

CASE STUDY

Resolving Controversial Environmental Issues

- What evidence does the author offer to lead to her conclusion? On the basis of this evidence, are you persuaded by the author's argument? What evidence would persuade you?
- We asked you one critical thinking question. Ask yourself another critical thinking question, using the skills you have learned. Choose a question that offers the strongest critique of the argument. Ask yourself the question and then offer an answer.

The editorial below provides many opportunities to practice your critical thinking skills. Before you answer the following questions, think about the critical thinking skills you learned throughout the book. You learned to identify the components of an argument. You can identify ambiguous words, ethical norms preferred by authors, and assumptions. You learned the importance of identifying and evaluating evidence. You have also learned to look for missing information. Finally, you learned some of the many logical fallacies.

Amend the WTO

Environmentalists who are at all concerned about the future of our planet should work to change the WTO. Recent rulings by the WTO have undermined environmental protections to the detriment of human health and the future we are leaving our children. One recent egregious example of the WTO's ability to undercut a country's environmental protections is the WTO's decision in the shrimp–turtle case.

The United States banned the importation of shrimp caught in ways that harm endangered sea turtles. This ban was applied both to U.S. shrimpers and to shrimpers abroad. For shrimp to be acceptable for market in the United States, the shrimp had to be caught in nets that use TEDs. These devices ensure that sea turtles will not be brutally killed by shrimp nets. India, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Thailand sued the United States under WTO rules stating that TEDs constituted an unfair barrier to trade. The WTO, full of antienvironment capitalists who would create freer trade even at the expense of human life, of course ruled that the U.S. ban constituted an unfair trade barrier.

Democratically instituted rules have been overturned by a supranational body that is accountable to no one. The U.S. rules were implemented on both U.S. and foreign shrimpers; How can this constitute a trade barrier? The WTO is just hypersuspicious and views any environmental rule as a threat to trade; witness the decision in the dolphin–tuna case. In fact, the WTO is really hypocritical. Production methods are regulated by parts of the agreement, including the fact that countries can decline goods produced by prison labor without this ban being construed as a barrier to trade. The WTO apparently recognizes the moral issues surrounding prison labor but refuses to see that environmental rules fall under the same category.

It will not be long before this race to the bottom threatens everything we hold dear. If we care about the environment and the human race, we should work to change the WTO. Every time an environmental rule prohibits certain behavior, it should not automatically be ruled a trade barrier. In fact, if all countries would work together to implement the same environmental standards we would not have the problem created by the U.S. requirement for the use of TEDs. However, because such cooperation is unlikely to happen, at a minimum the WTO should be revised to include concerns for environmental regulations. Only then will we see a sustainable world that we can feel proud to pass down to our children.

Now read the following editorial. Apply the same critical thinking questions to this editorial. Which argument do you think has more worth?

Process and Production Methods Cannot be Regulated

Environmentalists have angrily struck out at a recent decision by the WTO that a U.S. ban on shrimp caught without TEDs constituted an unfair barrier to trade. Yet, many important issues have been ignored by environmentalists in their hasty desire to condemn the WTO. One of these issues is the difficulty of regulating process and production methods (PPMs).

The U.S. ban was applied to PPMs. Basically, the United States stated that only shrimp caught in a particular way would be acceptable for the U.S. market. This ban flies in the face of global commitment to freer trade. The idea that like products cannot be discriminated against is one of the fundamental tenets of a free-trade regime. Shrimp are shrimp, regardless of the method by which they were caught. Once we allow countries to regulate on the basis of PPMs, trade barriers will be erected everywhere.

As well, if countries can begin to specify exactly how goods should be produced, then countries without those technologies will be at a severe disadvantage. Environmentalists often claim to look out for the poor and for less-developed nations, but allowing regulation of PPMs will certainly not help these countries. Once a rich nation such as the United States says that some good must be produced in a certain way, less-developed nations are already at a disadvantage in trade compared with areas such as the EU that probably already have the technology. The purpose of free trade is to make countries better off. By allowing less-developed countries to engage in trade, new markets are opened and new money can begin to improve the welfare of people in the country. Regulation of PPMs would send us back to the days of isolationism, and less-developed countries would be hurt the most.

Free trade provides benefits to everyone. Through specialization and the theory of comparative advantage, countries that trade can have more of the goods they want than if trade did not happen. Obviously, more goods mean that people are better off and can have a higher standard of living. Is not this the world we want to leave to our children?

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