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ENGL 101 Thursdays
Essay 3 (Final)
11/29/2012

Tyranny and Liberty

Are you better off now than you were four years ago? Are you better off than the days of your childhood? Have you more freedoms or more taxes? Have you given up freedoms for securities, even if they only last during a President's tenure? As Benjamin Franklin said, "Those who would give up liberty for temporary security deserve neither liberty nor security." Our Founders knew what freedom was, what liberty was, and what the role of a just government ought to be. But what have we to offer? Franklin also wrote "...a free country we give you, if you can keep it..." but what have we done with the free nation that was handed to us? We have dismissed the ideas of an "old, raggedy document" and exchanged them for the proven failures and horrors of Europe and Asia. We have lost sight of what makes mankind free, and moreover, we have lost sight of what freedom really is and how we take it for granted, and we have let the government run our lives instead of the government being run by the people. As Thomas Jefferson once said "When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty." I fear what the government will do to our republic, because I can affirm that the government of the United States of America is no longer a good and just government.

So how can someone who was born in the United States and has exclusively lived there his whole life determine that the government of the United States is bad, or that our ideologies are corrupt? That question can be asked of today's anti-federalists and today's pro-Communists alike. English philosopher John Locke has a very good observation on how we come to our knowledge:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: How comes it to be furnished? When comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE. In that our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. (Locke 126)

The "blank slate" philosophy can appeal to both liberal and conservative alike. We do, in fact start with nothing. So no matter where we were born, and where we live, we do come to know what we know by experience. It is everyday life that shapes our minds and our outlook. In the short 30 years I have been on this planet, in this country, I have seen many things. I can only look back now and see where the fundamental change in our society began. And also by reading, and discovering for myself, what Locke would call "reflection", I have come to know, by second hand experience, what other countries and even our own have faced in the way of tyrannical leadership. It is by reflection, that I can say our current government is not a good nor a just one. So... what should government be? In Locke's "Second Treatise of Government", he describes government as a mutual contract, and that the people are ultimately in charge, so much so that

they can alter or dissolve the contract if the government is not holding up its end of the bargain. Almost 100 years later, Locke's philosophy and words are used in the Declaration of Independence, and continued to inspire the founding documents of our country, including the United States Constitution. It is clear that our government isn't following the constitution and that our leadership is teetering on the slippery slope of drunken power that we have read about throughout the world. The contract held between the citizens of our nation and its leadership is now in favor of the leadership, who feel they can bypass the people and do what they want. Instead of providing for the defense of life, liberty and the right of property as Locke described it, it is now considered an offense to have life, liberty, and property, so much so that those who have these things in abundance are demonized and taxed beyond a tolerable level in effort to reward people who sit at home and do not contribute to society because that's "fair". We are a country that has so much. When did we become a people of the "have not" mentality? When did the "can do" attitude become "cannot"? It wasn't that long ago that President John F. Kennedy boldly stated: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." It's a safe bet to make that John F. Kennedy would not receive the Democratic Party nomination today, but that is another story entirely.

So, if the ideal government described by John Locke is to exist, what defines it? What is its ultimate purpose? This question faced our founders and our earliest representatives in the continental congress. Deliberations went on and on as to claim independence or stay in allegiance to Great Britain. Speeches were made, and votes were cast again, and again. But at last, on July 4th, 1776, those assembled unanimously declared:

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, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness...

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor. (Jefferson)

Jefferson and our Founders go it right in the “argument of all arguments” that is the Declaration of Independence. God will not choose a King, but instead, the people will choose their leaders and contract a government to keep what God has done. It is the government’s job to preserve and uphold the God given rights of humanity that we know as the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness... and as evident by the Tenth Amendment: “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” (Congress) Everything else is up to interpretation, but only to the individual states and their people. The federal government only exists to protect the people.

Freedoms do not come from the government. Freedom comes from God, and freedom comes from those who have made sacrifices on our behalf, and freedom comes from our ability as individuals to do what is right, and to pursue our God given rights. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galations 3:28, NRSV) Whether this bible verse inspired Jefferson to proclaim that “all men are created equal”, we understand that this verse has continued to inspire Americans as we have resolved such plights as slavery, woman’s suffrage, labor suffrage, and eventually homosexual suffrage. There are no special rights for any special group of people. We all have the same rights under the constitution. It is, however, taken many debates, elections, and laws to be passed to recognize the extension of these unalienable rights. But it is not the duty of the government to incur mounds of never-ending debt, give out free cellular phones to those who ask, or micro-manage every aspect of a citizen’s life.

So what is a good and just government? What is its nature, and how do you recognize it? In these modern times, it is hard to do. We must first take off the rose-tinted glasses, put down the pipe, and stop drinking the kool-aid, and take a sobering look at the state of our union. We are a long way from what we were, but America is still worth fighting for. Instead of fundamentally transforming our country or changing even our history as famously suggested by a certain politician and his wife, let’s instead realize what we have before us. Our history is a great history, filled with trials and tribulations, of which righteousness and the good of mankind has always rendered success over the evils that have taunted and held us back. Our nation is a great nation. It is not perfect, and it probably never will be. We can agree that things are not running as smoothly as they once did, and what I offer is that it is because we have lost sight of

what a government ought to be, and we have lost sight of our Founder's vision, and taken our freedoms for granted. So, in taking back what is rightfully ours, we should boldly proclaim that our government is a government for the people, of the people, and by the people, and that the government works for us. And when the government no longer works for us, and becomes a large self-serving entity like it is today, it is our right and our duty to abolish or overthrow it, and re-establish what is right. The right kind of government is one that serves its people, as established in the United States Constitution. A just government is one that preserves the God given liberty of its people, and defends them from enemies, both foreign and domestic. A good natured government knows its role, and where that role begins and ends, and where the states and the people decide otherwise of laws and actions concerning them. I don't want to hope things will get better. I don't want to change my country. I just want to restore the values, honor, courage, and love that brought us the land of free, and the home of the brave. It is my right, my duty, my cause, my privilege, and by God, I shall, one person at a time.

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