Adam Gincel

Professor Hammerman

CAL 103C

12 February 2015

A Quilt of Governance

There is no one obviously correct way to rule over a large group of people. If there was, the past few thousands of years would not have been as full of revolution, war, and bloodshed as they were. A government is generally created with the needs of its people in mind, in response to a previous system of government after a successful revolution, or is the result of a restructuring of the government before it, after the people in charge start seeing problems arise. Even when it seems like a government is being made from scratch, such as after the American Revolution, founders are still being inspired by other governments and other writings on the topic. Whoever is creating the new government takes bits and pieces from various sources, stitching them together like one would a quilt, and eventually drafts what they believe is a government suited to meet the needs of its subjects. Similarly, I have a good idea of what governing style I would prefer, and it can be constructed fairly accurately using both Lao-Tzu’s *Thoughts from the Tao-te Ching* and Machiavelli’s *The Qualities of the Prince.*

To get into the frame of mind needed to envision my own governing system, I had to perform a simple thought experiment. I had to come up with a somewhat reasonable scenario in which I would be placed in some position of power. I was the Drum Major of my marching band in high school, and we flew to Florida once, so I used that as my example. Say the plane flew way off course and crashed on an island, leaving only me and the other kids in the band alive on the island. Being the obvious person in charge, the foundation would be set for me to lay down some ground rules. My first order of business would be to gather all of the section leaders, and with them form a pseudo-autocracy. With me and the section leaders at the helm, we would all look for supplies and a way to set up some sort of camp. Supplies would be rationed out, and we’d all try our best to survive. Importantly, the section leaders and I would be active participants when scavenging and during all related activities.

That simple, if silly, example shows influences from both the *Thoughts from the Tao-te Ching* and *The Qualities of the Prince.* Firstly, *The Prince* describes a small group of people in power, with the Prince at the head. This is describing an autocracy, like the one I would form with the other high ranking band members. We’d take charge, but not in some sort of authoritative way. Instead of ordering the rest of the band to do things, we would take charge in guiding everyone, being right in front of them or beside them, helping them along the way. This also ties into the *Tao* – Lao-Tzu wrote “If you want to be a great leader, you must learn to follow the Tao. Stop trying to control” (57.34-36). We would become better leaders by virtue of leading while working alongside the others, instead of becoming tyrannical by simply ordering them around. This brings what I believe should be the core basis of a governing system to light: a government should lead by example, while trying its best to provide its constituents with the means to succeed in their prospects. This means offering affordable education, promoting healthy competition in markets, and helping people who are having trouble getting on their feet. I also believe this should be done without excessive influence; the government shouldn’t strive to achieve these goals by manipulating every aspect of a society like some sort of puppeteer. A government’s job is to provide a healthy foundation for a society to grow and flourish. It may be difficult, but I believe a careful balance of authoritative leadership and hands-on societal influence could lead any government down a successful path.

A perfect system of government has yet to be discovered, if one even exists. Each and every government has its own share of problems which can result in anything from an unhappy minority to a bloodthirsty majority. I, myself, would be happy with a government that managed to assert its authority like Machiavelli describes while still managing to lead by example and without harsh interference, as is advocated for in the *Tao-te Ching*. While it wouldn’t be the perfect style of government, as that doesn’t exist as of now, it would certainly be at least tolerable, in my eyes. My preferred style of governance, and the one I believe will find the most success during its reign, is one that carefully balances its authority and its ability to provide opportunities for its constituents.

Works Cited

Jacobus, Lee A., ed. *A World of Ideas: Essential Readings for College Writers*. 9th ed. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2013. Print.

Lao-Tzu. *Thoughts from the Tao-te Ching.* Jacobus 219-34. Print.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Qualities of The Prince.* Jacobus 203-15. Print.