

At the end of the semester.

Economics 340: International Economics

Ethics Research Project

The primary research and writing project for this class will be an economic and ethical analysis of a case in international trade. This case must inhabit the intersection of international trade and business ethics, demonstrating your ability to understand and discuss the ethical responsibilities of consumers, producers, and governments with respect to a trade-related topic. You will prepare both a paper and a presentation of your project.

Use the distinction between empirical questions (what will happen?) and ethical questions (what values are helped or harmed?) to clearly articulate the ethical dimension of your topic. Choose a specific case or situation to analyze.

International Trade topics:

- gains from trade,
- winners and losers when nations trade,
- responsibilities of businesses and government to compensate losers from trade,
- trade policy (tariffs, quotas, subsidies),
- labor and environmental standards,
- effects of trade on developing countries,
- outsourcing and multinational production,
- etc.

Business Ethics / Ethical Dilemmas: What are the moral or ethical responsibilities of consumers, firms or governments with respect to international economics?

Your proposed topic should present your ethical question, and provide a brief description of why you think this question is interesting and how you will go about answering it. Clearly outline both the ethical dilemma and the international economics dimension of your proposed topic.

Examples of ethical questions:

Should the US government provide compensation to American workers who lose their jobs as a result of international trade?

Given that tariffs raise prices for consumers, should they be eliminated, or are they justified given their protection of domestic jobs?

Should the US limit food exports in order to keep prices low for American consumers?

FINAL PAPER

Your final paper will be 4-6 pages in length.

- It will begin with a thesis statement, taking a position on your topic.
- You should present a factual overview of your topic: what's this ethical dilemma all about, why has it arisen, why do we care?
- Present the ethical dimensions as well as the basic position that international economics takes on the subject.
- Carefully sort out the empirical and ethical questions.

Example: If your paper is about displaced workers, then you would provide an overview of why some workers are displaced by international trade. You could provide some actual historical examples of such displacement (ie: auto workers in Detroit, the rust belt, etc.). Present the international economics argument: ... sure, some people will lose their jobs, but on average the nation will be better off, and those displaced workers can do something more productive now! Present the ethical dilemma ... sure, trade benefits everyone *on average*, but what about the individuals who lose their jobs, livelihoods, etc.? Who has an obligation to maintain their well-being? Then make your argument: OK, on average everyone is better off, and workers can transition to another industry. But since this transition is difficult for many workers, the government has a responsibility to help. (Why? How?)

The length of the paper is just a guideline. I believe it will be difficult to complete the assignment well in less than four pages.

PRESENTATION

You will present your research in a formal presentation during the last week of class. The goal will be to concisely educate the class on your dilemma, its ethical dimensions, and your position. Slides and/or handouts may be used.