

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Posc 105

POLITICAL SYSTEM AND A CASE FOR GOVERNMENT

- I. THIS MORNING:
 - A. Course overview
 - 1. **Web page: www.udel.edu/htr/American**
 - B. The notion of a political system
 - C. A case for government
 - 1. A discussion of why at least some amount of political coercion is necessary in a free society.
- II. POLITICAL SYSTEM:
 - A. Institutions:
 - 1. Roles, rules, norms, expectations
 - 2. Although subject to change, institutions persist through time.
 - 3. Institutions interact with one another and affect and are effected by their “environment.”
 - 4. Political institutions in one way or another involve generalized power.
 - a. It is a system in the loose sense of the word: change in one part may lead to changes in others.
 - B. Power (an aside)
 - 1. One definition: X gets Y to do something Y would not otherwise do.
 - 2. Method: use of **resources**
 - a. Resources can be translated into power; that is, used to make Y do something Y would not otherwise do.
 - b. Examples: money, skill, prestige, time, organizational backing, fame, brute strength.
 - C. Actors:
 - 1. (Historical) individuals who actually play or carry out institutional roles.
 - 2. The problem of “agency”: the role of the great person in history.
 - a. How much influence to specific people really have on events?
 - D. The environment:
 - 1. Those elements (institutions, ideas, people, events, etc.) that affect and are affected by the political system.
- III. THE NATURE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION:
 - A. The problem of the **commons** and **rational (free) behavior**: individuals acting rationally in their own interests can and frequently do bring ruin on the community

and hence on themselves.

1. Example to be discussed in class
- B. The problem of public goods;
 1. What would happen if Congress passed a law making support for the military voluntary, much as contributions to charities are voluntary?
- C. The problem of the **market place**
 1. Free riders and freedom
 2. Should the government leave environmental protection market place?
- D. Major proposition: To escape the (inevitable?) problem of the destruction of the commons and free riders some form of coercion is necessary.
 1. This is a possible justification for government
- E. Problems that only individuals organized into social groups can solve.
 1. Major argument: many 21st century problems can only be solved by collective action
 2. Major proposition: the list of such problems is greater than conventional political wisdom suggests.

IV. NEXT TIME:

- A. Democracy and political capacity
- B. Reading:
 1. For now skim Patterson, Chapter 1. We'll come back to it.
 2. Start reading the *New York Times* for clipping file.
 3. Start **independent** reading.

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Go to American Political System Page