 18; Méndez, 'Fair Trade Networks in Two Coffee Cooperatives of Western El Salvador', p. 16; Bacon, 'Confronting the Coffee Crisis', p. 506.

³² See for instance, Raynolds, 'Poverty Alleviation through Participation in Fair Trade Coffee Networks', p. 20; P.L. Taylor et al., 'Keeping Trade Fair: Governance Challenges in the Fair Trade Coffee Initiative', *Sustainable Development*, 13: 3 (2005), pp. 202-203; Udomkit & Winnett, 'Fair Trade in Organic Rice', p. 51.

³³ See for instance, L. Raynolds et al., 'Fair Trade Coffee: Building Producer Capacity via Global Networks', *Journal of International Development*, 16: 8 (2004), pp. 1117-1118; Doherty & Tranchell, 'New Thinking in International Trade?', p. 174.

³⁴ Doherty & Tranchell, 'New Thinking in International Trade?', p. 173 note, for instance, the empowerment building affects (internal and external) of Divine Chocolate's power sharing model of stakeholding and decision-making. See also Raynolds, 'Poverty Alleviation through Participation in Fair Trade Coffee Networks', p. 22.

³⁵ See, for example, Tallontire, 'Partnerships in Fair Trade', pp. 173-175; C. Getz & A. Shreck, 'What Organic and Fair Trade Labels do not tell us: towards a place-based understanding of certification', *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30: 5 (2005), p. 498-499;

³⁶ See, for example, Traidcraft, 'What is Fair Trade?'; Larry's Beans, 'Fair Trade – Equality not Charity', available at <https://www.larrysbeans.com/fair-trade---equality-not-charity/> Accessed 30th December 2009.

³⁷ Fridell, 'Fair Trade and Neoliberalism', pp. 23-24.

³⁸ Brown, for example, suggests the establishment of an independent body to coordinate market exchange under Fair Trade rules instead of functioning under the remit of the World Trade Organisation. See M.B. Brown, *Fair Trade: Reform and Realities in the International Trading System* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pp. 171-175.

³⁹ We shall focus on only one particular version of this thesis but similar ideas are proffered by C. Sugden, 'Fair Trade as Christian Mission', in P. Johnson & C. Sugden, eds., *Markets, Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God: Essays to Celebrate Traidcraft's 21st Birthday* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2001), pp. 9-10; S. Smith & S.

Barrientos, 'Fair Trade and Ethical Trade: Are There Moves Towards Convergence?', *Sustainable Development*, 13: 3 (2005), pp. 192-193; M.K. Goodman, 'Reading Fair Trade: Political Ecological Imaginary and the Moral Economy of Fair Trade Foods', *Political Geography*, 23: 7 (2004), p. 894.

⁴⁰ L. Raynolds, 'Consumer/Producer Links in Fair Trade Coffee Networks', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42: 4 (2002), p. 416; L. Raynolds, 'Forging New Local/Global Links Through Fair Trade Agro-Food Networks', in R. Almás & G. Lawrence, eds., *Globalization, Localization and Sustainable Livelihoods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 58-59.

⁴¹ L. Raynolds, 'Re-embedding Global Agriculture: The International Organic and Fair Trade Movements', *Agriculture and Human Values*, 17: 3 (2000), p.306.

⁴² D.L. Murray & L. Raynolds, 'Alternative Trade in Bananas: Obstacles and Opportunities for Progressive Social Change in the Global Economy', *Agriculture and Human Values*, 17: 1 (2000), p. 66.

⁴³ On the former see Tallontire, 'Partnerships in Fair Trade', p. 173; on the latter see Getz & Shreck, 'What Organic and Fair Trade Labels do not tell us', p. 498; J. John, 'Fair Trade and Standard Setting: A Labour Rights Perspective', *Working USA*, 5: 1 (2001), pp. 67-68; Paul, 'Evaluating Fair Trade as a Development Project', p. 135.

⁴⁴ A. Shreck, 'Resistance, Redistribution, and Power in the Fair Trade Banana Initiative', *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22: 1 (2005), p. 26.

⁴⁵ S. Lyon, 'Evaluating Fair Trade Consumption: Politics, Defetishization and Producer Participation', *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30: 5 (2006), pp. 457-459.

⁴⁶ On the former see Smith & Barrientos, 'Fair Trade and Ethical Trade', p. 196; on the latter see Shreck, 'Resistance, Redistribution, and Power in the Fair Trade Banana Initiative', p. 26; M. Moberg, 'Fair Trade and Eastern Caribbean Banana Farmers: Rhetoric and Reality in the Anti-Globalization Movement', *Human Organization*, 64: 1 (2005), p. 5.

⁴⁷ A. Shreck, 'Just Bananas? Fair Trade Banana Production in the Dominican Republic', *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 10: 2 (2002), p. 20.

⁴⁸ I. Hudson & M. Hudson, 'Removing the Veil? Commodity Fetishism, Fair Trade and the Environment', *Organization and Environment*, 16: 4 (2003), pp. 414-419.

⁴⁹ Hudson & Hudson, 'Removing the Veil?', p. 424.

⁵⁰ Lyon, 'Evaluating Fair Trade Consumption', p.459.

⁵¹ Lyon, 'Evaluating Fair Trade Consumption', pp. 457-459. Similar points are made by C. Wright, 'Consuming Lives, Consuming Landscapes: Interpreting Advertisements for Cafedirect Coffees', *Journal of International Development*, 16: 5 (2004), p. 678; Fridell, 'Fair Trade and Neoliberalism', p. 22.

⁵² For instance, Paola Ghillani openly acknowledged that a key reason for him accepting the job as Director of Max Havelaar was to develop the organisation into a self-sufficient business, in P. Hulm, 'Fair Trade as a Business Model', *International Trade Forum*, 2 (2006), pp. 20-21. See also Hira & Ferrie, 'Fair Trade: Three Key Challenges for Reaching the Mainstream', p. 111; Tallontire, 'Challenges facing fair trade', p. 22; T. Witkowski, 'Fair Trade Marketing: An Alternative System for Globalization and Development', *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 13: 4 (2005), p. 31.

⁵³ This quote is taken from the FINE definition introduced in the first section of this paper and was used in the section originally defending Fair Trade as global market justice in a non-ideal world.

⁵⁴ This objection is based on B. Lindsay, 'Grounds for Complaint? Understanding the Coffee Crisis', *Paper for the Centre for Trade Policy Studies*, 16 (2003), available at <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/briefs/tbp-016.pdf> Accessed 30th December 2009.

⁵⁵ This conclusion is supported for markets more broadly by R. Maseland & A. De Vaal, 'How Fair is Fair Trade?', *De Economist*, 150: 3 (2002), p. 259, although they do recognise the consistency of the argument depends on the specific product price elasticity of demand.

⁵⁶ This criticism is proffered by Fridell, 'Fair Trade and Neoliberalism', pp. 21-23.

⁵⁷ P. Singer & J. Mason, *Eating: What We Eat and Why it Matters* (London: Arrow Books, 2006), pp. 161-163.

⁵⁸ Singer & Mason, *Eating*, p. 165.

⁵⁹ Important examples here include G.A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 50 & p. 260; J. Carens, *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market: An Essay in Utopian Politico-Economic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); R. Van der Veen & P. Van Parijs, 'A Capitalism Road to Communism', *Basic Income Studies: An International Journal of Basic Income Research*, 1: 1: Article 6 (2006), pp. 5-8. The difficulty of finding an efficient alternative is well explored by A. Buchanan, *Ethics, Efficiency, and the Market* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1988).

⁶⁰ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice (Revised Edition)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 266.

⁶¹ This idea is suggested by R. Howse & M.J. Trebilcock, 'The Fair Trade – Free Trade Debate: Trade, Labor, and the Environment', *International Review of Law and Economics*, 16: 1 (1996), pp. 76-79. This position is also supported by C. Valor, 'What if all trade was Fair Trade? The Potential of a Social Clause to Achieve the Goals of Fair Trade', *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 14: 3 (2006), p. 172.

⁶² These points are made in Lyon, 'Evaluating Fair Trade Consumption', p. 461.

⁶³ A point along these lines is made by S.M. Okin, 'Gender, the Public and the Private', in D. Held, ed., *Political Theory Today* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 75-76.

⁶⁴ See, for example, those stressed in T. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms (Second Edition)* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).