

Mommy, What Is Government?

by Stephen DeVoy



The sun had just set over the Martian landscape and the thin atmosphere was still lit with a blue glow. The Castro family had finished dinner and watched the sun set through the thick windows of their home, a large structure primarily beneath the surface, but with one level above where the surface could be seen. Maria Castro sat on the couch, snuggled against her mother. The local educational collective had shown an old film about war on Earth. It was a strange world, Earth, with many concepts and ideas foreign to Maria. Maria looked up at her mother and asked, "Mommy, what is government?"

"Something we left behind on Earth, my dear," she replied. "Why do you ask?"

"I saw a film today about a war on Earth. The film mentioned the word 'government.' I never heard that word before," said Maria.

"Well, Maria," said her mother, "I've never lived under a government so what I have to say may not be accurate. However, I will tell you what my father told me."

The mother pondered thoughtfully for a moment, as if struggling for words, and then she began to recount what she had heard about government.

"A long time ago, back on Earth, before it was destroyed in a great war, people did not live freely as they do here on Mars. Most people believed that humans were evil by nature and that they needed to be controlled by other humans."

"That's silly," said Maria. "First of all, people are neither good nor evil. We begin our lives ignorant and we learn to be ethical. Secondly, if people were evil by nature, how could it be that some would be good enough to lead the evil?"

"I know," said her mother, "that seems obvious to us, but it was not obvious to them. They failed to understand that imposition of control denies individuals the opportunity to be responsible. Without full self responsibility, learning to live an ethical life is impossible. Having failed to achieve an ethical life, it is no wonder that the people of Earth seemed evil.

"In their simplemindedness, they sought to control the existence of violence and injustice by imposing violence and injustice. Rather than giving each individual the right to choose between being just and unjust, they chose to construct a mechanism to impose an artificial justice, selecting from the population individuals to control the mechanism. These selected individuals tended to wield the mechanism of "justice" with impunity. Having concentrated the power of the many into the hands of the few, society became hierarchical and government evolved to exist for its own sake, exploiting the hierarchical relationship to extract more and more resources from the people for the purpose of increasing the government's control over the people.

"Those entrenched in power, enabled by the tools of government - a great lever whereby all of society's collective force could be wielded in the interest of the entrenched, the powerful discovered that they could control and manipulate the perception of reality. In a real and just world, natural forces impose reality upon the senses. Under natural circumstances, such as we have here on Mars, an unjust person can be shunned, denied resources and handed justice by the individual decisions of his or her fellow humans. Under government, such individual choices are limited and the government reserves for itself the right to determine justice and control resources. Under government, it is the government that decides which unjust individuals shall receive justice and which shall not. Within hierarchical societies, mechanisms controlled by entrenched individuals are wielded, more often than not, in the interest of the person at the controls and not in the interest of justice. Therefore, there is no objective justice under government, only an expression of the self serving interests of those wielding the power they stole from others.

"With such power concentrated in the hands of the few, the people became pawns in the competition between governments..."

"Wait!" exclaimed Maria. "There were more than one government on Earth?"

"Yes," her mother answered. "Some people just can't get enough of a bad thing," she laughed.

"As I was saying, governments competed with each other for resources. Those in control of a government could further enrich themselves and their associates by expropriating the resources (e.g. the natural resources and human resources) of other governments. Naturally, governments do not usually roll over and hand their resources to another, so this led to conflict. The conflict between governments took the form of war and the people were sent to fight on behalf of the governments."

Maria interrupted her mother. "You mean it was not enough that government stole the resources of its own people, but now it was using its own people as resources in conflicts? Moreover, these conflicts were intended to steal the resources of other governments - resources that governments stole from their own people would become the target of theft by other governments and the victims of these robberies, the people of the nations in conflict, would be sent to execute the theft or defend against it?"

"I know it sounds absurd, Maria, but that is how it was," said her mother. "As governments conquered governments, the number of independent governments on Earth grew smaller and smaller until there was only one super powerful government imposing its will upon a handful of subject governments. That super powerful government became more and more oppressive as it had no one to answer to. In time a rebellion brewed. Many of the smaller governments began to organize against the super powerful government and a large war ensued. Rather than give up its power, the super powerful government destroyed the Earth with nuclear weapons. Fortunately, before this happened, many humans had already come to Mars, a world without a government, and decided to keep it that way."

"I'm glad we did," said Maria.

"So am I," said her mother.

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