

Wed. Jan. 21 – Man’s Rights – might want to combine this lecture with Topic 05

Review: Is it fair to pay a higher wage to a taller or more attractive person? (5 min)

Discuss where to learn about economics through the news (NYT, WSJ, The Economist, blogs, podcasts) (5-10 min)

Discuss “Where Sweatshops are a Dream” (10 min)

Overview of Ayn Rand’s “Man’s Rights.” Relate back to news and Part I of Rothbard’s *Ethics of Liberty*. (20-25 min)

Group Discussions and Presentations – have students break into groups to discuss and then present (15 min)

Daily Question: Answer the Group Discussion Questions. Read the other questions before Friday.

News Sources

How many of you are majors? Has an instructor ever told you places that you could find economics in the news or news sources that you might read as you go through college?

Newspapers: NYTimes, WSJ

Magazines: The Economist, U.S. News, Time

Other: blogs (Mankiw, Marginal Revolution, Beckner-Posner) and podcasts

“Where Sweatshops are a Dream”

The Op-Ed (01/15/2009 NYTimes) addresses the idea of whether sweatshops are desirable. From an outsider’s standpoint, they violate what we would consider as a minimal standard of living. However, the sweatshops provide jobs that might not otherwise exist in those areas. The factories can be a person’s way to get out of the fields and into better work conditions. The moral of the story is not to impose our impressions of what is fair or good on people that are in a very different situation. We must try to understand their perspective. If not, we might make them worse off.

“Man’s Rights”

- What are rights? Rights are moral principles which define and protect a man’s freedom of action, but impose no obligations on other men.
- What else does Rand say? We only have *one* fundamental right: the right to one’s own life. The source of rights is not a divine law or congressional law, but one of identity.
- What does Rand say we need the government for? To protect man’s rights by protecting him from physical violence.
- Rand goes on to write that “[t]he freedom of speech of private individuals includes the right not to agree, not to listen, and not to finance one’s own antagonists.” What is the “freedom of speech” like in today’s society? How has it changed? Is it important to be able to express ourselves freely? Why? At what cost? To what extent?
- What are *unalienable* rights? In the Declaration of Independence, it says that men are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” What is Life? What is Liberty? What is the pursuit of Happiness? How does the present sociological and political situation either live up to or conflict with this document? Are we stretching “the pursuit of Happiness” too far when we force banks to lend to people that they would not normally give money? Whose pursuit of Happiness matters?
- What are economic vs. personal incentives of news producers? Does the news represent free speech? Is it well-rounded? What forces cause it to be such? What are alternatives?

Group Discussion

We need to form five groups. These are the questions that will be addressed. Each group is responsible for debating one assigned question. For homework, review the scenarios posed in the other questions. For next class, your group will briefly present the issues.

Question 1:

Address the bolded questions in a group discussion. Pick one person who will present the main conclusions of the group (it's fine if they are conflicting).

Since our Revolutionary War, a major difference between the United States and many foreign nations has always been the extent of our freedom of speech and press. After the tragedy of 9/11, citizens were quite willing to relinquish their freedoms for more government protection. Soon, we saw police on the streets of New York with machine guns and menacing German shepherds. The FBI flagged credit card accounts so that if you made a purchase in excess of 30% of your normal activity, all of your bank accounts were frozen. A number of new governmental agencies emerged to “protect” our citizens.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was created to oversee security for the highways, railroads, buses, mass transit systems, ports. TSA banned an assortment of products from cigarette lighters to fingernail clippers. No longer could you lock your suitcases. Laptop computers could be detained for searches, even if they contained highly sensitive personal or business data. **Can you think of other freedoms or rights that we have lost since 9/11? Is the presence of the TSA justifiable?** In October 2006, an undercover investigation at the Newark Airport revealed that the screeners caught only 2 out of 22 instances of guns and bombs passing through the security gates. **When does it become necessary to dissolve such an agency? When might we regain our freedoms? Is it constitutional for TSA to search you when you go to the airport? What might happen if we let the private airlines do the searching?**

In the 1940s, George Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-four*, a book that describes a totalitarian government where “Big Brother” is always watching its citizens. Censorship is a constant theme in the book. At one point, a character is instructed to erase all traces of people who spoke out against the government and its policies.

To what extent are we willing to let go of our freedoms for the well-being and security of our nation? How do we know when a government has gone too far and is no longer protecting our rights, but infringing upon our freedoms? Should a nation's interests come before its citizens' personal liberties? What would you propose to do with the TSA? Will your proposal be able to prevent an event like 9/11 from happening again?

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Question 2:

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In the article “Man’s Rights,” Ayn Rand writes that the Declaration of Independence “provided the only valid justification of government” by declaring its purpose to “protect man’s rights by protecting him from physical violence.” Consider this situation:

In July 2002, I was living and working in San José, Costa Rica. During one afternoon, I attended a meeting with several governmental cabinet members. Before we began, one of the ministers asked me, “What is the justification for your country to attack Iraq?”

I had heard nothing of the situation. News sources in the U.S. were not carrying any stories. CNN International, however, aired a clip where President Bush explained that Saddam Hussein was housing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and was internally committing acts of atrocity against his own people. After Hussein refused the entry of external auditors, President Bush decided to invade Iraq. In the CNN report, President Bush told reporters that the mission would only last 90 days and American forces would withdraw. The U.S. Congress did not authorize war by our armies until October 16, 2002, a date that stretched just beyond the initial 90 days that he had declared.

Disregard the arguments of whether there actually were WMDs or if the presence of oil might have been a driving factor to invade. **Based on the statements of President Bush, would Rand have agreed with the invasion? Think back to the article on sweatshops and how we should be careful in imposing our beliefs on people that live in cultures or economic situations that differ from our own. By invading Iraq, what kinds of obligations were we forcing upon the citizens of Iraq? Upon our own citizens?**

Was the invasion of Iraq morally or politically ethical (based on U.S. laws)? Why did the checks-and-balances in our government not restrict the President from going to war when it was not Congressionally approved?

Now assume that the claims of WMDs were confirmed and found to be absolutely true. Given this knowledge, suppose the President decides to use the presence of those weapons as his basis for invading Iraq. **When, if ever, would Rand agree to the invasion? Is Rand’s philosophy even the correct framework for this kind of a situation?**

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Question 3:

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In the article “Man’s Rights,” Ayn Rand writes that “the government, acting as a policeman, may use force *only* in retaliation and *only* against those who initiate its use. The *NYTimes* printed an article entitled “Weighing Crimes and Ethics in Urban Warfare” on January 16, 2009. Consider the situation that author Steven Erlanger poses:

Your unit, on the edges of the northern Gaza town of Jabaliya, has taken mortar fire from the crowded refugee camp nearby. You prepare to return fire, and perhaps you notice — or perhaps you don't, even though it's on your map — that there is a United Nations school just there, full of displaced Gazans. You know that international law allows you to protect your soldiers and return fire, but also demands that you ensure that there is no excessive harm to civilians. Do you remember all that in the chaos?

What do you do? If your superior officer insists that you attack, are you obligated?

Assume you pick GPS-guided mortars, which are supposed to be accurate and of a specific explosive force, and fire back. In the end, you kill some Hamas fighters but also, the United Nations says, more than 40 civilians, some of them children.

Have you committed a war crime? Are you exempt because you are military? Should it be possible to sue a military officer in civil courts for damages? Instead, suppose that the situation occurs in a remote Afghani village where Taliban insurgents had fired on a patrolling U.S. envoy. **Would your arguments change?**

The International Criminal Court is an independent, permanent court that was formed based on a treaty signed by 108 countries. As a court of last resort, “it will not act if a case is investigated or prosecuted by a national judicial system unless the national proceedings are not genuine (e.g. they are undertaken to shield a person from criminal responsibility). The ICC tries only the most serious crimes of international concern, like genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The United States has taken international criticism for not belonging to such a court. **Should the ICC be able to prosecute people who have committed a crime, but who the U.S. may pardon or not treat as war criminals? What should the U.S. do if one of its citizens is detained for prosecution while traveling internationally or serving abroad in the military? Would it matter if the person were a student versus the president of a prosperous business enterprise?**

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Question 4:

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On January 1, 2009, Cuba celebrated 50 years since Fidel Castro led his countrymen in an infamous revolution. Since that time, the United States has failed in numerous attempts to overthrow the government and the longstanding trade embargo has drawn much attention over the last few years. To the United States, the Cuban government represents the antithesis of capitalism and the market system.

While we may pride ourselves as living in a free country, we seldom learn about some of the historical blunders that our country has committed. To avoid these errors in the future, it is important that we do not forget our mistakes.

In 1951, Guatemala held its first peaceful democratic election. Not too long thereafter, the United Fruit company feared that President Arbenz would nationalize their land. Appealing to the United States, they alleged Soviet involvement. In 1954, President Eisenhower encouraged the CIA to arm Guatemalan ex-military leaders who had fled into nearby countries. The *coup d'état* caused a man named Ernesto "Che" Guevara to flee Guatemala City to Mexico City, where he was introduced to Fidel Castro. Together, they planned the Cuban Revolution, which was launched two years later. As you well know, their regime ironically became one of our country's fiercest ideological opponents.

Is military imperialism a result of capitalism? How are the two connected? How are they different?

In 1960, Eisenhower was quoted as having said, "Informed citizens are the guardian and spirit of democracy." Rand wrote that governments should protect citizens from physical harm. Consider the extent of that protection. **When, if ever, does a government have the right to invade the land of another sovereign nation (or to support such an activity)? Should the United States protect citizens of other nations from tyranny? Was the overthrow of the Guatemalan government a morally or ethically just action? Or did the Guatemalan government have a right to go unmolested by the United States? Would your opinion change if the Guatemalan government had not been democratically elected?** Do not forget about the historical context when considering these questions.

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Question 5:

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The Statue of Liberty was a gift given by France to the United States in 1886. Standing 305 feet from foundation to torch and weighing 450,000 pounds, it serves as a welcome to immigrants and Americans entering the New York Harbor. Reportedly, somewhere between one-third and one-half of Americans have an ancestor who passed through Immigration on Ellis Island from the 1890s until the 1950s.

Illegal immigration has become a popular topic during the Bush Administration. In 2000, the U.S. Census estimated that we housed close to 8.7 million illegal immigrants. The National Public Radio estimated that there were close to 10 million in a 2005 article ("Study Details Lives of Illegal Immigrants in U.S."). A year later, a Christian Science Monitor newspaper article reported the range to be from 7 to 20 million. Regardless of the real number, the population represents a significant percentage of the United States (around 300,000,000).

There is a legal process by which citizens of other nations can seek work, tourist, and spousal visas. Depending on the nature, some of the options allow for permanent residency while others grant only a temporary pass to enter the United States. **If a person enters the United States illegally, what rights should that person have?**

Often, the right of passage entails crossing over our border with Mexico. Sometimes, the path takes them across a scorching desert, hidden in the tire well of a car, or swimming across a powerful river. President Bush has been active in constructing a fence to stretch the entire U.S.-Mexico border. **If workers in the U.S. are not willing to fill jobs of local businesses, do owners have a right to employ illegal immigrants? If illegal immigrants flee political or economic situations (which may mean living on less than \$1USD/day) to seek work in the United States, do they have a right to work?**

Besides disrupting the flow of the labor market, a fence could have devastating effects to other facets of life. Seldom do we hear about the U.S. border towns that depend on the local commerce of Mexicans who cross over to buy goods or to work during the day. U.S. citizens sometimes travel into Mexico for its cheap medical services. Private schools on both sides of the borders have students of mixed nationalities. **What kinds of secondary effects might occur with a border fence? Imagine you were in charge of drafting the future immigration policy. Your policy will be debated for its effects on the economy, education, health care, law, and taxation. How would you deal with illegal immigration? Would you give out ID cards? Would you create a work program? Would you maintain the *status quo*? What rights might be implicit in your policy?**