The Federalist Papers Summary and Analysis

by Alexander Hamilton and John Jay and James Madison

Essay 10

Summary

Madison begins perhaps the most famous of the Federalist papers by stating that one of the strongest arguments in favor of the Constitution is the fact that it establishes a government capable of controlling the violence and damage caused by factions. Madison defines factions as groups of people who gather together to protect and promote their special economic interests and political opinions. Although these factions are at odds with each other, they frequently work against the public interest, and infringe upon the rights of others.

Both supporters and opponents of the plan are concerned with the political instability produced by rival factions. The state governments have not succeeded in solving this problem; in fact, the situation is so problematic that people are disillusioned with all politicians and blame government for their problems. Consequently, a form of popular government that can deal successfully with this problem has a great deal to recommend it. Given the nature of man, factions are inevitable. As long as men hold different opinions, have different amounts of wealth, and own different amount of property, they will continue to fraternize with people who are most similar to them. Both serious and trivial reasons account for the formation of factions but the most important source of faction is the unequal distribution of property. Men of greater ability and talent tend to possess more property than those of lesser ability, and since the first object of government is to protect and encourage ability, it follows that the rights of property owners must be protected. Property is divided unequally, and, in addition, there are many different kinds of property. and men have different interests depending upon the kind of property they own. For example, the interests of landowners differ from those who own businesses. Government must not only protect the conflicting interests of property owners

but must, at the same time, successfully regulate the conflicts between those with and without property.

To Madison, there are only two ways to control a faction: to remove its causes and to control its effects. The first is impossible. There are only two ways to remove the causes of a faction: destroy liberty or give every citizen the same opinions, passions, and interests. Destroying liberty is a "cure worse then the disease itself," and the second is impracticable. The causes of factions are thus part of the nature of man and we must deal with their effects and accept their existence. The government created by the Constitution controls the damage caused by such factions.

The framers established a representative form of government, a government in which the many elect the few who govern. Pure or direct democracies (countries in which all the citizens participate directly in making the laws) cannot possibly control factious conflicts. This is because the strongest and largest faction dominates, and there is no way to protect weak factions against the actions of an obnoxious individual or a strong majority. Direct democracies cannot effectively protect personal and property rights and have always been characterized by conflict.

If the new plan of government is adopted, Madison hopes that the men elected to office will be wise and good men,- the best of America. Theoretically, those who govern should be the least likely to sacrifice the public good to temporary condition, but the opposite might happen. Men who are members of particular factions, or who have prejudices or evil motives might manage, by intrigue or corruption, to win elections and then betray the interests of the people. However, the possibility of this happening in a large country, such as the United States, is greatly reduced. The likelihood that public office will be held by qualified men is greater in large countries because there will be more representatives chosen by a greater number of citizens. This makes it more difficult for the candidates to deceive the people. Representative government is needed in large countries, not to protect the people from the tyranny of the few, but to guard against the rule of the mob.
In large republics, factions will be numerous, but they will be

weaker than in small, direct democracies where it is easier for factions to consolidate their strength. In this country, leaders of factions may be able to influence state governments to support unsound economic and political policies -as the states, far from being abolished, retain much of their sovereignty. If the framers had abolished the state governments, the opponents of the proposed government would have a legitimate objection.

The immediate object of the constitution is to bring the present thirteen states into a secure union. Almost every state, old and new, will have one boundary next to territory owned by a foreign nation. The states farthest from the center of the country will be most endangered by these foreign countries; they may find it inconvenient to send representatives long distances to the capitol, but in terms of safety and protection they stand to gain the most from a strong national government.

Madison concludes that he presents these previous arguments because he is confident that many will not listen to those "prophets of gloom" who say that the proposed government is unworkable. For this founding father, it seems incredible that these gloomy voices suggest abandonment of the idea of coming together in strength -- the states still have common interests. Madison concludes that "according to the degree of pleasure and pride we feel in being Republicans, ought to be our zeal in cherishing the spirit and supporting the character of Federalists." Analysis

James Madison carried to the Convention a plan that was the exact opposite of Hamilton's. In fact, the theory he advocated at Philadelphia and in his Federalist essays was developed as a republican substitute for the New Yorker's "high toned" scheme of state. Madison was convinced that the class struggle would be ameliorated in America by establishing a limited federal government that would make functional use of the vast size of the country and the existence of the states as active political organisms. He argued in his "Notes on Confederacy," in his Convention speeches, and again in Federalist 10 that if an extended republic was set up including a multiplicity of economic, geographic, social, religious, and sectional interests, these interests, by checking each other, would prevent American

society from being divided into the clashing armies of the rich and the poor. Thus, if no interstate proletariat could become organized on purely economic lines, the property of the rich would be safe even though the mass of the people held political power. Madison's solution for the class struggle was not to set up an absolute and irresponsible state to regiment society from above; he was never willing to sacrifice liberty to gain security. He wished to multiply the deposits of political power in the state itself sufficiently to break down the sole dualism of rich and poor and thus to guarantee both liberty and security. This, as he stated in Federalist 10, would provide a "republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government."

It is also interesting to note that James Madison was the most creative and philosophical disciple of the Scottish school of science and politics in the Philadelphia Convention. His effectiveness as an advocate of a new constitution, and of the particular constitution that was drawn up in Philadelphia in 1787, was certainly based in a large part on his personal experience in public life and his personal knowledge of the conditions of American in 1787. But Madison's greatness as a statesmen rests in part on his ability to set his limited personal experience in the context of the experience of men in other ages and times, thus giving extra insight to his political formulations.
His most amazing political prophecy, contained within the pages of Federalist 10, was that the size of the United States and its variety of interests could be made a guarantee of stability and justice under the new constitution. When Madison made this prophecy, the accepted opinion among all sophisticated politicians was exactly the opposite. It was David Hume's speculations on the "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," first published in 1752, that most stimulated James Madison's' thought on factions. In this essay Hume disclaimed any attempt to substitute a political utopia for "the common botched and inaccurate governments which seemed to serve imperfect men so well. Nevertheless, he argued, the idea of a perfect commonwealth "is surely the most worthy curiosity of any the wit of man can possibly devise. And who knows, if this controversy were fixed by the universal consent of the wise and learned, but, in some future age, an opportunity might be afforded of reducing the theory to practice, either by a dissolution of some old

government, or by the combination of men to form a new one, in some distant part of the world. " At the end of Hume's essay was a discussion that was of interest to Madison. The Scot casually demolished the Montesquieu small-republic theory; and it was this part of the essay, contained in a single page, that was to serve Madison in new-modeling a "botched" Confederation "in a distant part of the world." Hume said that "in a large government, which is modeled with masterly skill, there is compass and room enough to refine the democracy, from the lower people, who may be admitted into the first elections or first concoction of the commonwealth, to the higher magistrate, who direct all the movements. At the same time, the parts are so distant and remote, that it is very difficult, either by intrigue, prejudice, or passion, to hurry them into any measure against the public interest." Hume's analysis here had turned the small-territory republic theory upside down: if a free state could once be established in a large area, it would be stable and safe from the effects of faction. Madison had found the answer to Montesquieu. He had also found in embryonic form his own theory of the extended federal republic.

In Hume's essay lay the germ for Madison's theory of the extended republic. It is interesting to see how he took these scattered and incomplete fragments and built them into an intellectual and theoretical structure of his own. Madison's first full statement of this hypothesis appeared in his "Notes on the Confederacy" written in April 1787, eight months before the final version of it was published as the tenth Federalist. Starting with the proposition that "in republican Government, the majority, however, composed, ultimately give the law," Madison then asks what is to restrain an interested majority from unjust violations of the minority's rights? Three motives might be claimed to meliorate the selfishness of the majority: first, "prudent regard for their own good, as involved in the general . . . good" second, "respect for character" and finally, religious scruples. After examining each in its turn Madison concludes that they are but a frail bulwark against a ruthless party.

When one examines these two papers in which Hume and Madison summed up the eighteenth century's most profound

thought on political parties, it becomes increasingly clear that the young American used the earlier work in preparing a survey on factions through the ages to introduce his own discussion of faction in America. Hume's work was admirably adapted to this purpose. It was philosophical and scientific in the best tradition of the Enlightenment. The facile domination of faction had been a commonplace in English politics for a hundred years, as Whig and Tory vociferously sought to fasten the label on each other. But the Scot, very little interested as a partisan and very much so as a social scientist, treated the subject therefore in psychological, intellectual, and socioeconomic terms. Throughout all history, he discovered, mankind has been divided into factions based either on personal loyalty to some leader or upon some "sentiment or interest" common to the group as a unit. This latter type he called a "Real" as distinguished from the "personal" faction. Finally, he subdivided the "real factions" into parties based on "interest, upon principle," or upon affection."

Hume spent well over five pages dissecting these three types; but Madison, while determined to be inclusive, had not the space to go into such minute analysis. Besides, he was more intent now on developing the cure than on describing the malady. He therefore consolidated Hume's two-page treatment of "personal" factions and his long discussion of parties based on "principle and affection" into a single sentence. The tenth Federalist reads" "A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well of speculation as of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions, have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex ad oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good." It is hard to conceive of a more perfect example of the concentration of idea and meaning than Madison achieved in this famous sentence.