

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Posc 150**

A CASE FOR GOVERNMENT

- I. CONTENTS:
- A. Wrapup
 - B. Question: how much government?
 - 1. Some possibilities
 - C. Being a rational human
 - D. "Tragedy of the Commons"
- II. WRAPUP:
- A. Three among many, many developments that greatly affect politics and government.
 - B. Growth of the have nots and a frustrated middle class.
 - 1. ✓ Despite growth in government wealthy as wealthy as ever.
 - 2. ✓ Stagnating wages and family incomes.
 - 3. ✓ Persistent poverty.
 - C. Ethnic diversity.
 - 1. ✓ Hispanics rapidly becoming the largest minority.
 - 2. What does this mean for traditional political alliances and the American creed?
 - D. Globalization
 - 1. The shifting balance between production of information versus material goods creates imbalances and especially anxieties in labor markets.
 - 2. Disruptions in labor markets.
- III. HOW MUCH GOVERNMENT:
- A. In this age of rapid and far-reaching social, economic, and political transformations a key question is how much government is needed and consistent with Americans' hopes and aspirations?
 - 1. ✱ Interpretation: a large, active national government is desirable and necessary.
 - B. Other answers:
 - 1. Anarchy
 - i. Justification for government is not self-evident. Government power (that is, legitimate coercion) runs counter to nature.
 - 2. Night watchman state
 - i. A minimal position: the only role of government is to protect natural political rights.
 - ii. There is no such thing as social and economic entitlements.
 - 3. Libertarian position

- i. No laws against drugs, abortion, gambling, prostitution.
 - 1) People must be responsible for themselves.
- ii. Abolish income tax.
- iii. No censorship; total privacy.
- iv. Cut government to bones and even more.
- v. See Libertarian party web site: <http://www.lp.org/lp.html>
- 4. ○Classical liberal position
 - i. Government is a necessary evil.
 - ii. Less government the better.
 - iii. Low taxes, reduce regulation, states' rights
 - iv. See Cato Institute (<http://www.cato.org/>)
- 5. ○Socialism:
 - i. The classical definition: government ownership of means of production
 - ii. See, for instance, the Marxism page: <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/marx.html>
 - iii. ○Hardly any one believes in classical socialism these days.
 - 1) ○ Unlike Europe there has never been a *real* socialist movement in the United States.
- 6. ○Progressive:
 - i. Democracy and capitalism require maintenance
 - ii. Political *and* economic power should be distributed as equitably as possible.
 - iii. ○Economic and political power cannot be separated.
 - iv. See Progressive policy institute, <http://www.ppionline.org/index.cfm>

IV. RATIONAL HUMANS AND SOCIETY:

- A. To understand the case for government we need to consider these propositions and terms.
 - 1. ○People are **rational**, which here means that they want to maximize the fulfillment of their desires with a minimum cost to themselves.
 - i. Maximize **utility** at least cost.
 - ii. Being rational is separate from moral or decent.
 - 2. ○People live in societies.
 - 3. **Goods**: the things people want such apples, CD players, mansions, parks, sunsets, safety.
 - 4. Limited supply of goods is the essential fact of life.

V. WHEN HUMANS ARE RATIONAL:

- A. **The following is a parable.**
- B. ✳“Tragedy of the Commons” (Russell Hardin)
 - 1. Remember the star means “understand the implications of the story or parable.”

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2. ○ State of nature: fertile pasture
- Limited “carrying capacity”: only a finite number of sheep can graze on in the meadow. Otherwise the grass will be entirely consumed.
 - The field is a public area or commons that no one owns.
3. Four **rational** farmers
- They want to maximize wool or mutton production at least cost to themselves.
 - That is, they want to maximize utility.
4. ○ The more sheep one farmer pastures the higher the production and the greater his or her utility.
5. ○ Consequently, each farmer wants the following:
- Graze as many of his/her own sheep as possible.
 - Limit number size of the others’ flocks.
6. ○ Why limit others?
- Because one farmer can expand his/her flock without destroying the commons and hence maximize profit or utility.
7. ○ But this works only so long as the others limit themselves.
- The commons is a limited good.
8. Now the great conundrum: each farmer being rational tries to maximize utility, but the commons simply cannot sustain ever expanding herds.
- If they all act rationally as described above (see Number 4), the commons will soon be destroyed (see Number 1-i above).
 - That is, individuals acting alone will not restrain themselves.
 - Why? Each wants the others to restrain themselves while he or she continues to expand.
 - Each has an incentive to be a **free rider**; that is, consume a good without paying for it.
 - But they all want this situation and so none is restrained.
 - Hardin, an economist, puts it this way: the use of the commons “is tragic because “each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase [the size of his flock] without limit--in a world that is limited.”
9. What is to be done?
- Only an “outside force” or power, an entity that can impose its will on the farmers, can save the situation.
 - Someone or something must **enforce** discipline on these rational actors.
10. ✱ A logical candidate is **government**.

VI. NEXT TIME:

- Democracy
- Reading:

- Course web site: Cyber Reserve Room, “An Argument for Government.” (www.udel.edu/American/Texts/needfor.html.)

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- i. You should know what point this parable supports; that is, unfettered freedom eventually leads to trouble for everyone.
 2. Optional: Text of Hardin's article. <http://dieoff.org/page95.htm>
 3. Optional: Extended discussion.
<http://members.aol.com/trajcom/private/trajcom.htm>