

Legal

Binding or enforceable rule: a rule of conduct or procedure recognized by a community as binding or enforceable by authority

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Barbarism

Barbarism is the most primitive legal system. Under barbarism, the strong take what they want from the weak: their money, possessions, even spouses and children. Disputes are settled by combat; might is right. There is little positive to say about barbarism, except perhaps that it cuts way back on red tape. It does not support a legal class that can complicate and obfuscate the law to ensure job security.

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is a form of government in which a professional class manages the day to day operations of the government. They collect the taxes. They build the roads. They turn the ruler's wishes into actuality. The Chinese mandarins are an early example of a bureaucracy; the motor vehicle agency of your local government is a later example. Bureaucracies provide a certain amount of stability and competence to a government, ensuring that the government will continue to operate efficiently even if the old ruler is thrown out and a new and totally inexperienced ruler takes his or her place. Over time, though, a bureaucracy may become "entrenched" - growing in size and inefficiency to the point where it is extremely difficult for a leader to accomplish anything - good or ill.

Civil Service

Civil Service is the technology of bureaucracy - organizing and running a government. A successful civil service requires standard procedures, division of responsibility, hierarchy, and advancement through merit. Clearly record-keeping is crucial to the successful management of a government, as well. While some early cultures kept records on clay or wax or stone tablets, the advent of paper was a boon to the advance of bureaucracy and a civil service. One of the oldest known civil services is found in China, during the Tang dynasty (600-900 AD). This was created largely in response to the Confucian demands for honest government; among other innovations, the Tang civil servants were hired based upon the results of a written examination, rather than through the more common methods of bribery and patronage, and thus had fewer ties to the wealthy and powerful nobility. The English followed the Chinese civil service model when they created a bureaucracy to manage their growing colonies. Though successful, the practice did not spread to Europe until the mid-18th century.

Code of Laws

The earliest tribal civilizations were bonded together by mutual needs and beliefs. A tribal chieftain, who acted as an advisor and enforcer of the will of the gods, ruled these

groups. No formal laws existed in these early cultures, but fear of the gods and a sense of tribal customs and morality kept order in the tribe. As societies became larger and more diverse, the need arose for established rules of conduct. The earliest known codes of laws existed in Babylon, India, and Palestine. The Twelve Tables of Rome, written in 500 BC, and its successors such as the Justinian Code, were the first codes of law to distinguish between public law, which involves the state, and private law, which concerns disputes between citizens. Roman law was the first formalized written system of laws, and went on to influence many of the legal systems of the modern world.

Constitution

A "constitution" is a system that establishes the fundamental rules by which a nation is governed. Generally, a constitution describes the relationship between the government and the people, and the relationships between the various parts (or branches) of the government. A constitution will lay down how the rulers of the country are chosen and describe the limits of their power. Many nations, such as the United States, have written, codified constitutions, while some, such as the United Kingdom, have unwritten constitutions. Aristotle invented the concept of constitutions in the 3rd Century BC. In 622 AD, the Prophet Muhammad created the first written constitution, the "Constitution of Medina." King Henry I of England proclaimed the "Charter of Liberties" in 1100 AD, and in 1215 the English nobility forced King John to sign the "Magna Carta." The most important part of the Magna Carta, Article 39, established the concept of "habeas corpus" (literally, "you should have the body") which constrained the king from exiling, imprisoning, or killing anyone without "due process" of law. The "due process" clause of the Fifth Amendment in the US Constitution is directly descended from Article 39.

Courthouse

As kingdoms and empires expanded, it became increasingly difficult for the rulers to maintain control over the more distant regions of their realm. To ensure that the far-flung cities of the empire contributed their expected share of duties and taxes to the government, rulers constructed courthouses to help unify their domains. These local centers of government meted out justice and helped preserve order in the midst of the furthest wilderness.

Free Speech

The term "free speech" describes a legal system in which a person cannot be stopped from saying anything he or she wants, as long as the speech doesn't cause immediate harm to those around him or her - even in the freest society, it is still illegal to shout "Fire!" in a crowded movie theatre. The benefits of free speech are many. The citizens may debate their government's policies and actions fully, without fear of punishment. A free press allows the citizens great access to news and information, allowing them to more accurately judge the events taking place in the world around them. Tyrants and despots rightly fear free speech more than almost anything else. On the other hand, free speech may be hate speech; it may be lies. Such speech must be allowed: once a government is allowed to

determine which speech is to be allowed and which is to be suppressed, the temptation to abuse that power is overwhelming, and speech isn't free any more.

Nationhood

A "nation" is a group of people sharing some kind of common identity. Nations may be united by language, custom, history, or religion (or any combination of them). Sharing languages, customs, histories and so forth provides strength to a nation - the sense of identity and commonality reduces internal strife, civil and religious wars, and so forth. Unfortunately, citizens with different languages, customs, and backgrounds may be looked upon with suspicion, distrust, and contempt, promoting unhappiness and unrest from the minority and limiting their ability to fully contribute to the society.

Vassalage

Vassalage is a feudal term referring to a person who enters a contract with his or her lord, agreeing to serve and protect the lord in return for monetary rewards or ownership or sovereignty over a parcel of land. The contract is often of both political and religious significance binding both parties by the rules of man and of God. Vassalage is often tribal in nature. One tribe conquers another, and rather than killing the conquered tribe or taking over its direct management, the conquering ruler makes the conquered his vassal: the lower ruler continues to maintain control over his people and territory, while paying tribute to his or her lord in the form of money, goods, soldiers or slaves.