

Why Study Government?

An Inaugural Lecture

GIVEN IN THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF
RHODESIA AND NYASALAND

F. M. G. Willson

WHY STUDY GOVERNMENT?

*An Inaugural Lecture
given in the University College of
Rhodesia and Nyasaland*

by

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OF RHODESIA
SALISBURY

1967

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SECOND IMPRESSION 1967

PRINTED IN RHODESIA

WHY STUDY GOVERNMENT?

AT a small North American university several years ago, on the first morning of a new session, a very young man made his way through the faculty buildings to deliver the opening lecture of his academic teaching career. He found his students, faced them resolutely, and launched into what he thought was a lengthy and carefully prepared discussion of his chosen topic. He sailed through his material with growing confidence, and rounded off his arguments with an impressive and much rehearsed conclusion. Pleased—indeed elated—with his own performance, he looked around—to find his listeners regarding him with composed and expectant faces. With a sudden sense of dreadful apprehension, he peered at his watch—to discover that only thirty-five of the allotted sixty minutes had passed. What on earth was he to do? He did not yet possess that reserve power of eloquence, made up of a long familiarity with subject-matter and an element of brazen self-confidence, on which the experienced lecturer can draw when faced with such an emergency. He tried desperately to improvise, but after muttering a few last, incoherent sentences, gave up the struggle. In a state of near panic, he gathered up his papers, announced ‘That will be all for today’, and with as much dignity as he could muster, marched down the aisle between the ranks of grinning undergraduates. At the back of the lecture room, now eager only to escape, he opened the first door he could see, swept through it with a defiant backward glance, closed it firmly—and found himself in a broom cupboard! No record exists of how long a period elapsed before he emerged.

It is only during the last few weeks, with the certainty of this evening's duty looming ever more threateningly, that I have come to feel complete sympathy with the inaugural misfortunes of the lecturer in the broom cupboard. And there are easy steps from pity for another to pity for oneself in a potentially comparable situation, and from self-pity to determined preparations for self-defence. With intense and even sadistic thoroughness, therefore, I have compiled many more words than even the slickest radio sports commentator could deliver in thirty-five minutes. And I have reconnoitred the exits from this lecture theatre so carefully that, should it be expedient for me to retreat before the wrath or scorn of this audience, I can guarantee a clear get-away and the chance to contemplate the sorry course of my inauguration in solitude beneath the cold night sky.

Sir, the professional interests of a professor of government are concentrated on work-a-day aspects of a work-a-day world. It is true that the same can be said, to some extent at least, of a great many subjects taught and studied in universities. In two preceding inaugural lectures delivered here during the last three months we have heard something of the unpleasant *realpolitik* of the ancient world, and a discussion of the intricacies of the language of the Shona people. On the other side of College Green many of my colleagues in the natural sciences devote their attention to the practical consequences and potentialities of the human manipulation of natural phenomena. But however mundane some of the subject-matter of all these academic activities may be, the study of that subject-matter often concerns—and itself reaches—the higher realms of the human spirit. The history of the ancient world—indeed

any history—reveals the heights, as well as the depths, which human culture can reach; language is not merely the instrument of daily commerce, but the medium through which are expressed all the noblest aspirations of men; the pursuit of the natural sciences can reveal the beauty as well as the practicality of the world and the universe around us. All such studies touch on the rarer mysteries of life and can afford to those who follow them an aesthetic satisfaction.

By contrast, my studies fall within an area of academic inquiry whose subject-matter is less flattering to the spiritual and intellectual capacities of man. In large part this is because they are not studies—save in limited contexts—of individual effort, of the individual personality, or of the relationships between individuals. Nor are they studies of non-human phenomena or of the application of human ingenuity to non-human phenomena. Along with economists, social anthropologists, lawyers, sociologists, social psychologists, and others who revel in more esoteric nomenclatures, the student of government and politics is interested in the ways in which society behaves *qua* society. And primarily he and his colleagues in this field of social studies are concerned with how societies behave now, rather than with how they have behaved in the past, how they ought to behave, or how they might behave in the future—though some understanding of the past experience of societies and of the ideas put forward about social behaviour and social organization is an essential element in the study of contemporary affairs.

Within this vast wilderness of social behaviour, what is the special area relevant to the student of government? The means by which a human group reaches decisions about matters of concern to all its members can be called

'politics'. The means by which such a group, having decided what should be done in matters affecting all its members, goes about translating decision into action can be called 'administration'. Of course, this bifurcation is in a sense unreal—the process of deciding what to do is frequently dictated by what has already been done, and by the means available for doing it; and the manner of taking action may be decided in advance by the objective set. None the less the dichotomy is hallowed by usage and not without use as a tool of exposition. The point of significance here is that neither politics nor administration is peculiar to the world of government. Every organized group—be it a nation, a business enterprise, a charitable foundation, or a sports club—has its own politics and administration. The study of politics and administration in the context of government, therefore, is in large part concerned with activities common to all organized groups; it is unique, however, in that it is concentrated on politics and administration which affect everyone—including all groups smaller than the whole community (and even the whole community in any non-governmental aspect)—who lives within the physical boundaries of a sovereign state; and because the institutions of the state, alone among social organizations, have the legitimate privilege of exercising coercive power.

The primary task, therefore, of the student of government—as indeed of any student of society—is to explain the actions of groups. This does not mean that the actions of individuals are irrelevant or that a 'group'—which is in many respects an abstraction—is the only meaningful unit in government. It means, simply, that the kind of actions of interest to a student of society are the actions which are concerned, consciously or unconsciously, with the lives

of communities of men rather than with the life of man as an individual. The implication of this for the character of the study is clear. Man as an individual may through his ability and industry produce something of near intellectual or aesthetic perfection, and such individual work forms or adds to the basic store of knowledge and values in the higher planes of human effort—in philosophic contemplation, in the fine arts, and in the natural sciences. Such achievement is only possible because the workings of the mind of an individual can by an effort of will be uncluttered by the need to take account of other competing interests: in the spheres of philosophy, art, or science, compromise is the kiss of death. But the actions of human groups are all compromises, and in no context more so than in that of government. The arts and the techniques of persuading, cajoling, or forcing large numbers of people to accept an overall pattern of rules regulating many fundamental aspects of their lives are the arts and techniques of reaching a certain level of agreement among a mass of people over an immense range of subject-matter. Occasionally in public affairs a person or group of persons appears on the scene, blessed (or cursed) with an ability amounting to genius in the handling of people. Such a person or group has worked out, to his or their own intellectual satisfaction, the blueprint of an ideal society. For a time, through their sheer political and administrative ability, they succeed in capturing a high proportion of the nation's enthusiasm and in subduing any opposition to their schemes; and in the long run undoubtedly they will leave their mark on the practices and the attitudes of society. But their ideals are never fully achieved: the initial impetus slackens, offended interests assert themselves, the grand design is watered down to the level of what is generally acceptable to what

has become a lukewarm and less dynamically led community.

The whole of government revolves around the need to find an essential minimum area of agreement: it is, therefore, a process of perpetual, messy compromise. The imperfections and the mundaneness of politics and government are reflected in the epigrams and the jargon which have grown around it. 'Politics is the art of the possible'; 'the machinery of government'; and perhaps most aptly cynical, Benjamin Disraeli's reaction to becoming Prime Minister—'I have reached the top of the greasy pole.' The examination of such processes, be the examiners however so scholarly and erudite, can produce little of poetry, and no more than merely technical perfection. It is an examination of earthbound man, and of his struggle to maintain at least a minimum and workable level of social tolerance. I repeat, Sir, the study of government is a work-a-day occupation, and, alas, it can produce only a work-a-day inaugural lecture.

But to know the limitations of one's subject, like knowing one's personal limitations, is perhaps not a worthless quality, even if it may be dangerously inhibiting. And if the study of government is accepted by its practitioners as being less likely than many other academic pursuits to add to the world's appreciation of the beautiful and the perfect, this does not mean that those practitioners regard themselves as serving an ignoble purpose. It is a poor—and a rare—academic creature who will spend his career teaching and studying a subject without any belief in its relevance to the problems of life. Those of us who have chosen to teach and study government feel fully justified professionally in so doing. I should like to attempt a brief justification, stopping first on the way to explain what the field of

teaching and research in governmental and administrative politics involves, how inquiry into this field is carried on, and what are the prerequisites—social, political, and personal—without which the study cannot achieve even moderate success.

Men have been curious about why and how they should be governed since at least the beginnings of recorded history, and there seems no good reason to doubt that they were equally interested long before that time. For roughly 2,000 years after the Greeks first recorded their history and experience in a medium which was communicable to later ages, however, this curiosity—or, rather, the only evidence of it which has survived—was directed not so much to examining how systems of government worked, as on the one hand to expounding the sort of systems which ought to exist, or to defending existing systems, by reference to a set or sets of major philosophical assumptions; and on the other hand to directing and advising on how systems could be manipulated to serve the selfish ends of rulers. And as the mental horizons of all men are restricted and their writings influenced by the limits of the knowledge and attitudes of the times in which they live, so the texts of the political theorists reveal to later centuries the degree to which, unconsciously, the ideas and ideals of their authors reflect both the social norms and the special political events of their personal experience; just as the impact of those writings on the minds and subsequent actions of those who came after them can be traced in political, social, and constitutional history.

The study of this body of theoretical literature is still carried on, sometimes with the emphasis on analysis for the sake of assessing how well articulated are the arguments

expressed, sometimes more in the historical tradition which uses the recorded ideas of men as evidence to explain the driving force behind particular social movements or to characterize the dominant features of a given period. Such study forms one strand of the modern approach to government as a university subject.

The second strand is history itself—mainly the history of politics, administration, and the evolution of constitutions, but not without reference to social, economic, and—here merging with the study of political theory—intellectual movements. The student of government gains immensely from paying attention to history. In the first place, because human attributes have not altered substantially in the mere handful of years of which we have records, men's attitudes towards, capacities for, and reactions to, political and administrative situations, though not perhaps scientifically classifiable in any exact sense, are none the less very often recognizably stereotyped—but only a study of history will demonstrate this. In the second place—a related place—history develops some appreciation of the dimension of time and the factor of continuity in politics and government. It conditions a student of contemporary affairs to bear in mind how long it takes, for instance, for a community to change its political habits; how alike may be the mode of thinking about and execution of two similar policies, each a hundred years apart; and, if situations are never repeated exactly, at least how frequently the same basic factors assert themselves. But, above all, the history of a society is an essential element in its current politics. How complete an explanation of the peculiar internal struggles of the Democratic Party of the United States can be given without reference to the American Civil War? What sense can one make of modern French politics if it is not realized

that the Revolution of 1789 is still not entirely accepted? Even within the span of his adult life a man carries with him memories which mould his political attitudes and influence his political actions.

History covers a lot of the groundwork of government, but nowadays it is regarded only as a buttress—an essential buttress—of the central body of a new subject. It is about a hundred years since the first modern attempts were made to look at the politics and administration of governments in order to answer the question: 'How do they work?' The origin and subsequent development of this approach reflect—as do all the contemporary studies of society—that fascination with the achievements of the natural scientists which so thrilled and alarmed the intelligentsia of the nineteenth century—and continue to thrill and alarm all twentieth-century societies. If so much could be discovered by careful empirical inquiry into natural phenomena, why should not the same techniques be applied to the affairs of man? The profession of political scientist was born, and though the titles of university chairs and departments in this field vary a good deal, indicating academic and lay doubts as to the respectability of the original conception, all its members accept that their work involves at least an attempt to apply scientific techniques of inquiry to the raw material of their studies.

In what might be called its early stages the new study tended to be concentrated on the formal institutions and rules of governmental systems—on constitutions and constitutional documents, on parliaments and public services, on courts and local authorities, on legislation and standing orders. Much of this early work had at least a quasi-legal quality, and it is interesting that in continental Europe even to this day the study of government is carried on mainly

within faculties of law. Analysis of the forms of institutions remains one of the essential launching bases for the more intricate study of politics and administration; but disciples of the new subject, first and predominantly in the United States, rather later and less extensively in Britain, the Commonwealth countries, and western Europe, came to realize that, useful and indeed essential as such formal analysis may be, it does not by itself come near revealing or explaining the origins or the real patterns of political power and influence. With an enthusiasm not yet spent, scholars began to probe the informal institutions and the actual problems of politics and administration—parties, pressure groups, the workings of electoral systems, the special attributes of politicians and administrators, the motives and behaviour of individual voters, the impact of the press, radio, and now television on political life, the effect of administrative practices on the course of governmental achievement, and so on and so forth.

In recent years these two approaches have tended to coalesce. It has been realized that the influences of the formal and informal institutions and processes of politics and administration shade often imperceptibly into each other, and that the way to an understanding of the dynamics of government lies through analysis of their interaction. And this realization has also aided and broadened an appreciation of the influence of and the influences on traditional political theory, while encouraging experiments with new theories based on continuously accumulating empirical data. With its feet planted firmly in history, its head clear of the clouds of impractical idealism, and its trunk nourished—perhaps over-nourished—with description and analysis of contemporary governments at work,

the whole subject has assumed some recognizable bodily shape—though, admittedly, an adolescent shape from which the puppy fat has still to be removed.

But alongside this sense of unity has developed a wider and, at any rate in the short run, a confusing consciousness that government as a university subject cannot be properly or fully studied by reference only to what have become its major academic components. The other social inquirers—the economists, social anthropologists, sociologists, and social psychologists—have so advanced their subjects as to make substantial contributions to an understanding of the exercise of power and influence. The overlap of this new knowledge with what has become the traditional body of government as a separate subject is now very formidable and is recognized, but has not yet been accommodated fully, in teaching syllabuses. In terms of such syllabuses the eventual outcome may well be a merging of the subject ‘government’ into more generalized courses on all social organization, retaining only a particular orientation towards the way in which power and influence are exercised within the special mechanism of the state. Such a complete synthesis is still a long way off, but there is and has been for some time a practical recognition of its inevitability. In this college, as in most other universities, the special study of government will comprise the usual trio of institutions, history, and theory, but as elsewhere, it will be underpinned as far as possible by at least an introduction to law, economics, and sociology.

The professional student of government can look back on the last century with some quiet pride in what has been achieved, but without the full conviction of the scholar who knows that his subject has been whole-heartedly and unquestionably established in academic curricula. The

truth must be faced that, despite the strides which have been made and the growth of a certain unity, government—or political science—or what you will—is still rather an untidy complex of studies than a real academic discipline. It is true that the techniques of natural science have been applied to the analysis of governmental life, but the natural scientist can ask fairly—what principles have been uncovered—where are your testable hypotheses—how far are you along the road to producing unshakeable propositions? And the honest answer must be—we have not succeeded in abstracting any universal rules about the conduct of government—we have mouthed some useful generalizations, we have developed some insights, and we have amassed a lot of facts, but no more, in a truly scientific context. The empirical study of government is still overwhelmingly a descriptive activity, and the collection of factual information can go on for ever without itself advancing the search for a set of fundamental principles which will explain the phenomena of politics and administration. If the study is to become truly 'scientific', then at some stage some scholar will have to produce one of those flashes of creative imagination which is the beginning of a legitimate theory whose propositions henceforward can be the guide to further investigations. But it might equally well be argued that perhaps the idea of a 'science' of government is misleading or even mistaken. To this possibility I should like to return. For the moment, to end this recital of the content, the progress, and the weaknesses of the study of government, I would make the cautious claim that it has become a diffuse but well-developed descriptive and analytical study, characterized by a recognizably separate intellectual approach, but that it is not yet a wholly satisfactory academic discipline.

Much less time need be spent on the research methods which the student of government employs. In the area of both political theory and institutions the basic raw material of his inquiries and the techniques of evaluating his findings are those of the historian. Both must compile and collate the evidence of the written word and both must apply the art of weighing and sifting that evidence. But the student of government is at a disadvantage as compared with the historian in the context of written sources. He is interested primarily in contemporary affairs, but a large proportion of the official and unofficial archives of recent and contemporary politics and administration are closed to him. Against this, it is true that he has readily available all contemporary published literature, and he is free from that inhibition of the historian which is expressed in the notion that yesterday's newspaper is academically respectable reading because it is history, but today's is inadmissible because it is politics. The student of government has the professional duty to read both, and the same applies to all the ephemeral and polemical literature of politics and the routine papers of administration, which can be of immense significance for him but are often of no real value to the historian in later days.

The gap in the availability of written evidence is one reason why we turn to additional research methods. The other—and the major—reason is that additional methods have been evolved not only, or at all, as substitutes for the written word, but as techniques of inquiry in their own right—as ways of extracting information which would never come to light from even the most exhaustive survey of the orthodox literature of a period. The student of politics and administration will be found drawing up questionnaires and persuading people to answer them: he will be

discovered skulking in the back row at political meetings and—if he can get in—at party conferences: he will spend hours in the rooms of busy politicians and officials, asking questions which may appear either meaningless or too dangerously meaningful to his hosts: he may be spotted in the public galleries of parliaments and courts of law; at home he will spend an unhealthy amount of time—thereby endangering the harmony of his household—listening to political news and commentary on the radio and watching the coverage of governmental affairs on television: and he will find himself falling into the distressing habit of eavesdropping—the conversations of others in every conceivable situation help him to fit what he hears—and who he hears—into an emerging pattern of ideas about the processes of politics and administration. And the price he must pay for all this pure devotion to scholarship is the public reputation of being a dangerous spy, a sensation monger, a man who uses his work as an excuse for indulging a vicious partiality for gossip, a home-wrecker, a bore, and perhaps worst of all, in the opinion of his more ascetic academic colleagues, something of a charlatan. I admit readily, Sir, that my justification for belonging to such a category of university personnel is probably insufficient to refute these popular misconceptions.

Any subject studied and taught in universities requires the existence of some particular external conditions without which its pursuit would be difficult if not impossible. In government, of all the social studies, the external prerequisites are perhaps more important than in any other subject.

Without attempting the wellnigh impossible task of defining precisely the attributes of what the intellectual

Western world means by the shorthand expression 'a free society', I would submit that the study of government as I have tried to describe it can exist only in a free society or in a society which, even if it does not boast all the characteristics of political freedom, is at least committed to the achievement of such a condition. Other societies with very different political régimes are susceptible of academic treatment by students using the techniques and general approach of research into government, but only from safe areas beyond the boundaries of such régimes, and, therefore, only through the use of evidence at second hand. The vast body of literature which has grown up on the subject of the government of Soviet Russia has increased enormously the knowledge available about the workings of that system. But even the most learned writer on the topic will admit that his view of Russian government cannot be as full a picture as can be obtained of the political systems of free societies. For the inquirer into government is concerned above all things to reveal and explain the mechanisms and processes of the exercise of power and influence. When power and influence are exercised by a hierarchy whose activities are closed to all but its own members, the independent student can probe only the results and not the origins, development, and inner characteristics of such activities. And within the frontiers of a state ruled by such a hierarchy, his probing would be a perilous undertaking.

Even within a free society, however, the study of government, especially when first introduced, may well excite some suspicion and hostility. These can only be overcome completely by general acceptance of the major justifications whose exposition must be delayed, alas, for yet a few minutes more. But they can also be allayed to some extent through the acceptance by students of government of a

special code of personal conduct in relation to their professional calling.

Complete detachment is an unattainable academic ideal, in no subject less likely of attainment than in the study of government. Every man is politically conditioned—by his family, by his education, by his wider social environment, by the political events through which he lives, and by a hundred other factors. If he comes to study politics and administration he brings to that study ideas which may be modified, or denied, or strengthened, by closer acquaintance with his subject-matter, but he will always have ideas and attitudes which will seep into his writings and his teachings. Free societies do not mind this, so long as those ideas and attitudes are backed by scholarly integrity. If a university teacher writes books and delivers lectures which reveal highly unorthodox personal convictions, a free society does not say, 'This man and his works must be suppressed.' A free society says, 'The work of this man reflects his own convictions, but it has been developed out of and with due regard for scholarship. His findings will be attacked by the equally scholarly findings of other men with different ideas. And any teacher has a sacred duty to guide his students not solely along the route of his own ideas and attitudes: he must also guide them to the ideas and attitudes of those with whom he does not agree. Only through an unhindered traffic of ideas can the study of any subject flourish.'

In so far as this academic freedom is part of a greater political freedom, the academic student of government must subscribe to it as strongly as any of his colleagues. But when he looks at other facets of political freedom, the academic student of government may well feel that he must relinquish some of them because of his professional

interests. He has the same right as any other citizen to cast his vote and to think about and discuss politics. Moreover, he is free to write about government, using the full discipline and paraphernalia of scholarship. His arguments may be to the advantage of certain groups, and thereby he may exercise a potent influence on political life. But at this point I suggest that both expedience and principle combine to put a barrier across the road to any more directly political activity on his part. Expedience dictates that anyone who must gain the confidence and co-operation of practising politicians and public officials in order to obtain the raw material for his research must demonstrate that he himself deserves such confidence and co-operation. And it is obvious enough that open participation by such an inquirer in the political battle is the last quality likely to endear him to any politicians except those with whom he is in sympathy, and to any civil servant who is imbued—or should be imbued—with the ideal of political neutrality. Principle suggests that the simultaneous pursuit of practical politics and the academic study of government are incompatible and undesirable. For the job of the politician is to persuade; the job of the academic student of politics is to examine as rigorously and impartially as is humanly possible the motives, the course, and the implications of political action. The gap between the two is too wide to be bridged successfully—perhaps even honestly—by any one man at the same time. I submit that anyone who tries to combine the two roles will betray his professional standing, will jeopardize the academic study of government, and, in all probability, will find the dual position untenable.

If social tolerance and governmental co-operation are prerequisites of the successful study of government, so too is the complete separation of the personnel of practical

politics from the personnel of academic inquiry into politics and administration. The student of government may properly be the instigator of political ideas. He may be a firm follower of one group of political leaders: but he must never be their colleague or servant in the practical business of politics. He should be, in his professional capacity, the coldest of academic cold fish.

Why study government? Why bother with what would appear to be a subject which is not quite an academic discipline; which employs a number of slightly dubious research techniques; which has produced no findings of truly scientific standing; which requires a special social and political environment; which tends to restrict the full political freedom of its practitioners; and which is likely to be the object of misunderstanding and suspicion among laymen and other academics?

A blanket answer could be given by adopting the over-quoted response of the mountaineer to the question, 'Why climb Everest?'—'We climb it because it is there.' We study government because it is there—a phenomenon which, like any other phenomenon, excites the human curiosity and fires the ambition to achieve an understanding of it, and thereby, perhaps, to extend the authority of man over his environment. Such an answer may be regarded, according to taste, either as containing the quintessence of philosophic wisdom or as being a superlative expression of intellectual snobbery. It may indeed hold within it the germ of a great truth, but it is unlikely in itself to be accepted as a sufficient justification for the outlay of time and money on a new university department.

Another general answer reverts to the implication thrown out earlier that the study of government can be regarded as

only one part of a scientific attempt to understand the whole of society. There are many who study government in the faith that their work, along with all the other studies of social organization, will produce, eventually, answers with the same qualities—or at least the same degree—of certainty and predictability as are produced in the natural sciences. While I respect the sincerity and integrity of such an approach I must confess to feeling not only sceptical but almost completely indifferent about it. The infinite variability of the factors influencing social behaviour, and the very slight progress which has been made towards any 'scientific' explanation of that behaviour so far, combine to convince me that the prospect of mankind having at hand a set of unequivocal formulae to apply to social activity is too remote to be taken very seriously. And though the possibility of such an achievement must be accepted, I for my part am glad to hold the prejudiced view that it will not materialize for aeons of time. For the vision of a world in which the findings of natural and social science had been so far advanced that they could be used to reduce the life of man to a set of impulses, infallibly controllable by a single authority, is a nightmare towards which I share the revulsion so eloquently expressed in the frightening novels of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, and more lightly revealed in these lines of John Betjeman from a poem about the horrors of a society well set on the road to planned perfection:

And ev'ry old cathedral that you enter
By then will be an Area Culture Centre.
Instead of nonsense about Death and Heaven
Lectures on civic duty will be given;
Eurhythmic classes dancing round the spire,
And economics courses in the choir.

If a society is to be asked to tolerate, finance, and give constructive, co-operative help to the study of government, then its decision will depend on how satisfactory are the answers offered by the sponsors of that study to severely practical questions which, at bottom, can be expressed thus: 'What use is it?' And though no thinking person can ever be absolutely certain of the 'use' of any academic study or even, perhaps, of what 'useful' means in the context of the whole gamut of human life, I suggest that there are, on a level lower than the high metaphysical plateau, answers which will meet the legitimate demands of a society primarily concerned with practical affairs.

One of the favourite queries put to the teacher of government is: 'Will the study produce politicians and senior administrators?' The answer must be that by itself the study will not produce such people. The peculiar capacities of the successful politician and administrator cannot be acquired by any academic study: they are innate capacities, more likely to be developed in the debates of the Student's Union or in the organization of a college rag than in the lecture room or the library. The anxious parent, worried lest the enrolment of his child for a course in government will lead that child into the maelstrom of party politics, must be relieved of anxiety; and the ambitious parent, keen on such enrolment because he feels that the seat of the Prime Minister awaits his offspring through the training that offspring is about to receive, must be disappointed of hope. A student is as safe—or as unsafe—from the lure of politics in the department of government to just the same extent as he is in the departments of botany or modern languages. We have no secret formula for an infallible assembly-line production of successful politicians or civil servants.

Another line of questioning which is often levelled at the teacher of government is based on the belief that by taking courses in government a student is bound to embrace some dangerous doctrine and that his moral and ethical standards will be debased by too close a contact with the world of politics. My rejoinder would be that at a university the chance that a student will embrace one or several new creeds is quite considerable, but that in a department of government he will have an opportunity not only of learning to assess dispassionately the virtues and vices of political doctrines, but in all probability of modifying his views of them by relating them to the stark realities of government. And as for being debased by politics, I submit that this is little more than an old wives' tale. Politics is an essential part of all social life, and those who follow governmental politics as a vocation are performing an essential public duty. That there is dishonesty and viciousness in the world of government is undeniable: the higher the stakes the more ruthlessly do men compete. But if politics is correctly defined as the process by which human groups decide what actions should be taken in matters affecting all their members, then every sphere of social organization must offer the same opportunities for debasement. The proportion of evil in government is probably no greater than in other areas of human activity.

All this, however, is a negative defence: it is high time to thrust home a positive justification. To begin modestly, let the two most recent questions be rephrased somewhat; let the first become: can the study of government improve the qualities of politicians and senior administrators? Here we can give a cautious affirmative. Given the natural gifts to cope with the problems of government, a man cannot fail to be even more effective if he has sharpened his

mind through the process of stringent intellectual study. It can be argued cogently that there are better academic disciplines for training the mind than the study of government, at least in its present state; but even so there is sufficient intellectual content in that study to require those who follow it to develop and prove a high level of scholastic ability. And even with all its academic failings, the study provides a technical survey of the problems facing the politician and the administrator, and a perspective of the conditions in which they must operate which, though it does not in any sense comprise a vocational training, is the body of academic expertise most relevant to government. The old dogma that a successful politician must only be able to see one side of the case, and that the civil servant must blindly follow the orders of his masters without questioning their probable consequences, has worn a little thin in the conditions of the modern world. A trained intelligence is becoming ever more necessary for the conduct of public affairs, and the academic study of government can provide political and administrative man with at least a very valuable supplement to his natural talents.

But it is when the second question is rephrased that the door is opened for the major justification of the study: Will that study make men more politically conscious? Yes; and it is wholly desirable that it should. I have postulated that the study of government can only be carried on with a fair chance of full success in free societies; and one implication of this is that the study has something to contribute towards the successful working of free societies. A free society enjoys what we call limited or constitutional government, based on or aspiring to the full participation of its citizens. Such a system of government institutionalizes the competition for power and influence, and its smooth working is

dependent not only on the continuance of that competition but on the acceptance of limits beyond which competition must not be pushed. How fine and simple this sounds—and how intensely difficult and complicated it really is! Quite apart from external threats, the internal hazards facing constitutional government are great, even when such government has been long established, let alone when it is a new and tender growth. So much more is known than ever before about economic forces that the pressure by groups and individuals on government to manipulate those forces—irrespective of the effects on other individuals and groups—is constant: the apparatus of repression available to authority, if authority be minded to use it, grows potentially more efficient: the techniques of large-scale organization, public and private, tend to subordinate individuals to the role of featureless but ever more interdependent units: every organized group in society has become better equipped to squeeze the last ounce of privilege for its own interests: and the media of mass communications, with all their blessings, have brought with them the insidious influence of unscrupulous advertising, of distorted news and slanted comment, poured out unceasingly to a wider audience than has been subjected ever before to such conditioning.

This is not a prelude to a prophecy of impending doom. It is a catalogue—incomplete, alas, to the point of caricature—of some of the perils of a free society, and it is intended to support the view that only a widespread understanding of practical governmental requirements can keep that society politically free. All men consider that they understand politics—and so they do, in as far as only they know how they feel about what appears to them to fit their personal ideas of how society should behave, and

what seems to them to be in favour of, or against, their own immediate material interests. And it is no part of the job of a student of government to tell people in a free society what they should believe, what policies are 'right' or 'wrong'. It is his job to widen the understanding of the mechanisms of the governmental system. The more such mechanisms are understood, the less likely is it that the evil consequences of policies based on half-truths, extravagant claims, or blind prejudices will be ignored, and the more likely is it that rational policies—better still, alternative rational policies—will be recognized and examined realistically.

A knowledge of these mechanisms is not at everyone's fingertips. The structure of modern politics and administration takes an ever larger share of a nation's manpower and resources: the bureaucracy of a modern state is immense, and the processes of administration often tortuous. Not only the citizen but the politician and the administrator will gain from independent, systematic examination of a society's political and administrative institutions. The more intelligible a system of government, the less chance is there of it degenerating into inefficiency and injustice. Nor is the usefulness of a knowledge of governmental practice limited to the affairs of one's own community. No country today is wholly unaffected by the domestic politics of other countries, and the actions of other countries can be assessed correctly only if one has some understanding of their internal governmental systems. The fact that certain proposals of the American President can be nullified by the United States Senate is not just an item of dry academic interest to be sported in university common rooms: it is a piece of information which if not appreciated abroad could lead to serious international misunderstanding. People

who are aware of the implications of such a constitutional provision—and of similarly significant provisions in the governmental arrangements of other states—are not blessed with some mystical power of insight: they have studied government themselves and have drawn on the work of professional students of government. It is the possession of this sort of knowledge, and the ability to use such knowledge intelligently, which I interpret as political consciousness, and which I glory in the attempt to spread as widely as possible.

Constitutional government is the most complex of all forms of government, because it offers the chance of maximizing the freedom of individuals and of taking proper account of the legitimate interests of groups. To have in such a society an ever-growing body of people who understand how the pieces of the system fit together, who recognize the consequences of proposed actions, and who can hoist the danger signals when the limits of constitutional safety are reached is a major political safeguard. The teachers of government in universities—and, far, far more important, their pupils—should help to constitute a core of technically informed thinking citizens, not necessarily ‘non-partisan’, not devoid of political passion nor impervious to just human demands, but capable of tilting the scales always in a direction which will ensure the continuity of the fundamental mechanisms of constitutional politics and administration.

It is a big claim, but one not made in arrogance. I have stressed throughout that the tools of the student of government are primitive and imperfect. And I have also stressed—and stress again—that the essential pre-condition of the study is its willing acceptance by the community. A society devoted to the ideal of constitutional government will gain

some benefit, even if it is sometimes a muddled and always a humble benefit, by allowing and encouraging the study of its politics and administration. A society which refuses to allow such examination must be suspected of fearing what independent inquiry would reveal.

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