

The trader's ethics

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The trader's craft raises ethical questions that the following parts will examine in detail and that should be announced here. The trader deals with countries where corruption is widespread, with leaders and companies whose integrity is uncertain, and with commodities whose extraction may have serious social and environmental effects. He contributes to supplying the world with energy and food, which is an essential function. He may also, if he is not careful, contribute to the plundering of the resources of poor countries, to the corruption of their elites or to the financing of conflicts.

The Geneva tradition of moral economy, described in Part B, offers a point of reference. Calvin accepted commerce and credit, provided that they served the common good and did not exploit the weakness of others. The contemporary trader, subject to ever more demanding compliance rules, must build this requirement into his daily decisions: declining a lucrative but doubtful transaction, verifying the origin of a commodity, making sure that the price paid to a producer country is fair. Part H will show how the law has progressively codified these requirements, and Part I how they arise in relations with Africa.

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