

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS: BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

The need for government

But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.

--James Madison, *The Federalist*, Number 51 (February 6, 1788)

The danger of government

The history of the human race is one long story of attempts by certain persons and classes to obtain control of the power of the State, so as to win earthly gratifications at the expense of others. ... Some want to get [wealth] without paying the price of industry and economy. In ancient times they made use of force. They organized bands of robbers. They plundered laborers and merchants. Chief of all, however, they found that means of robbery which consisted in gaining control of the civil organization--the State--and using its poetry and romance as a glamour under cover of which they made robbery lawful. They developed high-spun theories of nationality, patriotism, and loyalty. They took all the rank, glory, power, and prestige of the great civil organization, and they took all the rights. They threw on others the burdens and the duties.

--William Graham Sumner on the dangers of plutocracy and democracy, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, Chapter 7 (1883)

“A government big enough to give you everything you want is a government big enough to take from you everything you have.”

--President Gerald R. Ford, Address to a Joint Session of Congress (August 12, 1974)

What is politics?

The “jargonized” version:

“Politics is the authoritative allocation of values for a society.”

--David Easton, Canadian political scientist

The “plain English” version:

“Politics is who gets what, when, how.”

--Harold Lasswell, American political scientist