

Seminar in Ethics — IDH 3600.601 & PHI 6605.601 **Spring 2012 2:00 – 4:50 Tuesdays (224 COQ)**

We are in the early stages of the 2012 US national election. Next November, citizens will choose a President, a third of its Senators, and all members of the House. Given the highly contentious nature of these elections, it is a good time to think carefully about the good society. We begin by reading two books (and several essays) advocating radically different approaches, approaches roughly reflected in the two main political parties. Each book was written by a Nobel Prize winning economist (1974 and 2008). While one advocates a narrower role for the national government, the other advocates an expanded role.

Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, (written in the mid-1940s) and essays from Rand's *The Virtue of Selfishness* are oft considered foundational books of the modern conservative movement. Their central message is clear: giving government more power leads to the diminution of individual freedom. In contrast, *The Conscience of a Liberal* argues that the government should take on an expanded role to insure a just society and to increase each person's power over her own life.

Both admirably defend their respective positions. Both, though, have some gaps and make some contentious historical and moral claims. We will seek to make each argument as precise and persuasive as possible; then we frame potential questions about, and discuss criticisms of, each.

To help in these tasks, we will also read a variety of other essays online. These are available through the university library to all USF St. Pete students. The full syllabus will include links to them.

Course Aims

This course should help students “Demonstrate awareness of the ethical dimensions of human behavior” You will achieve this outcome by learning to better:

- read carefully, fairly, and critically
 - understand the importance of language
 - spot ambiguity, vagueness, and other relevant shifts in meaning
 - understand the importance of context to determining meaning
- write clearly, honestly, and effectively
 - write precise sentences
 - write lucid, coherent paragraphs
 - organize a thoughtful, unified paper
- evaluate arguments; offer and defend one's own argument
 - distinguish reason from rhetoric
 - discern what is morally relevant
 - identify what you should know to make moral decisions
 - understand the importance of history and broad background knowledge
- understand and refine moral reasoning
 - understand and appreciate competing moral views
 - critically evaluate your views, attitudes, and behavior
 - develop and defend your own ethical views

Texts

The Road to Serfdom, F. A. Hayek

The Conscience of a Liberal, Paul Krugman

Assorted online readings (links from the syllabus - WWW)

Style: Basics of Clarity and Grace, (4th edition) J. Williams. Recommended, not required