

The Role of Government

W. Brent Webber, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Las Vegas, Nevada, October 21, 2020

Lighting of chalice and check-ins

Many well-known (and some now forgotten) methods of governance have existed throughout human history. There are elements of a functional society that cannot be done individually, and require collective resources, but there is often an uneasy balance between individual and collective good.

Quotes

“Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.” – Ronald Reagan

“A country that does not know how to read or write is easy to deceive” – Che Guevara

“Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on, or by imbeciles who really mean it” – Lawrence Peter

“Freedom is living without government coercion. So when a politician talks about freedom for this group or that, ask yourself whether he is advocating more government action or less.” – Ron Paul

“Better the occasional faults of a government that lives in a spirit of charity than the consistent omissions of a government frozen in the ice of its own indifference.” – Franklin D. Roosevelt

“There is nobody in this country who got rich on their own. Nobody. You built a factory out there - good for you. But I want to be clear. You moved your goods to market on roads the rest of us paid for. You hired workers the rest of us paid to educate. You were safe in your factory because of police forces and fire forces that the rest of us paid for.” – Elizabeth Warren

“Morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government” – from the Declaration of Independence

“China’s headlong plunge into capitalism over the last 40 years was not a repudiation of the Communist Party’s founding ideology, but something possible only because of it.” – Xi Jinping

“Only in a socialist system are the interests of the individual, the state and the collective at one. That is why only a socialist constitution can encourage the citizens to fulfill enthusiastically their duties to the society and the fatherland.” – Ho Chi Minh

Questions to Ponder

- Consider the following forms of government: capitalism, socialism, communism, feudalism, theocracy, and anarchy. What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of each form of governance?
- What role does government play in your life right now, at the local, state, and federal levels?
- What are some examples of former governmental functions that have become privatized? In what ways has society benefited or suffered from this?
- Should the government’s role be to lead society toward particular outcomes? Or is its role to “lag” and only move toward those outcomes when a critical mass of constituents demand it?
- In the U.S. and many other countries, governments are the only entities with legitimate police powers. In what ways does this help maintain a functioning society? In what ways does this hinder society?
- Government in the U.S. is created by people, many of whom are directly placed in their roles by voters, or are appointed by elected officials. What are our means of redress if any part of our government is actively harming us or others?
- Is another form of governance possible in our country, at the state or federal level? What might that look like in practice? Would that be desirable?
- Governance also exists within private and religious organizations. What are your experiences with good or bad governance at this level?

Take a few minutes to consider these questions, then begin sharing.

Likes and Wishes / Business Matters

Closing Words

Said hey, little boy, you can't go where the others go

'Cause you don't look like they do

Said hey, old man, how can you stand to think that way?

And did you really think about it before you made the rules?

He said, son

That's just the way it is

Some things will never change

That's just the way it is

Ah, but don't you believe them

- “The Way It Is”, Bruce Hornsby & The Range

Extinguishment of Chalice