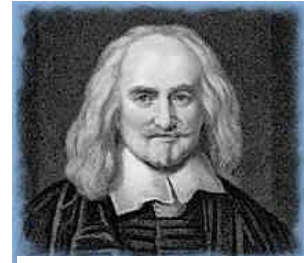


What is Government?

If on Monday ten people were shipwrecked on a desert island, by Saturday they would probably have established some form of government. For government is simply the organization of people for common action. Even primitive societies have machinery for maintaining law and order and getting things done. Life without government would be difficult to imagine.



Thomas Hobbes

The seventeenth century English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, compared it to a war of "every man against every man." In such a situation he wrote:

...there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation nor the use of commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time, no arts, no letters, no societies; and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.

It is one of man's greatest triumphs that he has solved the problem of the constant war of "every man against every man" by means of government.

Among civilized peoples government does not exist merely to provide law and order, but that is its essential function, since Without order nothing else is possible. Government provides the means by which people can accomplish, as a group, work that the individual alone cannot possibly do. At one time the function of government was restricted to such primary tasks as maintaining law and order, collecting taxes, and conducting foreign affairs and defense. Today there are few aspects of our private or public lives that are not regulated or affected in some way by government... In highly complex societies government is one of the most complex, varied and pervasive of all human institutions.

In forming their government, our shipwrecked islanders would have many choices. They might agree to accept the rule of the most intelligent, or the handsomest or the shortest, and make him a king or a chief. "They could have chosen a leader by picking straws, or by a show of hands or by a secret vote. The strongest might have

imposed his will on the group by force and become a dictator. If they could not agree among themselves on a common policy, the ten castaways might have organized themselves into two or more groups, in which case there would be two or more governments, each with a different solution to the common problems. The possibilities are endless, and each choice would lead to a different kind of government. Once equipped with a government, by the end of a week, the castaways would probably have devised a simple set of rules and regulations or a constitution, which defined the rights the individual enjoyed and the responsibilities he owed to the group or the public. By the end of a year this simple system would have become much more complex and there would undoubtedly be some arrangement for enforcing the rules. Regardless of what kind of government the islanders chose, it would almost inevitably consist of three parts:

- ◆ Legislative
- ◆ Executive
- ◆ Judicial

This is true not only of the government of a country, but for most clubs as well. A full meeting of the club members usually passes certain broad proposals, which can be called legislation. These meetings, however, are held infrequently. To carry on the work of the club on a day-to-day basis, the members elect an executive -a President, Secretary, Treasurer, and other officials. Finally, many clubs have sets of rules and regulations concerning the behaviour and activities of the members and have judicial bodies which act as a form of court to judge those charged with disobeying the club laws.

1. Do you agree that governments are a necessary and inevitable fact of life?
2. Is it possible that any society could exist without some sort of rule of law?
3. If this class was the group of castaways that were shipwrecked, what sort of government would it wind up with? Who would assume leadership roles? How would they become leaders? What rights would each individual in society have? What responsibilities would each be given? How would individuals who refuse to assume these responsibilities be dealt with?

Be prepared to discuss this fully next class. Failure to do so if called upon may result in the judicial branch of this class dealing with you cruelly.