

Machiavelli and *The Federalist*:
Florentine Insights into Publius

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I: Introduction

No less an authority than James Madison himself described *The Federalist Papers* as the “most useful exposition of the principles of the Constitution.”¹ Written chiefly by Madison and Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist* argued for the adoption of the new Constitution to replace the inadequate Articles of Confederation. Both men had been among the central figures of the Constitutional Convention. Hamilton, an immigrant from the British West Indies and former aid to General George Washington, had been one of the most influential critics of the weakness of the central government under the Articles and a persistent advocate for reform. Madison, a native of Virginia, had been a successful politician and was subsequently credited as the chief architect of the finalized Constitution. Although neither considered the document perfect, they shared a firm conviction that it was a desperately needed improvement. They therefore undertook to write *The Federalist* under the pen name of *Publius* (after one of the fathers of the Roman Republic) to articulate the reasoning behind the Constitution and to refute the arguments of their anti-federalist opponents. Of the eighty-five articles that made up *The Federalist Papers*, Hamilton wrote fifty-one, and Madison wrote twenty-nine (with John Jay contributing five).

¹ Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 680.

Yet, despite their unity on the issue of ratification, Madison and Hamilton would soon go on to become bitter political rivals, with sharply divergent visions for America's future. For this reason, it is less surprising that within *The Federalist*, one finds Hamilton and Madison in tension not merely with the Anti-Federalists, but also with each other. Hamilton and Madison's political philosophies for America achieve an imperfect synthesis within *The Federalist*. While the two men are in wholehearted agreement on some points, at others one perceives significant differences in tone and emphasis, and at times, even outright contradiction. Because these two towering figures had such a great impact on the nascent United States before and after the ratification of the Constitution, understanding the dialogue between them is essential to understanding some of the fundamental principles and tensions upon which the United States was founded.

This thesis sets out to explore this unique discussion between the two great American founders, through the prism of Niccolo Machiavelli. Although the republicanism of the American Founding, and *The Federalist Papers* in particular, has been scrutinized and studied carefully many legions of scholars, few have sought insight into this period from the thought of Machiavelli. The neglect of Machiavelli is somewhat surprising in light of his status as one of history's greatest republican theorists. Although the Florentine goes unmentioned by Madison and Hamilton in *The Federalist*, there are two good reasons for turning to him. First, indices of both Americans' personal correspondence reveal that they had carefully read Machiavelli. Moreover, many of the thinkers whom Madison and Hamilton more openly credit were themselves deeply

affected by Machiavelli. This suggests that Machiavelli's thought likely influenced the Americans through direct and indirect channels.

The second reason for turning to Machiavelli is related to the first, but is of greater importance to the methodology of this thesis. We intend here textual interpretation, an exegesis of some the key themes of *The Federalist*. While written for public consumption, *The Federalist* makes complex philosophical arguments about government. Moreover, since the Constitution was in fact ratified and has successfully endured through to the present, *The Federalist* takes on even greater significance: its theoretical reasoning has manifested in real-world application. For these reasons, it merits study in its own right, and not merely insofar as it fits into the march of intellectual history. We seek to understand the complex dynamic between Madison and Hamilton as expressed in *The Federalist*. In this light, we turn to Machiavelli as a great political theorist, whose insights into politics—republican politics especially— can help us understand the issues with which Madison and Hamilton grapple. Evidence of Machiavelli's influence on the Americans is useful to our project of using him to understand their thought, but it is not necessary. Regardless of whether the intellectual pedigree of the Americans' ideas can be traced back to the Florentine with confidence, Machiavelli's profound understanding of the dynamics of republican politics can still enlighten us about some of the reasons for agreement and divergence between Madison and Hamilton.

We find that many of the areas of agreement between Madison and Hamilton take place on Machiavellian terms. An appreciation of human nature as deeply flawed and characterized by an insatiable lust for power forms the cornerstone of politics of Madison

and Hamilton. Moreover, Madison and Hamilton follow Machiavelli in perceiving a divide between the elite few and the populous mass. Machiavelli helps us to comprehend how thinkers would construct governments and ideals of civic virtue on the basis of this understanding of the character of the raw material of human society. In addition, this thesis contends that Madison and Hamilton ultimately diverge on the question of what sort of republic America ought to become. This break seems to occur on precisely the fault line established by Machiavelli of the two types of republics: Rome and Sparta.

This thesis then argues that the interplay between the Americans' general agreement on the basic qualities of human nature and their disagreement about the ideal character of the American republic is essential to understanding the overall political philosophy of *The Federalist*. This dynamic, which appears to take place along distinctively Machiavellian lines, then informs the discussion between Madison and Hamilton on two other important topics.

First, on the basis of their visions of human nature and their aspirations for the type of republic America ought to be, Madison and Hamilton address the issue of restraint and empowerment. All governments must ensure that individuals and groups have some amount of power to accomplish the goals of the society. Yet, if men are naturally motivated by an unquenchable *libido dominandi*, governments must also employ a system of restraint to prevent the emergence of tyranny. How the American government ought to balance these competing necessities of restraint and empowerment is a central theme of *The Federalist*, and can be powerfully illuminated by Machiavelli.

Second, Madison and Hamilton follow Machiavelli in their deep concern for republican virtue. While certain aspects of man's character in society are unalterable, there are other qualities that may be cultivated or repressed. Depending on what sort of republic one envisions, one will necessarily seek to encourage certain tendencies while inhibiting others. The qualities of character beneficial to the polity constitute republican virtue. Here again, we find the ideas of Madison and Hamilton illuminated by Machiavelli.

This thesis will therefore trace the discussion between Madison and Hamilton first through the broader questions of human nature and the intended character of the American republic. On the basis of that exploration, it will follow the Americans' dialogue through questions of restraint and empowerment and republican virtue.

Although the majority of the secondary literature dealt with in this thesis will be incorporated into the body of the work, there are two issues raised by scholars that need to be addressed in the introduction. If left unanswered, these objections would undermine the very premises of the thesis.

Paul Rahe argues in *Republics Ancient and Modern* that "*The Federalist* is less a treatise in political philosophy composed for the ages than a work of political rhetoric aimed at a particular audience."² If Rahe's characterization is correct, any attempt to extract consistent theoretical doctrines from the *Federalist*—or to use it to illuminate the true thought behind the Constitution— would not only be in vain, but would also be a gross misuse of the document. In fact, Rahe's point does have some limited validity; *The Federalist* was indeed written during a period of intense debate over the Constitution's

² Ibid., 573.

ratification, and certainly the authors sought to persuade the public to support Constitution. However, Rahe himself furnishes perhaps the best piece of evidence to suggest that *The Federalist* was always more than simply political rhetoric. Rahe quotes James Madison, writing long after the ratification controversy had ended: “the ‘Federalist’ may fairly enough be regarded as the most authentic exposition of the text of the federal Constitution, as understood by the Body which prepared and the Authority which accepted it.”³ Such a claim by one of the chief authors of *The Federalist* would seem to support our method of approaching it.

Furthermore, as one simply reads *The Federalist*, one finds by empirical observation that the work includes much that is typical of any other work of political theory: arguments about the nature of man, the relationship of the individual to the state, the proper internal organization of the state, the ends of political society, the role of foreign policy, and the authors’ engagement with the ideas of other political theorists.⁴ Thus, it appears fully justifiable to approach *The Federalist* in the manner of this paper and to read it as a work of political theory.

The second major objection to the premises of this paper is best articulated by Luigi Bassani. Bassani argues that at the time of the American founding, “Machiavelli was not influential on American political thought.”⁵ Bassani cites the fact that the

³ Ibid., 680

⁴ In addition, we find scholarly precedent for treating *The Federalist* as a work of political philosophy in Pocock’s *Machiavellian Moment*, and Stourzh’s *Alexander Hamilton and the idea of Republican Government*.

⁵ Luigi Bassani, “Machiavelli and Revolutionary America: Beyond the Republican Paradigm,” in *Anglo-American Faces of Machiavelli*, ed. Alessandro Arienzo and Gianfranco Borrelli (Rome: Polimetric Publisher, 2009), 401.

members of the founding generation rarely mentioned Machiavelli in their public writings.⁶ But, Bassani fails even to mention the possibility that, like previous and subsequent generations, the founders recognized that Machiavelli's thought was disreputable in public discourse, and that acknowledging a debt to the Florentine could well discredit one's own argument. This line of reasoning would certainly account for Madison's and Hamilton's reticence to discuss Machiavelli by name. Furthermore, J.G.A. Pocock's seminal work, *Machiavellian Moment*, makes a powerful case that the Revolutionary generation, far from being insulated from Machiavelli, was in fact "anchored in that Aristotelian and Machiavellian tradition."⁷ He identifies "Machiavellian assumptions" as a central part of the dominant discourse of the Founding Fathers.

Paul Rahe, Gerald Stourzh, and others provide copious (albeit, often circumstantial) evidence of Machiavelli's influence on the founders—Madison and Hamilton in particular.⁸ Again, one can look to the text of *The Federalist* itself for support, and one finds there a multitude of examples that strongly suggest that Madison and Hamilton both dealt substantively with Machiavelli's arguments and ideas. However, as discussed above, evidence that Machiavelli had a strong influence on the Madison and Hamilton is merely useful in our peculiar method of approaching *The Federalist*. It is not

⁶ Ibid., 387.

⁷ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 506.

⁸ John Harper, in *American Machiavelli*, also offers an intriguing bit of evidence to support Machiavelli's influence on Hamilton. In 1798, Hamilton wrote another series of public arguments under the pseudonym of Titus Manlius. Plutarch, Hamilton's 'usual source' does not tell the story of Titus Manlius. Machiavelli is perhaps the most prominent available source who does. This fact alone proves nothing, but is intriguingly suggestive of a closer tie between Hamilton and the Florentine.

essential to our project to establish that, on any given point, Madison or Hamilton writes under the direct or indirect influence of Machiavelli. Rather, if we find Machiavellian dynamics expressing themselves in the thought of the Americans, that alone is sufficient cause for us to turn to him for enlightenment and elucidation.

This paper will chiefly appeal to the primary texts—*The Federalist* and Machiavelli's two major works: *The Prince* and *The Discourses*— to address the four themes outlined above. There is no scholarly work (known to this author) that exclusively explores *The Federalist Papers* in light of Machiavelli, although many scholars have addressed aspects of this topic. Therefore this paper will integrate evidence and arguments from such secondary literature at the relevant points in the body of this work.

II: Human Nature (Pt. I: general humanity)

The precise character of human nature is necessarily a central concern for Machiavelli. Indeed, in a significant way, one might consider it the basis of his entire politics. He insists that in all cases, one should disregard “imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen before or known to exist in truth,” and instead consider not how men ought to live, but how they do live.⁹ One might well consider the following passage from *Federalist No. 32* an Americanized paraphrasing of that foundational point of *The Prince*, which distinguishes “men who hope to see the *halcyon scenes of the poetic or fabulous age realized in America*” from “those who believe we are likely to experience a common portion of the vicissitudes and calamities which have fallen to the lot of other nations ... such men *must behold the actual situation of their country.*”¹⁰ It seems that Hamilton and Madison, too, are concerned with the “effectual truth of the thing.”¹¹

While neither Hamilton nor Madison devotes any of his papers wholly and explicitly to human nature, they too seem to recognize that any practicable proposed constitution must first take human nature into account. As Madison puts it, “what is

⁹ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 61.

¹⁰ Robert Ferguson, ed., *The Federalist* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2006), 163. Emphasis mine. Future citations of *The Federalist* will consist of “*Federalist*” followed by letter number and page number.

¹¹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 61.

government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?”¹² Therefore, to discover the Federalists’ vision of human nature, it is appropriate to seek it in their plan of government.

In the very first *Paper*, Hamilton describes the common qualities of human nature: “ambition, avarice, personal animosity, party opposition, and many other motives, not more laudable than these.”¹³ This matches neatly with Machiavelli’s arresting claim that men are “ungrateful, fickle, pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain... men are wicked.”¹⁴ In Madison’s first paper, he also sees fit to discuss “the nature of man.”¹⁵ Madison concurs with Hamilton and Machiavelli that men are prone to “faction...ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power...passions, mutual animosity, much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good.”¹⁶

Madison and Hamilton both go on to flesh out their generally pessimistic view of human nature. For Madison, men are not angels, nor can they hope to be governed by angels. One cannot expect reason or love of country and fellow men to trump passion and interest. In short, humanity as a whole may be characterized by a thorough “defect of better motives.”¹⁷ Madison also sees the *libido dominandi* at work in the political sphere.

12 *Federalist 51*, 288.

13 *Federalist 1*, 10.

14 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 66.

15 *Federalist 10*, 53.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Federalist 51*, 289.

According to Madison, those who possess power desire to acquire more: “it will not be denied, that power is of an encroaching nature.”¹⁸

According to Hamilton, “men are ambitious, vindictive and rapacious.”¹⁹ Machiavelli’s men are also vindictive and rapacious, ever eager to take revenge for injuries suffered at the hands of another. Hamilton posits that certain qualities, which may not always characterize men as individuals, emerge when men coalesce into groups: “love of power, or the desire for pre-eminence and dominion... the jealousy of power, or the desire of equality and safety.”²⁰ Although it only has the opportunity to manifest itself when man is in society, this love of power is natural, inextricably part of “the constitution of man.”²¹ Moreover, since neither Madison nor Hamilton considers pre-social man, the qualities that universally emerge in society are, for their practical purposes, equivalent to “nature.”

Thus far, Hamilton has not strayed significantly either from Madison or from Machiavelli. He does however, ascribe to social man one important characteristic that cannot be found in either Machiavelli or the *Papers* written by Madison: a commercial drive. Although it is far more tenuously a part of pure human nature, Hamilton suggests that (by his time) the commercial motive has become as strong a force on man’s character as the *libido dominandi* when he asks rhetorically: “Is not the love of wealth as domineering and enterprising a passion as that of power or glory?”²²

¹⁸ *Federalist 48*, 275.

¹⁹ *Federalist 6*, 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Federalist 15*, 84.

²² *Ibid.*

One may well take Hamilton's vision of man's commercial instinct to be a significant departure from Machiavelli, and in a certain sense it is. Machiavelli devotes little attention to the commercial motive in both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. The role of commerce in Hamilton's vision of American virtue will be explored at length in Chapter III of this thesis. It is worth noting here, however, that in contrast to many advocates of commercialism, Hamilton does not believe that commerce moderates men's mores, making them more peace-loving and less concerned with politics and war. Indeed, Hamilton attacks such suggestions, deriding those:

who stand ready to advocate the paradox of perpetual peace between the states, though dismembered and alienated from each other...the genius of republics, they say, is pacific; the spirit of commerce has a tendency to soften the manners of men, and to extinguish those inflammable humours which have so often kindled into wars. Commercial republics, like ours, will never be disposed to waste themselves in ruinous contentions... they will be governed by mutual interest... a spirit of mutual amity and accord"²³

To these dreamers, Hamilton counters: "Has commerce hitherto done any thing more than change the objects of war?... Have there not been as many wars founded upon commercial motives... as were before occasioned by cupidity of territory or dominion?"²⁴ Thus, if anything, Hamilton's insertion of the commercial instinct into his conception of

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

human nature complements—perhaps even intensifies—those rapacious, aggressive qualities that form the core of the Machiavellian understanding.

II: Human Nature (Pt. 2: the two humors)²⁵

Although Madison and Hamilton do agree that mankind is characterized by certain general (and generally unflattering) traits, like Machiavelli they also perceive in society a divide between ‘the few’ and ‘the many’ (or, the great and the people). According to Machiavelli, every society consists of “two diverse humours.” The few great desire to command and oppress the people, while the multitude seek not to be oppressed by the great.²⁶ The struggle between these two forces drives and shapes politics in every regime. For Madison and Hamilton, their conceptions of this fundamental dichotomy overlap significantly with each other and with Machiavelli, yet they also evince certain subtle, yet significant, differences.

Gary Rosen persuasively avers that Madison’s distinction between the people and the great bespeaks a strong connection between the Virginian and the Florentine:

²⁵ As with the previous section, there is some justification for objection to calling the topic “human nature.” However, as we proceed, we find that one’s placement among either the many or the great is contingent on innate qualities and not (to any significant degree) circumstance. Therefore, while neither of the two humors constitutes the universal human nature, each expresses the indelible nature of the two human types. For this reason, we tentatively persist in including it under the title of ‘human nature.’

²⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 39.

Like Machiavelli, and unlike the Anglo-American social compact tradition as a whole, Madison discerns a fundamental divide among human beings, one with far-reaching implications for political life. For Madison, it is not enough to say that human beings are equal by right, with none enjoying a natural title to rule. This familiar doctrine provides a necessary moral standard, but it fails to make the all-important practical distinction between the few and the many, the great and the common.²⁷

Whereas one may plausibly argue that much of Machiavelli's intellectual influence on Madison was of an indirect nature—modified and filtered by such Machiavelli students as Sidney and Montesquieu—this facet of Madison's thought strongly suggests more direct influence. As Rosen notes, the distinction between the great and the many is largely absent from the thinkers from whom Madison would have indirectly received Machiavellian concepts (such as Montesquieu or Harrington). Therefore, that this distinction enjoys such a prominent place in Madison's own thought points to an unfiltered, direct influence of Machiavelli on Madison. Thus, although our project does not require proof of such influence, this implication of it lends weight to the analysis.

Madison brings up the great-many division in his first paper—although he wisely defers to the egalitarian sensibilities of his audience by not posing the issue quite as starkly as Machiavelli. He points to “the diversity in the faculties of men” as the fundamental source of inequality.²⁸ As the term “faculty” suggests a natural, or innate

²⁷ Gary Rosen, “James Madison's Princes and Peoples,” in *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, ed. Paul Rahe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 230-231.

²⁸ *Federalist 10*, 53.

quality, it seems that Madison is suggesting that this core difference between people is one of nature, not of context and upbringing. As Madison continues, the ‘faculties’ that produce the greatest difference among men are those that pertain to rationality. Those who are more intelligent, wiser, and more resistant to whims and flights of passion form this natural, informal aristocracy.²⁹ This division between the great and the people is in their respective natures, emerging from inherent and inalterable inequalities of ability, not from artificial distinctions bred by society.³⁰

The people—the many—are inherently fickle, ignorant, and self-interested in a narrow sense. Because of this, they cannot be trusted to govern themselves in a direct democracy: “a pure democracy...can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction... Hence it is, that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention... as short in their lives, as they have been violent in their deaths.”³¹ Of more immediate concern to the Virginian, the people are also naturally incompetent to found a regime for themselves. According to Madison, the Constitutional Convention was only able to take place because the immanent danger of public calamity had stifled the people’s usual unruliness and led them to place ‘enthusiastic confidence ... in their patriotic leaders.’³² This vision of the vital importance of fear for a founding strongly echoes Machiavelli. Similarly, Machiavelli expresses quite clearly the inability of the

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 56.

32 *Federalist 49*, 281.

people to found a regime for themselves: “for the many are not capable of ordering a thing because they do not know its good.”³³

But if Madison follows Machiavelli in viewing the fundamental weaknesses and incompetencies of the people for self-government and self-founding, he also adopts, and perhaps even intensifies Machiavelli’s vision of the useful qualities of the people. Machiavelli says that although the people cannot themselves inaugurate new modes and orders because they do not see the good of the new, “when they have come to know it, they do not agree to abandon it.”³⁴ Thus, for Machiavelli, the people can serve as a conserving, regime-preserving force in a republic, after the founding has taken place. As we will discuss in subsequent chapters, Madison encourages the people in this role.

Madison foresees the people’s inherent conservatism will ultimately gravitate towards a defense of the new constitutional order, once that order has accrued sufficient age and authority: “all governments rest on opinion... the reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone... when the examples which fortify opinion are *ancient*, as well as *numerous*, they are known to have a double effect... the most rational government will not find it a superfluous advantage to have the prejudices of the community on its side.”³⁵

It is important to note, however, that Madison also departs from Machiavelli on one significant quality of the people. As Rosen notes, Machiavelli’s project involves

33 Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 29.

34 Ibid.

35 *Federalist 49*, 281-282.

“divesting the few and the many from the claims of justice that distinguish them.”³⁶

Madison nowise accepts the moral disarmament of the people in an ultimate sense. The people are unwise, irrational, prone to passion and faction; and prudence thus dictates that they not be entrusted with the too much control of the reigns of their own government. But, Madison’s vision of the people’s involvement in consenting to and upholding the new regime goes beyond the utility to the state of having the people’s support. None of people’s many foibles and faults divests them from their ultimate right and sovereignty: “the people are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter, under which the several branches of government hold their power, is derived.”³⁷

Still, because of the people’s unfitness to govern themselves directly, they are in desperate need of governance by their betters. Representative government must cultivate and attract these superior natures: “a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice, will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations.”³⁸ These men differ from men of “inferior capacities”³⁹ in their ability to reconcile internal disagreements, to direct foreign policy, and generally to steer the ship of state prudently away from the shoals. At their best, they are “enlightened statesmen (who seek) to adjust clashing interests, and render them all subservient to the public good.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Rosen, “Madison’s Princes and Peoples,” 231.

³⁷ *Federalist 49*, 280.

³⁸ *Federalist 10*, 56.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ No. 10

Rosen argues that, in viewing the great as possessing such positive and public-spirited qualities, Madison departs drastically from Machiavelli:

The profile he sketched of his princely types, of the few, was quite different from Machiavelli's. They were not amoral seekers of glory and dominion, indifferent to the needs and claims of the many... they represented 'the enlightened and impartial part of America,' those who possessed 'a rational, intelligent, and unbiased mind.'⁴¹

However, upon closer examination it appears that Rosen's conception of both Machiavelli and Madison here is flawed and that latter's departure from the former is less than Rosen suggests. Although Madison believes that the great will certainly exceed the average man in wisdom and *hopes* that they will prove outstanding in patriotism, he does not believe that they are always more moral or trustworthy than their fellow citizens. In short, one cannot *rely* upon the wisdom and pure motives of the great: "it is vain to say, that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests, and render them all subservient to the public good."⁴² Madison acknowledges a fear that those attracted to the Federal Government might be those who "have the least sympathy with the mass of the people; and be the most likely to aim at an ambitious sacrifice of the many, to the aggrandizement of the few."⁴³ In republican government it is essential that "ambition must be made to counteract ambition"⁴⁴—a fault which particularly afflicts the great more

41 Rosen 240

42 *No 10*. P 53-54.

43 *Federalist 57*, 316.

44 *Federalist 51*, 288.

than the mundanely-oriented people.⁴⁵ The great are likewise not immune to the tendency to faction, a characteristic not peculiar to a certain type of individual, but rather “sown in the nature of man, (thus) different leaders, ambitiously contend for pre-eminence and power.”⁴⁶

Therefore, we see that Madison’s great are differentiated from the people fundamentally by their intelligence and ability, not *necessarily* by their morality. Madison’s departure from Machiavelli here lies not so much in his vision of the great generally, but by his faith that some of the great will also be animated by (relatively) unbiased patriotic motives to serve the public good. The benignity of the great is not a given for Madison any more than for Machiavelli; but for Madison, the malicious ambition of the great is also not a given, as at times it seems to be in Machiavelli. Herein, then, is the essence of Madison’s departure: he holds out a vision for more diversity of types within the category of the great—some are aspiring tyrants, but others may truly be ‘enlightened statesmen.’

Hamilton, too, envisions a great divide between the many and the few. Like Madison, Hamilton’s chief criteria for distinguishing between the two humors are “ability” and “enlightenment,”⁴⁷ a position that leaves it ambiguous as to whether this divide is natural or contextual, as ability might be considered an innate quality, yet

⁴⁵ Madison’s move to embrace ambition and faction as a means of preserving republican liberty is perhaps the most strikingly Machiavellian aspect of his politics and is explored in depth in Chapter IV of this thesis.

⁴⁶ *Federalist 10*, 53.

⁴⁷ *Federalist 70*, 388.

enlightenment clearly must be acquired. In addition, the typical characteristics of Hamilton's two humors differ in some notable instances from those of Madison.

Madison had located the utility and virtue of the people in their conservative tendencies, their natural affinity for the authority of old orders and customs. Hamilton, in contrast, views the people to be nearly as ambitious, tumultuous, and daring as the great. Hamilton asserts that the desire for power and dominion operates on all men as much as the desire for equality or safety.⁴⁸ Far from being cautious, Hamilton's people are quite prone to war, even when conflict is not the wisest course:

there have been... almost as many popular wars as royal wars. The cries of the nation and the importunities of their representatives have, upon various occasions, dragged their monarchs into war, or continued them in it, contrary to their inclinations, and sometimes contrary to the real interests of the state.⁴⁹

Such a vision of the people strongly recalls Machiavelli's assertion that "Many times the people desires its own ruin, deceived by a false appearance of the good."⁵⁰ Hamilton's people are no better suited to deliberate on domestic matters: "popular assemblies (are) frequently subject to the impulses of rage, resentment, jealousy, avarice, and of other irregular and violent propensities."⁵¹ Thus, we see that Hamilton views the people as incapable of direct self-government as Madison does, but for almost opposite reasons.

Although both Federalists view the people as lacking the prudence and ability of the

48 *Federalist 6*, 30.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 105.

51 *Federalist 6*, 30.

great, in Madison, these deficiencies manifest in a kind of parochial conservatism; for Hamilton, they manifest in a tendency to dangerous adventurism and upheaval.

Hamilton's need, then, for some other class of men, better equipped for governing is perhaps even greater than Madison's. If one can say that Hamilton envisions the people having a more 'intense' nature than does Madison, the same must be said of Hamilton's great. Whereas Madison writes vaguely of the potential virtues and vices of the great, often using generalities and abstract reasoning, Hamilton's discussion is much more striking. Both the blessings and dangers latent in the great types of human beings seem to be of a higher order than those envisioned by Madison.

In the very first *Paper*, Hamilton speaks of the most pressing danger to the American republic: "the perverted ambition of another class of men, who will either hope to aggrandize themselves by the confusions of their country, or will flatter themselves with fairer prospects of elevation."⁵² Not merely the public ambition, but also private motives can move the great to imperil their country.⁵³ Nor does Hamilton rest his cases on reasoning and assertions. He repeatedly appeals to historical examples to illustrate the harm the ambitious great have done:

The celebrated Pericles, in compliance with the resentments of a prostitute, at the expense of much of the blood and treasure of his countrymen, attacked, vanquished and destroyed the city of the *Samnians*. The same man... was the

⁵² *Federalist 1*, 11.

⁵³ "Enmities, interests, hopes and fears of leading individuals... men of this class, whether favorites of a king or of a people, have in too many instances abused the confidence they possessed; and assuming the pretext of some public motive, have not scrupled to sacrifice the national tranquility to personal advantage, or personal gratification."-*Federalist 6*, 30.

primitive author of that famous and fatal war... that terminated in the ruin of the Athenian commonwealth.⁵⁴

We find in Machiavelli similar catalogues of personal flaws of the great that have brought ruin (e.g. the terrible Roman emperors *The Prince*: XIX). It can hardly be denied that Hamilton sees in the great the potential for terrible harm done to the commonwealth. But, one finds that this danger is in some significant sense overshadowed by the tremendous positive possibilities of the great.

The irresponsible, unwise, and unruly qualities of the people might lead Hamilton to rest his hopes on the great as a check to popular passions. Hamilton, however, has far grander ambitions for this type of person. The few have an astounding capacity to accomplish great things.

Just as Hamilton looks to history to provide examples of the danger posed by the great to society, he also finds there proof of their amazing potential. Despite the overwhelming contemporary antipathy to one-man rule, Hamilton dares to cite the ancient Roman dictators as an example of what a boon great men can be for their countries:

Every man, the least conversant in Roman story, knows how often that republic was obliged to take refuge in the absolute power of a single man, under the formidable title of dictator, as well against the intrigues of ambitious individuals, who aspired to the tyranny, and the seditions of whole classes of the community,

⁵⁴ *Federalist 6*, 30. Hamilton here also discusses the damage done by the ambitions of Thomas Wolsey to England and of Madame de Pompadore to France.

whose conduct threatened the existence of all government, as against the invasions of external enemies⁵⁵

One perceives that Hamilton sees in the great the potential saviors, as much as the potential destroyers of the liberty of the state.

Even in times less characterized by upheaval and crisis, Hamilton's great are by nature best suited to bear the ordinary load of governing. They perceive the public good far more clearly than the public itself does.⁵⁶ For instance, Hamilton insists on the central importance of money to the functioning of government: "money is with propriety considered as the vital principle of the body politic; as that which sustains its life and motion, and enables it to perform its most essential functions."⁵⁷ Hamilton posits, however, that the vital and complicated power of raising money is a task for one or a small few capable individuals.⁵⁸

The chief reason for Hamilton's firmer (than Madison's) confidence in the great lies in his trust to their immunity to factionalism. For Hamilton, the American Constitution especially will work to cultivate: "select bodies of men... with peculiar care and judgment... they will be less apt to be tainted by the spirit of faction, and more out of reach of those occasional ill humours, or temporary prejudices and propensities."⁵⁹ Thus, for Hamilton, it seems that the tendency to faction is not quite as 'sown in the nature of

⁵⁵ *Federalist 70*, 387-88.

⁵⁶ *Federalist 71*, 396.

⁵⁷ *Federalist 30*, 159.

⁵⁸ *Federalist 36*, 187-188.

⁵⁹ *Federalist 27*, 146.

man' as it is for Madison. Hamilton's great, in short, are quite capable of rising above petty political wrangling, with the aid of properly constructed institutions and political incentives.

For Hamilton, the great are set apart from the people not only by superior intellect and ability, but also by a peculiar passion: a desire for glory: "the love of fame, the ruling passion of the noblest minds."⁶⁰ This passion motivates and drives the great in their endeavors. It is noteworthy that Hamilton attributes this quality equally to those who have served and those who have harmed their countries—it is the 'ruling passion' of both. It seems that the key factor in determining whether a great individual will be boon or bane of his country is contextual: if the individual perceives that the path to glory lies in the service of the common good, he will apply his considerable abilities to that end; if greater glory can be obtained by subjugating his country, he will be drawn in that direction. Attempting to calibrate this fulcrum to elite behavior will occupy many of Hamilton's *Papers*, as he tries to contrive the proper republican incentives that will entice great individuals to place themselves in the service of their country.

We see from this exploration that Madison and Hamilton share a Machiavellian view of man's moral character, with special emphasis on man's desire for power. In addition, although they may differ on the details, they see political society divided between two types: the few and the many. This understanding of humanity's social characteristics is essential to the rest of Madison's and Hamilton's theories.

⁶⁰ *Federalist* 72, 401.

III: Character of the American Republic

A conception of man's character in society is an issue of the building blocks, the raw material, out of which a state is built. On the basis of this understanding, a founder must decide what kind of state to build from this raw material. Although Madison and Hamilton agree on certain key points of the first question, they differ significantly on the second. That America must be a republic was an almost unquestionable proposition for this generation. But, Madison and Hamilton divide over the precise *sort* of republic America ought to become, especially how America ought to orient itself towards the world. For both men, there is a reciprocal relationship between a republic's domestic arrangement and its behavior internationally. This chapter will explore how Madison conceives of an America turned inward, preserving domestic tranquility and eschewing an active role in world affairs. The chapter will also explore how Hamilton, in contrast, proposes a more aggressive, outward-looking America, a republic that aspires to empire.

Madison's republic is a finely calibrated balance of power. Long-term stability and internal liberty are to be the chief characteristics of this state. Interaction with other

nations must necessarily threaten this stability. Territorial expansion or involvement in the affairs of other nations would tend strongly to upset America's internal balance. Madison therefore does little to illustrate a real plan for America's foreign policy. But, no more than Hamilton does Madison expect America's disinterest in the affairs of other nations to be reciprocated. Therefore, insofar as America must have such a policy, Madison emphasizes defensiveness, the need to protect America from outright conquest and from internal division sown by hostile nations. Madison does not plan out a more detailed foreign policy because America's orientation to the external world is to be almost entirely reactive. As threats emerge, America's leadership will act to meet them, but the driving principle behind all such action is to maintain America's domestic freedom and security.

Hamilton, in contrast, has a more expansive (in both senses) vision of America's foreign policy. Caring less about maintaining a rigid internal order and more about growing a vibrant and powerful republic, Hamilton develops far more clearly a plan for America in the world. Although he eschews discussion of direct military conquest, Hamilton proposes that America cultivate a mighty commercial empire. He advocates for an energetic executive whose adequate power and wide discretion exists at least in part to enable America to grow great through maritime and commercial pursuits. Hamilton acknowledges that this aggressive commercial bent may provoke European nations who may feel their own trade threatened. In fact, Hamilton admits that America's naval trading activity will constitute a genuine danger to established European commerce. For this reason, Hamilton proposes that America maintain a professional army, and—more

importantly—a powerful navy, capable of defending its interests. Although Hamilton initially portrays these two military institutions as essentially defensive, he barely troubles himself to conceal that they are intended to defend what is in truth a very aggressive commercial posture.

This divide between Madison and Hamilton takes place chiefly upon the very same issue Machiavelli uses to distinguish between types of republics. For Machiavelli, successful republics fall into one of two categories: “you are reasoning either about a republic that wishes to make an empire, such as Rome, or about one for whom it is enough to maintain itself (such as) Venice and Sparta.”⁶¹

One type of republic seeks above all longevity and liberty: “those republics that have been free for a long while without such enmities and tumults.”⁶² Machiavelli gives two chief examples of such republics. The first, Venice, like America, benefited from a geography that isolated it somewhat from other major powers. In order to maintain its stability, however, Venice had also to deliberately limit the number of foreigners who could take up residence: “when it appeared to them that there were as many as would be sufficient for a political way of life, they closed to all others who might come newly to inhabit there the way enabling them to join the government.”⁶³ In addition, they never relied on the lower classes to fight wars. By these means, they avoided disrupting the internal balance of power. Sparta too strove to limit the foreign influence and the influx of any great number of new people who might upset its internal order: “they blocked the

⁶¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 18.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

way to those who might come to inhabit it.⁶⁴ Machiavelli notes that “expansion is poison to such republics,” and attributes the destruction of both Sparta and Venice to their eventual attempts to expand. Thus, the sole external orientation of such a republic must be defensive: “it is well ordered for defense (especially) if there were in it a constitution and laws to prohibit it from expanding.”⁶⁵

Rome, in contrast, was tumultuously imbalanced internally. By encouraging immigration and giving the plebs power, Rome unleashed forces that helped carry it to greatness: “without a great number of men, and well armed, a republic can never grow, or, if it grows, maintain itself.”⁶⁶ But, this course carries its own dangers. Such a republic may grow greater, but it will not last (as a republic) as long as the quiescent republics: “if you wish to make a people numerous and armed so as to be able to make a great empire, you make it of such a quality that you cannot then manage it in your mode.”⁶⁷

Both the Americans and the Florentine argue that the *libido dominandi* is a general human trait. Therefore, the choice for states seems to lie in whether one wishes to direct the urge to rule inwardly or outwardly. If directed inwardly, as in Sparta, Venice and Madison’s republic, one balances the ambitions of great men against each other, and hopefully thereby one ensures domestic peace and political liberty. If directed outwardly, as in Rome and Hamilton’s republic, one can grow vigorously and pursue national greatness. But, the nation’s very expansion will strain its internal organization and

64 Ibid., 21.

65 Ibid., 21-22.

66 Ibid., p 22.

67 Ibid.

institutions, jeopardizing its constitution, and pushing it towards one-man rule. Now, although Machiavelli takes pains to accurately detail the qualities of both kinds of republic, he nevertheless chooses one: “since all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady, they must either rise or fall... since one cannot, as I believe, balance this thing [the Spartan model]... I believe it is necessary to follow the Roman order.”⁶⁸ Ultimately, neither sort of republic can hope to last forever, and the restless ambition of men makes the hope of an eternally-balanced republic nigh impossible. Therefore, Machiavelli advocates expansion.

Although only one of them concurs with Machiavelli’s conclusion, we see that both Americans seem to organize their republics on either side of the choice Machiavelli offers. Madison does not seem to agree with Machiavelli about the futility of his task. He seeks to balance the ambitions of men against each other in such a way as to provide enduring liberty and stability. Hamilton, on the other, chooses a modified version of the Roman model.⁶⁹ Hamilton’s republicanism already contains in it a vision of a strong executive. This executive power, though perhaps contrary to ‘pure’ republicanism (certainly of the sort proposed by the Anti-Federalists) might allow the republic to preserve its constitutional order even as it grows exponentially in wealth, power, and size, since the impetus towards concentrating power in a single man would be anticipated and channeled within the constitutional framework. Pocock sums up Hamilton’s position of

68 Ibid, p. 23.

69¹ As will be discussed in Chapter V, Hamilton’s appreciation for commerce places him in a certain sense at odds with the Florentine. Hamilton continues to propose that America’s expansion be primarily of the commercial variety. This differs from Rome’s more purely military expansion.

the conflict between liberty and expansion: “Could America be republic and empire at the same time? Hamilton did not answer these questions in the negative.”⁷⁰

While he knows that a government that disarms itself completely is at the mercy of foreign powers, Madison accepts Machiavelli’s teaching that Rome’s military success ultimately destroyed its republican liberty: “the liberties of Rome proved the final victim to her military triumphs.”⁷¹ Madison therefore proposes granting the government the ability to raise small armies, but recommends keeping them quite small, large enough for the purposes of defense but certainly of no real offensive value: “a standing force, therefore is a dangerous, at the same time that it may be a necessary, provision. On the smallest scale, it has its inconveniences. On an extensive scale, its consequences may be fatal.”⁷²

All of Madison’s foreign policy prescriptions are defensive or preventative in nature. He fears the prospect that a weak or divided America might find itself the plaything of the European great powers, and become “instruments of foreign ambition, jealousy, and revenge.”⁷³ America’s government must prove stable enough to show a united front to those European powers, to prevent them from being able to play the American states off of one another: “America united, with a handful of troops, or without a single soldier, exhibits a more forbidding posture to foreign ambition, than America

⁷⁰ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 531.

⁷¹ *Federalist 41*, 226.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 227.

disunited, with a hundred thousand veterans ready for combat.”⁷⁴ Madison’s tolerance for an America even without “a single soldier,” should be indicative enough that Madison in no way envisions an expansionist foreign policy for the country. Rahe notes that this position is based at least in part on Madison’s faith that America’s geographic location reduces the probability that the imperative for national survival will come into conflict with a just and free domestic order: “In *The Federalist*, Madison only hints at the tension between justice and the public good. He can pass over the matter quickly because of the protection afforded Britain’s former colonies by their relative isolation.”⁷⁵

Madison says relatively little else about his vision of American foreign policy. Since he does not plan for a program of expansion, he needs only to sketch loosely the outlines of a defensive and reactive policy. The political leaders of a given time must rise to the exigencies of their particular situation and fend off threats. Madison trusts the Senate, as a body of great men, to provide the necessary prudence to anticipate and defeat any menace: “history informs us of no long lived republic which had not a Senate.”⁷⁶ For this reason, the Senate—and not the more popular House of Representatives—is to be the Congressional body most involved with foreign policy, e.g. in the ratification of treaties. The superior prudence that Madison identifies with the great individuals likely to compose the Senate is the most valuable quality for guiding foreign policy.

74 Ibid., 226.

75 Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 615.

76 *Federalist* 63, 350.

We see then, that Madison's vision of foreign policy, such as it is, cleaves quite closely to Machiavelli's outline of the Spartan/Venetian model.⁷⁷ Foreign policy consists almost exclusively of dangers to a state that seeks above all else to preserve its domestic institutions. Expansion must be avoided at all costs. This results in a foreign policy proposal that is bereft of initiative or national ambition. The government's attitude must be to manage external threats prudently and to prevent them from interfering with the happy but delicate domestic order.

In contrast to the scarcity in Madison's papers, Hamilton's papers abound with his proposals for America's foreign policy. Hamilton does not share Madison's bare-bones, approach to laying out a foreign policy for the future. Instead, Hamilton sets forth specific proposals for a foreign policy that substantially exceeds Madison's reactivity. Whereas Madison's focus lies in the domestic sphere and usually relates questions of foreign policy to their impact internally, Hamilton's orientation might be seen as the reverse. Hamilton's discussion of domestic arrangements often takes its bearings from how such arrangements might affect America's standing in the world.

Hamilton concurs with Machiavelli that republics are no less disposed towards war than their monarchical counterparts, nor are they less capable of waging it. "Sparta, Athens, Rome and Carthage, were all republics; two of them, Athens and Carthage, of the commercial kind. Yet were they as often engaged in wars, offensive and defensive, as the neighboring monarchies of the same times. Sparta was little better than a well regulated

⁷⁷ Even though Machiavelli ultimately rejects this model, he himself elevates it to be the counterpart to his preferred model. While Machiavelli does not favor it, he clearly considers it a viable choice.

camp; and Rome was never sated of carnage and conquest.”⁷⁸ Hamilton avoids any suggestion that America might prove an exception to this rule.

Hamilton shares Madison’s immediate fears that a weak and weakly united America might suffer the manipulation and machinations of European powers: “[America] would be a prey to the wanton intermeddlings of all nations at war with each other; who, having nothing to fear from us, would, with little scruple or remorse, supply their wants by depredations on our property.”⁷⁹

But, Hamilton diverges from Madison in seeking not only security from such “depredations,” but in looking forward to the day when a united America might turn the tables on the divided Europeans: “a price would be set not only upon our friendship, but upon our neutrality. By a steady adherence to the union, we may hope, ere long, to become the arbiter of Europe in America; and to be able to incline the balance of European competitions in this part of the world, as our interest may dictate.”⁸⁰ Indeed, Hamilton goes so far as to say that America’s power might expand beyond parity with Europe to dominance: “Let the Thirteen States, bound together in a strict and indissoluble union, concur in erecting one great American system, superior to the control of all transatlantic force or influence, and able to dictate the terms of the connexion between the old and the new world!”⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Federalist 6*, 32.

⁷⁹ *Federalist 11*, 61.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

Hamilton's strongly insists that national power is heavily dependent on national prosperity: "money is the vital principle of the body politic; as that which sustains its life and motion" without which "government must sink into a fatal atrophy, and in a short course of time perish."⁸² As we will explore more full in subsequent chapters, Hamilton also sees the United States as having a competitive advantage in realm of commercial trading. He proposes that America exploit that advantage to replace European traders and to carry on "an ACTIVE COMMERCE in our own bottoms."⁸³

Although it does not necessarily entail military conquest, Hamilton knows that such a development in American commerce would be—and would be perceived by European powers as— an aggressive move: America "has already excited uneasy sensations in several of the maritime powers of Europe. They... look forward, with painful solicitude to what this country is capable of becoming. They foresee the dangers that may threaten their American dominions."⁸⁴ Therefore, the European powers, by impeding American commerce, attempt a "clipping of the wings on which we might soar to a dangerous greatness."⁸⁵ For this reason, Hamilton advocates a "powerful marine," to defend American maritime commerce.⁸⁶

But, in addition, Hamilton proposes aggressive trade policies that will further diminish the power of Europeans in favor of the United States. No proponent of free

82 *Federalist 30*, 159.

83 *Federalist 11*, 59.

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*

trade, Hamilton advocates a mercantilist approach that treats commerce as an instrument of foreign policy: “by prohibitory regulations, extending at the same time throughout the states, we may oblige foreign countries to bid against each other for the privileges of our markets.”⁸⁷ Only a strong central government of the type devised in the Constitution would be able to enforce such prohibitions on trade. But, if America had such a government, the benefits would be great: “suppose for instance, we had a government in America, capable of excluding Great Britain... from all our ports ... Would it not enable us to negotiate, with the fairest prospect of success, for commercial privileges of the most valuable and extensive kind?”⁸⁸

The ability to carry out trade policies so difficult to enforce and to raise an army and navy necessary to defend American commerce requires a powerful central government. Indeed, the infinite dangers and possibilities of the anarchic international system requires that the central government have unlimited powers to meet any eventuality: “to raise armies; to build and equip fleets... these powers ought to exist without limitation; because it is impossible to foresee or to define the extent and variety of national exigencies, and the correspondent extent and variety of the means which may be necessary to satisfy them.”⁸⁹ Hamilton shows by this that he has learned what Machiavelli taught: that no one can foresee all of the events that will take place

87 *Ibid.*, 59-60.

88 *Ibid.*, 60.

89 *Federalist* 32, 125.

throughout the history of a state, and for that reason, great men of each new generation require the authority and power to undertake “new acts of foresight.”⁹⁰

The office of the presidency serves to give an individual just such power. Machiavelli had argued that in the archetypal expansionist republic, Rome, military success eventually pushed the Romans to abandon their constitution.⁹¹ Hamilton, too, notes that free peoples can buckle under perceived danger and tumult to abandon their freedom to those who promise to protect them: “the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty, to resort for repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights.”⁹² Under extreme conditions, the fear of hostile enemies overrides all other national priorities: “safety from external danger, is the most powerful director of national conduct. Even the ardent love of liberty will, after a time, give way to its dictates.”⁹³ The almost inexorable impetus to consolidate power in a single individual can be ameliorated by partially accommodating it. Although Hamilton openly admires the Roman dictatorship, the absolute rule of a single man runs afoul of republican sensibilities.

The American president, while not omnipotent, does enjoy wide powers and discretion in dealing with foreign policy issues. For Hamilton, the presidency reconciles the absolute necessity of a powerful executive with the republican aversion to unchecked

⁹⁰ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 308.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁹² *Federalist* 8, 42.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

power: “the ingredients which constituted energy in the executive are, unity; duration; an adequate provision for its support; competent powers. The ingredients which constituted safety in the republican sense are, a due dependence on the people; a due responsibility.”⁹⁴ The office of the president, with its ability to make treaties and command the military, is still bound by frequent elections to the people, and depends on Congress for money and declarations of war.⁹⁵

But, also like Machiavelli, Hamilton recognizes that such considerations as the composition of the executive are not the only factors which enable a republic to expand. Machiavelli had argued that Rome’s growth depended upon the people: they “gave the plebs strength and increase and infinite opportunities for tumult. But if the Roman state had come to be quieter... it would also have been weaker because it cut off the way by which it could have come to the greatness it achieved.”⁹⁶ Hamilton, too seeks to build America’s “dangerous greatness” on the firm foundation of the people: “the fabric of American empire must rest on the solid basis of the consent of the people. The streams of national power ought to flow from that pure original fountain.”⁹⁷ Not only does Hamilton here affirm with Machiavelli the dependence on the people as the source of national power, but he also uses the term “American empire,” a phrase never once used by Madison. This passage leaves little doubt that Hamilton’s vision of the American republic

⁹⁴ *Federalist 70*, 390.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 21.

⁹⁷ *Federalist 22*, 124-125.

is deeply bound to a vision of expansion, although Hamilton leaves it ambiguous whether this expansion would entail territorial conquest or simple commercial domination.

Gerald Stourzh also sees in Hamilton a self-conscious hope for an American empire. He describes Hamilton's plan as guiding "the United States through her period of present infancy to future strength and greatness."⁹⁸ Thus, Hamilton's foreign policy proposals come in two categories. For the immediate future, Hamilton's position is hardly distinguishable from Madison's, but for different reasons. Madison's defensiveness is rooted in the essence of his foreign policy, whereas Hamilton's defensiveness is only a response to America's youthful weakness. Hamilton's long-term plans call for, as Stourzh puts it: "America to dictate to Europe the terms of connection between the old and the new world, there was clearly the implication of a global balance of power in which America would gain a safe preponderance."⁹⁹ Pocock writes about this imperial vision, saying that: "Hamilton's empire was thus a challenge to Madison's federalism... and drew more drastically Machiavellian conclusions."¹⁰⁰ Whereas Madison learned from Machiavelli about the necessity to balance internal power and avoid external expansion if one is to build a quiescent republic, Hamilton goes further in accepting Machiavelli's position that such a republic is unrealistic, and perhaps even undesirable in comparison with a vigorous, expansionist republic.

⁹⁸ Gerald Stourzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 198.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰⁰ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 531.

In either case, we discern in Hamilton a vision of America's long-term foreign policy that favors aggression, activity and expansion. Whereas Madison's proposals sought to preserve liberty and security, Hamilton sees greatness and power as worthy national goals. To Madison's Spartan model of republican foreign policy, Hamilton opposes the model favored by the Romans and Machiavelli himself. Moreover, when we examine the opinions of both Americans on the appropriate internal organization of the state, we see—as in Machiavelli—that domestic institutions and foreign policy influence each other. To Madison's and Hamilton's credit, each manages to harmonize his domestic arrangements with his foreign policy vision. However, it is also clear that the foreign policies of each do not wholly harmonize with the other. A state cannot simultaneously avoid expansion and seek to build an "American empire." The concerns of domestic liberty and security must occasionally conflict with the desire to "soar to a dangerous greatness."

IV: Restraint and Empowerment

In his discussion of republics, Machiavelli has much to say about the importance of restraint and empowerment. Republics must necessarily empower certain individuals (and even whole classes) if they wish to accomplish anything. Yet, the nature of man's *libido dominandi* is such that, without restraints, tyranny will emerge. Therefore, a founder must make a careful judgment about the ordering of a republic to ensure that it possesses the necessary strength to survive and thrive, while not allowing any element of

the society to accumulate too much power. Thus, a republic's life is characterized by the interplay of the desire to preserve its life with the desire to preserve its liberty.

Fittingly then, Machiavelli addresses early in Book I of the *Discourses* the issue of "Where the Guard of Freedom May Be Settled More Securely, in the People or in the Great."¹⁰¹ It is a question of which of the social orders must be empowered to restrain those who might ascend to the tyranny of the polity. Machiavelli answers that the issue depends on what sort of republic one aspires to create. If the republic lacks imperial and ambition and seeks only to preserve itself, one ought to entrust its liberty to the safekeeping of the great. If, on the other hand, the republic aspires to conquest, it ought to leave the guardianship to the people. We might expect that Madison's and Hamilton's views on this subject would track with their different hopes for the sort of republic America is to become.

In either case, institutional checks to both the great and the people are essential for the longevity of a republic: "the states of princes have lasted very long, the states of republics have lasted very long, and both have had need of being regulated by the laws."¹⁰² Machiavelli argues that if the great are not restrained by laws, they will ravage the people, and if the people are unrestrained, "in the midst of such confusion, a tyrant can arise."¹⁰³ The restraint of the people by laws ought to be augmented by the prudent

¹⁰¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 17.

¹⁰² Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 118.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

and benign leadership of some of the great: “a tumultuous people can be spoken to by a good man, and it can easily be returned to the good way.”¹⁰⁴

However, Machiavelli recognizes that institutional restraints may prove insufficient to keep potential usurpers among the great in check. Machiavelli recommends encouraging the mutual suspicion of the great against one another. The particular ambition of various ‘great’ individuals would lead them to watch jealously for any sign that one of their peers might be acquiring too much power.¹⁰⁵

However, in addition to requiring special restraints, the great also need to be provided with special powers, if the republic is to survive and thrive. For one thing, certain functions of government can only be effectively carried out under the undisputed leadership of a single individual. Machiavelli points to the military as such a case: “one recognizes the uselessness of many commanders in an army or in a town that has to be defended.”¹⁰⁶ Speaking more broadly, Machiavelli cites Livy: “it is most healthy in the administration of great things that the summit of command be with one individual.”¹⁰⁷

More importantly, Machiavelli proposes leaving the great wide discretion in certain areas because the future is always uncertain, and republics will always stand in need of men with uncommon foresight and ability to guide them prudently. Machiavelli concludes his discourses with a chapter entitled: “A Republic Has Need of New Acts of Foresight Every Day If One Wishes to Maintain It Free; and for What Merits Quintus

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 104.

106 Ibid., 253.

107 Ibid.

Fabius Was Called Maximus.” Since even the wisest founder cannot anticipate every eventuality, one cannot place all of one’s trust in laws and ordinary institutions. At times, one will have to rely on outstanding individuals (such as Quintus Fabius) to rise to the challenge of their times. For this reason, Machiavelli approves of the Roman concept of incorporating an extraordinary institution into the constitution, which drastically empowers individuals in times of crisis to defend the state:

Truly, among other Roman orders, this [the dictatorship] is one that deserves to be considered and numbered among those that were the cause of the greatness of so great an empire, for without such an order cities escape from extraordinary accidents with difficulty. Because the customary orders in republics have a slow motion...their remedies are very dangerous when they have to remedy a thing that time does not wait for. So republics should have a like mode among their orders...¹⁰⁸

Turning to Madison and Hamilton, we see that their visions of the appropriate balance between restraint and empowerment follows naturally from their understandings of the different human types and of the sort of republic they hope to construct. Since both of those understandings take place on Machiavellian terms, it is hardly surprising that their discussion of restraint and empowerment should do likewise.

Reading *The Federalist* superficially, one might conclude that James Madison give roughly equal weight to the demands of restraint and empowerment. Madison certainly devotes copious pages to the importance of giving the different branches of the

108 Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 74.

proposed government sufficient power and authority. Yet, throughout such sections, Madison's focus remains almost exclusively upon organizing these powers so that they may check and restrain each other. In other words, for Madison, the task of empowering any individual or group is in chiefly in service of restraining some other group or individual. Such a position fits well with Madison's pessimistic view of human nature. If man's nature is such that—whether through ignorance or malice—he is a chronic danger to himself and his fellows, then it follows that the primary task of good government is the restraint of man.

But, in its single-minded focus on constructing an elaborate system of fetters, Madison's vision drastically circumscribes the role of the statesman to embark America upon any positive project. Madison's proposed republic cleaves much more closely to the Spartan model, with few aspirations (if any) beyond the preservation of itself and its liberty. In this vision, the statesman is a kind of caretaker, a prudent guide of the public welfare, who serves as one of the many checks against the omnipresent danger of tyranny. Even in extreme circumstances, the statesman's role is purely reactive; his discretion extends only so far as is needed to preserve the republic against external enemies or to restore internally the balance power that maintains domestic peace and liberty.

Madison poses the entire project of constructing a government as a question of restraint: "In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."¹⁰⁹ The issue of good government is

¹⁰⁹ *Federalist 51*, 288.

reducible to properly organized *control*. It is noteworthy that the first responsibility of the law-giving founder is to ensure that the government is able to control the people. It is similarly noteworthy that Madison's axiom is not symmetric: the second responsibility of the law-giver is not to ensure that the people can in turn control the government, but that the government be organized so as to control itself.

Such a position seems to be at odds with other statements made by the Virginian, even within the same *Paper*. He writes that: "a dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government, but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions."¹¹⁰ One is then led to wonder whether the internal structure of the government or the people themselves are Madison's true "security against a gradual concentration of the several powers."¹¹¹ Madison's murky ambivalence becomes clearer when one examines his statements in their entirety. Madison devotes far more—in terms of pages and emphasis—to 'auxiliary precautions' than to a reliance on the people. The quotation cited above is part of Madison's most comprehensive discussion of the system of 'checks and balances.' Far from relying in practice on the government's dependence on the people, Madison focuses on "the policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives."¹¹² Madison appears completely to abandon that which he considers "primary" (reliance on the people) in favor of what is merely "auxiliary" (institutional counter-balancing).

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

This puzzle casts doubt on the candor of Madison's earlier prioritization and demands some sort of resolution. Madison never recants his position of the ultimate sovereignty of the people: "the people are the only legitimate fountain of power."¹¹³ But, while Madison concedes the supremacy of the people *in principle*, he posits that such a principle cannot guide policy *in practice*:

were this principle rigorously adhered to, it would require that all the appointments for the supreme executive, legislative, and judiciary magistracies, should be drawn from the same fountain of authority, the people...Some difficulties, however, and some additional expense, would attend the execution of it. Some deviations, therefore, from the principle must be admitted."¹¹⁴

Madison here attempts a synthesis. While maintaining his position about the rights of the people, he cannot blind himself to 'effectual truth of the thing:' that the people cannot be relied upon to preserve their own liberty.

As a result, Madison recognizes the moral supremacy of the people *de jure*, he does not give them corresponding responsibility in his organization of the government's powers. In other words, because entrusting the liberty and safety of the commonwealth to the people is a practical folly, Madison denies them a role in governing concomitant to the authority they possess by right.

So, Madison recognizes that forces more reliable than the people need to be found to maintain the equilibrium of restraint that preserves liberty. Madison proposes to build his restraints upon the firm foundation of those very moral failings that so threaten

113 *Federalist 49*, 280.

114 *Federalist 51*, 288.

liberty's fragile balance. Man's freedom and security shall rest upon his most reliable features: his flaws.

In his first *Paper*, Madison unveils one such mechanism to harness man's moral weakness for public benefit. As we have already noted, Madison perceives that: "the latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man."¹¹⁵ Faction can be devastating to a political community: "governments are too unstable; that the public good is disregarded in conflicts of rival parties; that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice, and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior forces of an interested and overbearing majority."¹¹⁶ Yet the most obvious solution to the problem of faction—eliminating the political liberty without which it cannot exist—would be to sacrifice the very object Madison is trying to secure: "It could never be more truly said, than of the first remedy [eliminating liberty], that it is worse than the disease. Liberty is to faction, what air is to fire... But it could not be a less folly to abolish political liberty, than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life."¹¹⁷

Madison proposes instead to modify and multiply—not eliminate—factious spirits, thereby turning them from a threat to a safeguard of liberty. Against minority factions, the ordinary functioning of elective government ought to be sufficient check: "if a faction consists of less than a majority, relief is supplied by the republican principle,

¹¹⁵ *Federalist 10*, 53.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

which enables the majority to defeat its sinister views, by regular vote.”¹¹⁸ But, Madison recognizes the real possibility of majoritarian tyranny. For this reason, Madison openly condemns purely democratic governance: “pure democracy... can admit of no cure for the mischief of faction. A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole... and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party, or an obnoxious individual.”¹¹⁹



Republican government, in contrast, strips the people of most decision-making power and places it in the hands of an elite few. These elite men, vetted by their fellow citizens, will hopefully be of a wiser, and less factious character: “[republics] refine and enlarge the public’s views, by passing them through the medium of a chose body of citizens, whose wisdom may be discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice, will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations.”¹²⁰ The proposed Senate, the upper legislative house, is especially designed with this purpose in mind. Elected by state legislatures and for longer terms than counterparts in the House of Representatives, senators ought to be freer from the whims and flights of fancy that move the public at large. They are to serve as a check on the people, and on the people’s nearest representatives in Congress, while also—by virtue of their longer terms in office—having an ability to see longer-term projects through to their conclusion. In both senses, then, they are to serve as a check on the people and their more short-sighted representatives in Congress: “an additional body in the legislative

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

department, which, having sufficient permanency to provide for such objects as require a continued attention... a defense to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions.”¹²¹

The House of Representatives exists, however, to defend the people against their ‘defenders’ in the Senate. By virtue of frequent elections and small constituencies, the members of the House are to be extremely responsive to the will of the people: “it is essential to liberty that... the branch of government under consideration should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with, the people.”¹²² By this means, the people can resist any encroachments by the more permanent branch of the legislature on their liberty. Thus, on the whole, the bifurcation of legislative power is intended to use each branch as a check upon the other: “with less power, therefore, to abuse, the federal representatives can be less tempted on one side, and will be doubly watched on the other.”¹²³ Similarly, the executive branch, the judiciary, and the state governments all serve as additional layers of this complex balancing of power.

Madison also insists that the federal makeup of the new union will multiply the number of political factions, thereby making it much more difficult for any one faction to approach sufficient numerical strength to impose its way on the country: “extend the sphere and you take in a great variety of parties and interest; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other

121 *Federalist 63*, 349.

122 *Federalist 52*, 293.

123 *Ibid.*, 296.

citizens; or if such a motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength and act in unison.”¹²⁴ The reader can hardly fail to note, however, that Madison’s deliberately fashioned plan for gridlock will apply not only to those situations where government action will tend toward tyranny, but to any government action.

Madison consciously impedes government functioning to preserve citizens’ liberty, but government will also be hamstrung as it attempts to engage in any positive project—e.g. territorial expansion. We can thus say that Madison continues to adhere to the essential character of Machiavelli’s Spartan model of a republic, where the polity works exclusively towards its own preservation and internal liberty.

Madison also contrives another major restraint. This one binds the great only, but extra restraint upon the great is necessary; they have more talent and ability than the people, but they often partake of the same flaws, therefore their potential for upsetting Madison’s delicate balance is all the greater. In keeping with his general tactics, Madison proposes to make the particular weakness of the great—their ambition—another restraint. In doing so, he strongly echoes Machiavelli’s recommendation that the great in a republic must keep each other in check. In a certain sense, Madison even plans to intensify the self-interested jealousies of power of the great, in order to harness that energy and turn them into watchdogs against the machinations of one another.

According to Madison: “the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary means, *and personal motives*, to resist encroachments of the

¹²⁴ *Federalist 10*, 56.

others”(emphasis mine).¹²⁵ Rather than futilely attempt to cultivate pure disinterestedness in the public officials, Madison proposes to place man’s natural self-interest in the service of the constitutional order, by giving each magistrate a strong personal interest in protecting the privileges granted his office under the constitutional schema: “ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man, must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place.”¹²⁶ This is an idea that is further developed by Alexander Hamilton, who feels that such motivations can (and should) be used to prompt the great to actively advance the cause of the nation through positive projects as territorial acquisition. For Madison, the however, this motivation is a conservative one, which guards and watches others more than it incites leaders to undertake endeavors on their own independent initiative.

Madison’s embrace of faction and ambition as the chief bulwarks of liberty is a strikingly Machiavellian position. The apparent fragility of republics and the historic examples of republics falling victim to the ambitions of individuals or internecine factional conflict might naturally lead one (and *did* lead many influential thinkers) to view ambition and faction as the banes of republics. Madison and Machiavelli, however, see the two phenomena as inextricable from man’s nature. Thus, in one sense Madison’s proposals are an acceptance of this unalterable fact and an attempt to find constitutional outlets for man’s factious and ambitious tendencies, thereby preventing them from destroying the state. Such an orientation is illuminated by Machiavelli’s position that

¹²⁵ *Federalist 51*, 288.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

factional contention is necessary because “every city ought to have its modes with which the people can vent its ambition.”¹²⁷ Machiavelli continues that: “there is nothing that makes a republic so stable and steady as to order it in a mode so that those alternating humors that agitate it can be vented in a way ordered by the laws.”¹²⁸ To attempt to construct a government that quashes these dangerous aspects of man’s nature is a hopeless folly. One is left to manage these qualities in such a way as to do the least damage.

More importantly, Madison and Machiavelli saw ambition and faction as potentially useful to the preservation of a republic. Just as Madison supports the existence of faction in America, Machiavelli writes that those who condemn the political disunity in Rome “between the nobles and the plebs blame those things that were the first cause of keeping Rome free.”¹²⁹ As for ambition, Madison is again an echo of Machiavelli. The Florentine intends to use the ambitions of one individual to check another: “the ambition of any citizen cannot be opposed with a better, less scandalous, and easier mode than to anticipate the ways that he is seen to tread to arrive at the rank that he plans.”¹³⁰

Madison’s general approach to ambition and faction thus seems powerfully Machiavellian. Acknowledging first that these aspects cannot be excised from man in society, Madison therefore accepts that they must be manipulated and channeled so that

¹²⁷ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 17.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁹ *Discourses*, 16.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

that polity suffers the least amount of harm, and even enjoys a valuable benefit from them.

When discussing how his system of checks and balances relates to his overall vision of the proper ends of government, Madison says: “justice is the end of government, it is the end of civil society. It ever has been, and ever will be, pursued, until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit.”¹³¹ Madison declines to offer an explicit definition of justice, but we might suppose that it consists mainly in the freedom and security of the individual. This inference is based on Madison’s contrasting of the just society with a (presumably unjust) society in which “the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger” and there is “insecurity of rights.”¹³² We hear a good deal less about justice from Machiavelli. As his examples indicate, checks and balances serve as a means for preserving liberty. But, this, like justice, appears in the domestic situation of the republic.

Whatever its precise definition, Madison’s understanding of justice is an internal phenomenon; it is concerned with conditions inside the state. Madison’s republic, in all its complexity, looks internally, and therefore holds to the Spartan/Venetian model in its essentially inward-facing character. It deliberately eschews innovation and expansion, in return for which it hopes to achieve a stable, constant liberty. The system of using factions and ambition as checks is the centerpiece of Madison’s plan to achieve that end.

131 *Federalist 51*, 291.

132 *Ibid.*

In Hamilton's *Papers*, we find the New Yorker emphasizing the value of properly organized power more than that of properly organized restraint. Hamilton stresses the value of stability less than Madison, preferring instead to expound upon the benefits of national vitality and strength. In a sense, one perceives that Hamilton's vision for the republic is more outward-looking. Hamilton seeks a government that is more than a reactive, stabilizing force. Rather, the government—or its leaders—ought to be characterized by initiative, undertaking projects and plans for the good of the nation. Moreover, Hamilton rests his hopes for America's liberty and greatness more on individuals than he does in institutions.

Hamilton's offers the following standard of evaluation for government:

“Though we cannot acquiesce in the political heresy of the poet, who says: *‘For forms of government, let fools contest... that which is best administered is best’* yet we may safely pronounce, that the true test of government is, its aptitude and tendency to produce a good administration.”¹³³

This periphrastic statement recalls to mind Machiavelli's ambiguous statement about character of Agathocles, that “one cannot call it virtue,” immediately before he describes Agathocles as virtuous.¹³⁴ Just as Machiavelli seems to be indicating that while he feels that Agathocles is virtuous, the prevailing prejudices about virtue prevent him from being able to say so, Hamilton seems to suggest that he agrees with the political heretic, although he cannot openly say so. America's political orthodoxy so strongly affirms the

133 *Federalist 68*, 379.

134 Machiavelli, *Prince*, 35.

absolute moral superiority of the republican form of government that Hamilton cannot suggest that the efficient administration of government matters more than any particular form. This position places Hamilton firmly at odds with Madison. Whereas Madison evaluates governments on their success in achieving “justice,” Hamilton looks to “good administration.” In this, Hamilton adopts a more ‘pragmatic’ orientation, leaving statesmen more leeway to determine what would constitute good administration in a given context, instead of tethering them through institutional restraints and abstract principles as Madison does.

Hamilton also diverges from Madison on the issue of restraining faction. Madison had sought to minimize the destructive power of factious sedition by multiplying (and thereby diluting the power of) factions, while simultaneously redirecting them to serve the public good. Hamilton shares Madison’s fear that America may be torn apart by the different interests comprehended within the federation, but his remedy is less complex and theoretical. The preponderance of power—especially military power—concentrated in the central government ought to deter most potential disruptive factions, and it will forcibly squelch any faction that persists in its destructive activity:

“the hope of impunity, is a strong incitement to sedition: the dread of punishment, a proportionally strong discouragement to it. Will not the government of the union, which if possessed of a due degree of power, can call to its aid the collective resources of the whole confederacy, be more likely to repress the *former* sentiment, and to inspire the *latter*.”¹³⁵

135 *Federalist 27*, 147.

Both Madison and Hamilton desire to oppose the pernicious effects of faction, but while Madison sees the solution in multiplying factions, Hamilton sees it in strengthening the powers opposing them.

Hamilton argues that one of government's great tasks is to reconcile "energy in government, with the inviolable attention due to liberty, and to the republican form."¹³⁶ Such a formulation suggests that Hamilton wishes to cloak 'energetic' government in republican garb. The "republican form" is to be filled with an energetic government. We shall see that it is energy—not republicanism—that serves as Hamilton's priority.

Hamilton envisions energetic government and successful administration to depend on wide discretion and vast powers being granted to individuals capable of wielding them. It is telling that while Madison assumes responsibility for discussing at length the role of the legislature, Hamilton is our guide to the constitution's proposed executive branch. It is in the executive branch that Hamilton places responsibility for liberty, safety, and good government generally:

"energy in the executive is a leading character in the definition of good government. It is essential to the protection of the community against foreign attacks: it is not less essential to the steady administration of the laws; to the protection of property... to the security of liberty against the enterprises and assaults of ambition, of faction, and of anarchy."¹³⁷

Hamilton's view about the importance of an energetic and powerful executive recalls Machiavelli's reasoning. As discussed above, Machiavelli argues that because no

¹³⁶ *Federalist 37*, 196.

¹³⁷ *Federalist 70*, 387.

founder can expect to anticipate all of the dangers that a republic may face over the course of its life, the republic must rely on “new acts of foresight.”¹³⁸ For Hamilton, America’s executive needs almost infinitely elastic discretion to deal with an almost infinite number of possible future dangers; the means must be proportional to the ends:

“The authorities essential to the care of the common defense are these: to raise armies... to direct their operations; to provide for their support. These powers ought to exist without limitation; because it is impossible to foresee or to define the extent and variety of the means which may be necessary for to satisfy them. The circumstances that endanger the safety of nations are infinite; and for this reason, no constitutional shackles can wisely be imposed on the power to which the care of it is committed”¹³⁹

But, Hamilton proposes investing power in a single individual in other areas besides national defense. Most notably, as was discussed briefly in Chapter II, Hamilton wishes to concentrate authority over the country’s finances in a single individual (or, at most a small handful):

“nations in general, even under governments of the more popular kind, usually commit the administration of their finances to single men, or to boards composed of a few individuals, who digest and prepare, in the first instance, the plans of taxation; which are afterwards passed into law by the authority of the sovereign or

138 Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 308.

139 *Federalist 23*, 125.

legislature. Inquisitive and enlightened statesmen, are everywhere deemed best qualified to make a judicious selection of the proper objects of revenue.”¹⁴⁰

Here again, we find Hamilton seeking to place responsibility for important decisions¹⁴¹ in the hands of a few (ideally, one alone), and subsequently covering those decisions in republican legitimacy by having the legislature ratify them. This arrangement may indeed be more than a sop to republican sensibilities, but the greater decision-making power still lies in the hands of the select individuals. Hamilton even goes so far in his advocacy of powerful executives that he effusively praises the Roman practice of appointing a dictator (while prudently avoiding the suggestion that America adopt that particular institution).

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Hamilton offers us a comprehensive defense of his preference for individual—as opposed to collective—decision-making. Interestingly, not only does Hamilton perceive more energy in individual decision-makers, he also feels that empowering individual leaders is a surer guard of liberty than investing power in collective bodies.

As for the advantages of unitary executive power, Hamilton is straightforward: “wherever two or more persons are engaged in any common enterprise or pursuit, there is always danger of difference of opinion... bitter dissensions are apt to spring. Whenever these happen, they lessen the respectability, weaken the authority, and distract the plans and operations of those whom they divide... they

140 *Federalist 36*, 189.

141 As we continue, we shall see the great significance of economic and financial decisions to Hamilton.

142 *Fed 70*, p. 387.

might impede or frustrate the most important measures of the government, in the most critical emergencies of the state.”¹⁴³

Hamilton even seems only to grudgingly approve the existence of a popular legislature, precisely because it is likely to fall prey to such evils: “upon the principles of a free government, inconveniences from the source just mentioned, must necessarily be submitted to in the formation of the legislature,” but it would be intolerable to similarly afflict the executive.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the executive must be a single individual.

Yet, Hamilton also sees the mechanisms of restraint in his scheme. Whereas Madison had relied primarily on institutional checks to prevent usurpations, Hamilton seeks to modify the behavior of political actors through incentives and disincentives that appeal to the particular character traits of the great. For instance, Hamilton argues that placing authority for some endeavor unambiguously in the hands of a single individual not only empowers him to do his job well, but it allows responsibility for failure to be assigned easily:

Responsibility is of two kinds, to censure and to punishment. The first is the most important of the two; especially in elective office... the multiplication of the executive adds to the difficulty of detection [of fault]. It often becomes impossible, amidst mutual accusations, to determine on whom the blame or the punishment of a pernicious measure... ought really to fall. It is shift from one

143 *Federalist 70*, 390.

144 *Ibid.*

person to another with so much dexterity... that the public opinion is left in suspense about the real author.¹⁴⁵

For these reasons, unity of power would also mean unity of responsibility, and the public can more easily exact retribution against its malefactors when it is clear who is responsible for mismanagement or disaster.

Hamilton also offers another cause by which individuals in power will feel compelled to restrain themselves: their own ambition. Hamilton acknowledges, as much as Madison, that ambition often drives the actions of the great. Madison, for reasons discussed above, opts to ‘starve the beast,’ by turning the ambitions of the great into watch jealousy of each other. Hamilton, on the other hand, suggests leaving open channels to satisfy ambition in a salutary manner. Hamilton vigorously opposes office term limits, arguing that if one closes off the legitimate route to satisfying ambition, the ambitious will simply be forced to seek illegitimate routes. Instead, Hamilton wishes to maintain good public service as the only route to power and honor, thereby permanently redirecting the urges of the great into beneficial manifestations:

“there are few men who would not feel much less zeal in the discharge of a duty, when they were conscious that the advantage of the state, with which it was connected, must be relinquished at a determinate period, than when they were permitted to entertain a hope of *obtaining* by *meriting* a continuance of them. This position will not be disputed, so long as it is admitted that the desire for reward is one of the strongest incentives of human conduct; or that the best security for the interest of mankind, is to

145 Ibid., 392-393.

make interest coincide with duty... the love of fame, which is the ruling passion of the noblest minds, would prompt a man to plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public benefit.”¹⁴⁶

Thus, Hamilton seeks to enlist the ambition of a great individual to police not so much other great individuals as themselves.

Thus, we find Hamilton differing significantly with Madison about the proper way to empower and restrain individuals. Hamilton’s view emphasizes pragmatism and flexibility over Madison’s theory and stability. Madison looks to construct a free and secure domestic situation by finely-calibrated institutional checks. Hamilton looks to empower individuals to achieve goals beyond mere defense. Efficiency in administration and vision in leadership matter more to him than maintaining a given status quo.

Machiavelli writes that:

“if someone wished, therefore, to order a republic anew, he would have to consider whether he wished it to expand like Rome in dominion and power, or truly to remain within narrow limits. In the first case it is necessary to order it like Rome and make a place for tumults... in the second case, you can order it like Sparta... if it were in it a constitution and laws to prohibit it from expanding.”¹⁴⁷

We see that Madison’s arrangement of an almost paralyzing system of checks and balances is a natural and logical means to constructing for America a republic built on the Spartan model. Almost insuperable obstacles to initiative in government are to ensure that

¹⁴⁶ *Federalist* 72, 401.

¹⁴⁷ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 22-23.

the wickedness and folly of men does not undermine the liberty and security of the community. Hamilton, too, proposes means well suited to his aims. Government grants individuals with energy the discretion to take initiative for the sake of increasing the power and wealth of the polity. But, for this reason, his “American empire” can less admit of such an emphasis on check and safeguards, which work to hinder the efficient and energetic elements of government.

V: Virtue

Both J.G.A Pocock and Bernard Bailyn persuasively show that the revolutionary generation was deeply concerned with the issue of civic virtue. Bailyn argues that this concern derives from the thought of British writers who were in turn deeply influenced by Machiavelli.¹⁴⁸ In the minds of the Americans, however, a fear emerged that the mother country was becoming an infectious source of corruption, imperiling the virtue still retained in America. Thus Pocock writes that many leading Americans thought that: “the virtue and personal integrity of every American were therefore threatened by

¹⁴⁸ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 85-86.

corruption emanating from a source now alien, on which Americans had formerly believed themselves securely dependent.”¹⁴⁹ It would seem, then, that a special emphasis on preserving civic virtue would be a natural concern for the founders. Despite ubiquitous praise for Americans’ “simple” virtue, we see that in the thought of Madison and Hamilton, the concept of virtue is far from simple.

Neither the Florentine nor the Americans ever explicitly define virtue. For all three, virtue is a complex idea, difficult to define both because it encompasses several different qualities of character and because it manifests in different ways under different circumstances. For all three, virtue is a political (not religious or moral) quality of character (in either an individual, group or institution) that benefits the body politic.

Since all three thinkers agree on the existence of the two humors, it follows logically that virtue would appear differently in the people and the great. In order to fulfill their responsibilities to the republic, Machiavelli’s few must possess such qualities as prudence, courage, and daring. Among his free peoples, virtue may be found in hardiness, vigor in defense of the nation, and aversion to sloth.

For Hamilton, the virtue of the great lies always in their superior talents and energy. Madison, in contrast has a deeply situational understanding of the virtue of the great. During the period of founding, the virtue of Madison’s great is identical to Hamilton’s. However, for the rest of the life of the republic, the virtue of great is almost reversed; exerting a prudent, calming influence over the state now becomes their virtue. Even at their most active in the daily life of the republic, Madison’s great are mediators

¹⁴⁹ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 507.

and troubleshooters who work to reconcile competing interests and forge successful compromises that preserve the delicate balance of internal power.

As for the people, Madison knows that he cannot count on their disinterested wisdom to support the state. Instead, he proposes a kind of unthinking prejudice in favor of the constitutional order as the virtue of the people. For Madison, a virtuous people is a conservative watchdog against constitutional innovation. In contrast, Hamilton finds the virtue of the people in their daring, their commercial adventurism. As we continue, we see how the Americans' understandings of virtue are fitted to their understandings of human nature and their aspirations for the American republic.

Taking first Madison's great, we see that their energetic and creative virtues ought to have full expression only in the period of the founding. In the chaos and weakness prior to the founding, only a few individuals have the wisdom to perceive the ills of the nation and the foresight to construct institutions that will stand the test of time. The people, being too ignorant and unwieldy, cannot be relied upon to guide a founding: "it is impossible for the people spontaneously and universally, to move in concert towards their object."¹⁵⁰ This sense of inadequacy of the people for a founding is expressed in Machiavelli's dictum that "the many are not capable of ordering a thing because they do not know its good."¹⁵¹ For this reason, Machiavelli locates responsibility for a founding with the great, who may make use of any means necessary to accomplish their ends:

So a prudent orderer of a republic, who has the intent to wish to help not himself but the common good, should contrive to have authority alone...

¹⁵⁰ *Federalist 40*, 221.

¹⁵¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 29.

nor will a wise understanding ever reprove anyone for any extraordinary action that he uses to order a kingdom or constitute a republic.¹⁵²

Madison makes allowance for a small group of great individuals to perform the founding at least as well as one alone, but he otherwise follows Machiavelli here. Madison argues that the fear and disorder caused by the American government's weakness under the Articles of Confederation resulted in a sense of "danger which repressed the passions most unfriendly to order and concord; of an enthusiastic confidence of the people in their patriotic leaders, which stifled the ordinary diversity of opinions on great national questions."¹⁵³ Madison's vision of the central importance of fear and public malleability is precisely what Machiavelli claims is the essential quality for a good founding. In private, Madison was even more blunt about the people's willingness to accept any new constitutional order that promised relief from the current predicament, as he wrote to Thomas Jefferson: "My own idea is that the public mind will now or in a very little time receive any thing that promises stability to the public Councils and security to private rights."¹⁵⁴ For their part, "patriotic leaders" were to be such as to "possess the most wisdom to discern, and the most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society."¹⁵⁵

152 Ibid.

153 *Federalist 49*, 282.

154¹ *Papers of James Madison* 10:163, cited in Rosen's "Madison's Princes and Peoples."

155 *Federalist 47*, 316.

Moreover, Madison admits that when going about the founding, these great individuals may of their own initiative assume powers vastly greater than those the people might have wished to grant them: “it is therefore essential, that such changes be instituted by some *informal and unauthorized propositions*, made by some patriotic and respectable citizen, or number of citizens... this irregular and assumed privilege, of proposing to the people plans for their safety and happiness.”¹⁵⁶

We see then, that in the early period surrounding the founding, Madison proposes a rather expansive role for the virtue of the great. They must themselves bear the responsibility of constructing (and securing the acceptance of) a wholly new constitutional order. Such a task draws upon the creativity, foresight, and prudence of these individuals.

Madison does not propose extending the expression of these virtues of the great in the same way after the founding has been completed. The purview and range of motion for the great becomes powerfully circumscribed once the republic begins to function normally. Considering Madison’s vision of a well-ordered republic—rigidly balanced power against power—it seems logical that he would view the qualities of the great which make them indispensable assets at the founding to be liabilities in the day-to-day operation of the republic. Creativity and re-ordering would only upset the internal balance. For this reason, his description of virtuous leaders changes dramatically when he discusses their role in the republic after the founding. Now, the resistance to power-lust, judiciousness and the moderate reconciliation of differences become the hallmarks of a virtuous leader.

¹⁵⁶ *Federalist 40*, 221.

Madison knows that despite the Framers' best efforts, the American republic will still suffer from the occasional upheavals born of faction. Insofar as they can manage to avoid partaking of destructive partisanship, great individuals may serve to alleviate the stresses of political fractiousness. "Some temperate and respectable body of citizens" might serve to dampen the effects of "irregular passion."¹⁵⁷ Though they will not always be successful, it is to be hoped that sometimes, "enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests, and render them all subservient to the public good."¹⁵⁸

However, this seems the extent of the active virtue of the great in Madison's well functioning republic. Great men are to be troubleshooters and reconcilers of difference, but little more. The chief part of their virtue now lies in their ability to prudently guide the republic *without* taking that very same initiative that constituted their virtue in founding the republic. They must not try to reorder the state, to usurp power, or to alter the internal balance of the state. Federal institutions are designed to "obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and the most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous."¹⁵⁹ These "precautions" lie in the frequency of elections and in the other institutional constraints discussed in the previous chapter.

As Gary Rosen points out, for Madison "the act of founding is a rare feat, one properly belonging to a select few... When it comes to the maintenance of the

¹⁵⁷ *Federalist 63*, 349.

¹⁵⁸ *Federalist 10*, 54.

¹⁵⁹ *Federalist 57*, 316.

constitution... Madison turns expectantly to the people, the conservative element in the American regime. At the same time, he begins to cast a suspicious eye on the continuing intervention of the few."¹⁶⁰ The chief value of the virtues of the great is in founding the regime, the chief virtue of the people shall be in preserving it.

Machiavelli views one of the necessary republican virtues of the common people to be their willingness to sustain institutions:

the thing itself is ordered to last long not if it remains on the shoulders of one individual but rather if it remains in the care of many and its maintenance stays with many. For as the many are not capable of ordering a thing because they do not know its good ... so when they have come to know it, they do not agree to abandon it.¹⁶¹

Madison seizes upon this vision of the distinct weakness and virtue of the people. The judgment of the people is unreliable. But, if properly guided, the people can be a powerful conserving force of republican institutions, and it is in this quality that Madison locates the republican virtue of the people.

In *Federalist 49*, Madison argues against fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson had suggested holding frequent constitutional conventions. According to Jefferson, such a scheme would allow for the occasional constitutional adjustments necessary to respond to changes in circumstances and would serve to periodically reassert the moral supremacy of the people.

¹⁶⁰ Rosen, "Madison's Princes and Peoples," 231.

¹⁶¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 29.

Madison accepts the chief theoretical premise of Jefferson's argument, that the people are the source of all rightful authority: "the people are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter... is derived; it seems strictly consonant with republican theory to recur to the same original authority."¹⁶² Madison cannot deny that his republican philosophy must concede to the people an ultimate right to alter the constitution, so he restricts himself to limiting the expression of that right in practice to only the most extreme cases:

there is certainly great force in this reasoning, and it must be allowed to prove, that a constitutional road to the decision of the people must be kept open, for certain great and extraordinary occasions. But there appear to be insuperable objections to this proposed recurrence to the people.¹⁶³

Madison argues that to put this theory into practice would undermine the people's role as a preserving bulwark of the constitution. It would serve to expose the vices and undermine the virtues of the people.

Madison argues that Jefferson's trust in the people's judgment is unfounded. Especially in times of crisis or controversy (presumably the circumstances under which a constitutional convention would be called), the people are wont to make decisions on the basis of their passions. According to Madison, the public "could never be expected to turn to the true merits of the question...the *passions*, therefore, not the *reason* of the public, would sit in judgment."¹⁶⁴ It would therefore be especially dangerous to seek the public's

¹⁶² *Federalist 49*, 280.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 280-281

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

guidance in moments of real division over constitutional principles. The ultimate effects of the people's judgment could be disastrous.

But, Madison does not merely say that Jefferson's proposal would fuel the vice and folly of the people, he also claims that it would undermine one of the people's chief virtues: their tendency to preserve the good institutions they have been given. Madison suggests that the frequent referral of constitutional questions to the people and the frequent debate over constitutional principles would deprive the constitution of its aura of authority: "every appeal to the people would carry an implication of some defect in the government, frequent appeals would, in a great measure, deprive the government of that veneration which time bestows on every thing, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest governments would not possess the requisite stability."¹⁶⁵ Madison recognizes that his proposal is a kind of deception, which exists to turn the people's minds away from viewing the Constitution as the man-made (and therefore, flawed) document that it is. Madison proposes instilling an almost religious reverence in the populace for the constitution, a reverence which cannot survive constant scrutiny and debate over its principles:

All governments rest on opinion... the reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone; and acquires firmness and confidence, in proportion to the number with which it is associated. When the examples which fortify opinion, are *ancient*, as well as *numerous*, they are known to have a double effect... the most rational government will not

165 Ibid., 281.

find it a superfluous advantage to have the prejudices of the community on its side.¹⁶⁶

Madison's statement above is quite significant. Madison recognizes the conventional nature of all government—"all governments rest on opinion." He thus admits that the principles laid out in the proposed Constitution are legitimately open to question. Yet, the stability of the republic requires that this realization not become widespread and absorbed into the public consciousness. In order to achieve Madison's deeply desired internal tranquility and liberty, the people's natural conservatism must be cultivated and directed towards the nation's republican institutions. Madison can portray this preserving (and rather gullible) quality of the people as a virtue because he does not envision a dynamic, constantly changing republic—the conservatism of the people is a virtue precisely because it would stand athwart any moves towards adventurism or tyranny that would disturb the nation's stability. The virtue of the people lies in their willingness to preserve the ingenious institutions handed to them by the 'great'—the Founding Fathers.

It must be noted, that this virtue is not a natural quality of the people. As Madison's concern shows, the people can easily fall away from their preserving tendency. If they are repeatedly exposed to the flaws and weaknesses of their form of government, they will lose their reverential attitude towards it. Artifice is required to manipulate the people's circumstances, reinforcing their natural conservatism, and transforming it into a powerful preserving force. By employing the psychological power of tradition, Madison

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 281-282.

hopes to de-emphasize the Constitution's questionable—that is to say, challengeable and debatable—origins.

This attitude of Madison also recalls another Machiavellian dictum, that to preserve a republic, one must “lead them back to their beginnings.”¹⁶⁷ Madison does not propose to recall to the people the debates surrounding the founding, but he does advocate employing tradition to constantly draw the people's attention reverently to the principles enshrined in the founding. Machiavelli's proposal, however, serves a different purpose than Madison's. Whereas Madison constructs his scheme to ensure stability, Machiavelli seeks to reignite energy, often through fear: “unless something arises by which punishment is brought back to their memory and fear is renewed in their spirits, soon so many delinquents join together.”¹⁶⁸ Yet, there is a certain unity to both thinkers as well. Both accept the premise that there must be some virtuous quality present at the beginning of the republic, which it is necessary to preserve or revive for the republic to flourish. As Machiavelli writes: “all the beginnings of sects, republics, and kingdoms must have some goodness in them.”¹⁶⁹ Upon that fundamental point, Madison clearly agrees, claiming that the moment of the founding has brought about circumstances uniquely suited to the construction of the American republic:

the existing constitutions were formed in the midst of a danger which repressed the passions most unfriendly to order and concord; if an enthusiastic confidence of the people in their patriotic leaders, which

¹⁶⁷ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 209.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 211

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

stifled the ordinary diversity of opinion on great national questions...the future situations in which we must expect to be usually placed, do not present any equivalent security against the danger which is apprehended.¹⁷⁰

Here, Madison concedes again Machiavelli's point that fear and danger were essential to suppressing the willfulness of the people and giving free reign to the virtues of the great to found the regime. But, while Machiavelli asserts that the health of a republic depends on the maintenance of that initial atmosphere of fear, Madison's desire for tranquility leads him to prefer that the stabilizing virtue of the people dominate the republic after the founding. He wishes to retain, however, the people's deference and respect for the new constitutional forms, which the people first display at the founding.

As for Hamilton, he sees the virtue of people as being quite different from Madison's vision. The divergence here follows from Hamilton's divergence from Madison on the natural qualities of the people as well as ambition for an imperial republic. Whereas the staid and reliable conservatism of the people is, for Madison, their most useful quality to the republic, Hamilton seeks to cultivate and exploit their wild courage and adventurism, especially in the realm of commerce. Through commerce, Hamilton hopes to build the United States into a rich and mighty world power. Somewhat less interested in military virtues than Machiavelli, Hamilton sees the path to national greatness lying in the willingness of the people to take great risks in order to expand America's commercial networks at the expense of other great powers. Commercial

¹⁷⁰ *Federalist 49*, 282.

adventurism becomes a kind of virtue, as Pocock suggests, Hamilton saw that:

“commerce and specialization were the causes of dynamic *virtù*”.¹⁷¹

Hamilton’s view of the commercial tendencies of a people was discussed briefly in Chapter II. It deserves a fuller exposition here, however, because Hamilton strongly implies that commercial motives are not necessarily a part of human nature. Rather, they are a quality that derives from man’s context, and which can be cultivated or repressed by government policy. In *Federalist 6*, Hamilton differentiates those timeless and omnipresent qualities of human nature that are the sources of conflict and those which are the product of specific contingencies:

The causes of hostility among nations are innumerable. There are some which have a *general and almost constant operation* upon the collective bodies of men. Of this description are the love of power, or the desire of pre-eminence and dominion . . . the jealousy of power, or the desire for equality and safety. There are others, which have a more circumscribed, though an equally operative influence, within their spheres: such are the rivalships and competitions of commerce between commercial nations.¹⁷²

Thus, Hamilton discerns a difference between those qualities that universally act on man in society and can therefore be considered—for all practical political purposes—part of human nature, and those qualities that operate only under certain conditions.¹⁷³ It seems

171 Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 530.

172 *Federalist 6*, 29-30, emphasis mine.

173 The first category of qualities may not be a part human nature in the strict sense of the term, since Hamilton makes no claims about pre-social man. But, Hamilton is only concerned with social man here.

from the quotation above that Hamilton considers commercial motives to fall into the latter category.

In fact, Hamilton believes that commercial motives have been only a weak force in political considerations until recently: “Have there not been as many wars founded upon commercial motives, *since that has become the prevailing system of nations?*”¹⁷⁴ While this new factor in the political equation constitutes yet another source for conflict and war, it also provides a new route to national strength: “a prosperous commerce is now perceived and acknowledged, by all enlightened statesmen, to be the most useful, as well as the most productive, source of national wealth; and has accordingly become a primary object of their political cares.”¹⁷⁵

A commercial orientation brings with it two great advantages for a nation. First, it serves the good of the people themselves, by strengthening and inciting great activity of almost every private employment:

it serves to vivify and invigorate all the channels of industry, and to make them flow with great activity and copiousness. The assiduous merchant, the laborious husbandman, the active mechanic, and the industrious manufacturer... all orders of men, look forward with eager expectation, and growing alacrity, to this pleasing reward of their toils.¹⁷⁶

174 *Federalist 6*, 32. Emphasis mine.

175 *Federalist 12*, 65.

176 *Ibid.*, 65.

In this capacity, commerce also serves to reconcile some of those divisions within society that may become sources of internal strife: “the often agitated question between agriculture and commerce, has from indubitable experience, received a decision, which has silenced the rivalships that once subsisted between them... their interests are intimately mingled and interwoven.”¹⁷⁷

The second great benefit of a commercial orientation accrues to the nation’s government. Commercial activity vastly increases the power of the government by multiplying the amount of money it can collect in taxes, and it also extends the influence of the government well beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation. It is, for this reason, essential to national greatness: “a nation cannot long exist without revenue. Destitute of this essential support, it must resign its independence, and sink into the graded condition of a province... revenue must be had at all costs.”¹⁷⁸

Thus, a commercial bent is crucial to preserving and extending the nation’s power. However, this quality is not one of purely calm and calculating self-interest. To carry out commerce on the high seas—as Hamilton proposes—leads one into ventures that carry great risks. Treacherous and terrifying weather, piracy, and hostile foreign nations jealous of their own commerce: all stand athwart the path to wealth obtained by naval trade. It is here, however, that Hamilton sees an advantage for Americans:

the adventurous spirit, which distinguishes the commercial character of America, has already excited uneasy sensations in several of the maritime powers of Europe. They seem to be apprehensive of our too great interference in that carry

177 Ibid., 66.

178 Ibid., 70.

trade, which is the support of their navigation, and the foundation of their naval strength.¹⁷⁹

This orientation can be cultivated or undermined by government intervention:

suppose... the federal power of taxation were to be confined to duties on imports [it would] beget a general spirit of smuggling; which is always prejudicial to the fair trader, and eventually to the revenue itself,... force industry out of its most natural channels into other in which it flows with less advantage, and in the last place, oppress the merchant.¹⁸⁰

Conversely, by keeping duties light on traders, the government can encourage such adventurous men to continue enlarging national prosperity and power.

Some, such as Istvan Hont, argue that the aggressive, mercantilist outlook exemplified by Hamilton is simply an eighteenth century extension of Machiavelli's expansionist republicanism: "jealousy of trade was an extrapolation of Machiavellism to the modern trading economy."¹⁸¹ Hont terms the eighteenth century phenomenon of "an application of the Renaissance notion of the primacy of self-defense and the right to preemptive war to competitive international trade" as "economic neo-Machiavellism."¹⁸² To claim that Hamilton's position (and that of others like him) is a mere modification or extension of Machiavelli's principle into a realm he could not have considered

179 *Federalist 11*, 59

180 *Federalist 35*, 182.

181 Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 8.

182 *Ibid.*

(economics) may be a slight exaggeration. In comparison to purely military expansion, Machiavelli seems to have some distain for commercial expansion. He praises Romans because “they never acquired lands with money, never made peace with money, but always with the virtue of arms.”¹⁸³ Still, Hont’s basic point holds considerable merit. The sort of aggressive trade policies advocated by Hamilton certainly seem to rely on a kind of *raison d’etat* logic that would align with Machiavelli’s vision of an imperial republic.

It would be fair to claim that Hamilton modifies Machiavelli’s means in order to achieve the same ends. Machiavelli never denies the importance of wealth to a republic, he simply argues that: “well-ordered republics have to keep the public rich and their citizens poor,” the state’s money is to be acquired by the arms of its soldiers, not vice versa.¹⁸⁴ The intervening revolution in the field of economics has taught Hamilton that the most successful way of keeping the state rich is to also encourage the citizens to become wealthy, so as to draw revenue from them:

Money is with propriety considered as the vital principle of the body politic; as that which sustains its life and motion, and enables it to perform its most essential functions... from a deficiency in this particular... either the people must be subjected to continual plunder, as a substitute for a more eligible mode of supplying the public wants, or the government must sink into a fatal atrophy, and in a short course of time perish.¹⁸⁵

183 Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 199.

184 *Ibid.*, 79.

185 *Federalist 30*, 159.

For Hamilton, states are in fact forced to choose between a wealthy citizenry and a wealthy state, or an impoverished citizenry and a similarly impoverished state. Such a choice is in fact no choice at all. Therefore, Hamilton, while sharing Machiavelli's prioritization of government strength must revise some of Machiavelli's means of achieving that strength.

Despite its greater emphasis on commerce, Hamilton's vision of virtue (especially American virtue) is characterized by a kind of energetic daring and hardiness that strongly resembles the essential qualities of Machiavellian virtue. The adventurous spirit of American commerce described by Hamilton recalls to mind Machiavelli's characterization of the virtue of Agathocles: "in entering into and escaping from dangers, and the greatness of his spirit in overcoming adversities."¹⁸⁶ As noted above, Machiavelli is less sanguine about commerce as a spur to bold, courageous action, especially for the benefit of the state. Yet, Hamilton finds empirical evidence for his conception in the American character. He promotes this quality as virtue because its effects seem to be the very same as those sought by Machiavelli in virtue: commerce increases the power of the state and cultivates a willingness to brave danger in the hope of gain. Therefore, while we may quibble with Hont's claim that such a vision of commerce is purely an "extrapolation" of Machiavelli's principles, we can safely say that it constitutes a sympathetic revision of them that remains in line with their general spirit.

Turning our attention to the great, we see that Hamilton envisions a very different form of virtue for the great men of the American republic. While the virtue and

¹⁸⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 35.

excellence of the people is inextricably tied to their commercial activity, the great exhibit something of a disregard for commerce. In terms of policy, the great are strongly advised by Hamilton to encourage the commerce of the people, but Hamilton does not seem to expect them to take much part in commerce themselves. Tellingly, Hamilton nowhere in the *Federalist* makes even a passing mention of a titan of industry or trade—a man whose greatness manifests in commercial success. Rather, the great are drawn by their ambition to the halls of power: “love of fame, the ruling passion of the noblest minds, which would prompt a man to plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public benefit.”¹⁸⁷ This perhaps indicates even more unity between Hamilton and Machiavelli. Hamilton, though he acknowledges the immense benefits that accrue to a commercial nation, seems to suspect that the most gifted men will personally view commercial pursuits as beneath them, and that the political arena still holds the greatest challenges and honors for such men.

The virtue of the great clearly does not lie in their own pursuit of commerce, but in doing such deeds as to justly merit the fame they so covet. In this way, Hamilton’s vision of the virtue of the great resembles closely Madison’s view of the great at the founding. But, whereas Madison abandons this aspect of the greats’ character after the establishment of the regime, Hamilton does not. Unlike Madison, and much more like Machiavelli, Hamilton sees the everyday virtues of the great as active qualities that tend towards the increase of their country’s power: “decision, activity, secrecy, and dispatch.”¹⁸⁸ Indeed so far from the passive, abstinent virtues extolled by Madison,

¹⁸⁷ *Federalist* 72, 401.

¹⁸⁸ *Federalist* 70, 388.

Hamilton sees passivity and inactivity among the great—especially those in executive positions—as vices to be assiduously avoided: “all men of sense will agree in the necessity of an energetic executive.”¹⁸⁹ The weakness of even legislative bodies of great men lies in their lack of energy and speed in making decisions: “I was overruled by my council. The council were so divided in their opinions, that it was impossible to obtain any better resolution on the point.’ These and similar pretexts are constantly on hand.”¹⁹⁰

With their energy and intelligence, these great certainly fulfill Madison’s assigned role as troubleshooters. But, even here, Hamilton proposed far greater discretion for the great in resolving crises than does Madison. We have already noted Hamilton’s unabashed admiration for the Roman dictatorship as a bulwark against “intrigues of ambitious individuals... the seditions of whole classes of the community, and... against the invasions of external enemies.”¹⁹¹ While America shall not have a dictator, the presidency serves to accomplish the same essential duties.

In addition, Hamilton does concede to Madison that a virtuous great man will abstain from attempting to usurp his power in an unconstitutional fashion: the great “might sometimes be under temptations to sacrifice duty to interest, which it would require superlative virtue to withstand.”¹⁹² But this virtuous abstention does not extend to general initiative, as long as that initiative serves the interests of the commonwealth.

189 Ibid., 388.

190 Ibid., 392.

191 Ibid., 387-388.

192 *Federalist 75*, 414-415.

The appropriate attitude of the great is far from being merely reactive; the great are meant to guide and shape events: “the majesty of the national authority... must be able to address itself immediately to the hopes and fears of individuals.”¹⁹³ They will be the dischargers of government administration, which, for Hamilton, is the essence of government.¹⁹⁴ A single great individual, the president, is to lead the nation in war. In addition to the efficiency brought about by the unitary organization of this office, the holder of it must have such virtue for “the direction of the common strength.”¹⁹⁵

Thus, Hamilton’s great partake of an active virtue, fed by properly-channeled ambition. In comparison to Madison’s mediators and balancers, they make greater use of their superior talents and abilities. Initiative, energy, secrecy and firm execution of plans all characterize Hamilton’s cohort of outstanding individuals. These qualities are cultivated to help build, not a small and inward-oriented commonwealth, but a powerful, outward-looking imperial republic.

193 *Federalist 16*, 89.

194 *Federalist 68*, 379 .

195 *Federalist 64*, 410-411.

VI: Conclusion

This thesis should in no way be taken to argue that the American Founding was a purely (or even chiefly) a Machiavellian event. Nor does this thesis suggest that Machiavelli was the only (or primary) inspiration for Madison and Hamilton as they wrote *The Federalist Papers*. On such issues as natural rights, constitutionalism, the role of the judiciary, and commerce, one must look elsewhere for a guide to the Americans' thought. Instead, this thesis suggests that Machiavelli's teaching of politics had a significant influence, whether direct or indirect, on Madison and Hamilton in several key

areas. More importantly, it demonstrates how the Florentine's thought sheds light upon serious divergences between the New Yorker and the Virginian on several crucial issues. These divisions would eventually develop into very deep divisions and would shape much of the political debate in America's nascence.

Madison and Hamilton subscribe to Machiavelli's dismal description of man's moral character. All three thinkers agree that men are wicked, avaricious, prone to faction and desirous of power. However, Madison more than Hamilton fixates on the insidious and dangerous qualities of human nature. We also find in the two Americans cautious but unmistakable discussions of Machiavelli's two humors. Madison and Hamilton envision broadly two sorts of people within the body politic: the great and the people. Moreover, the Americans concur with Machiavelli that the great are characterized by heightened ambition and superior talent. However, the Americans differ strongly with one another on the character of the people. Madison sees the many as a naturally conservative force. This position is supported by Machiavelli's characterization of the people as change-adverse and reticent to accept new modes and orders. Hamilton, in contrast sees people as adventurous and tumultuous, a position that draws echoes Machiavelli's description of the Roman plebs.

The thought of both Americans conforms to Machiavelli's assertion that a state's domestic arrangement is closely intertwined with its foreign policy. Machiavelli proposes two potential models for republics: Sparta and Rome. The Spartan model is an inward-looking construction of carefully balanced power that must avoid expansion in order to achieve its goals of liberty and longevity. The Roman model is tumultuous and energetic. Instead of carefully constricting its citizens' *libido dominandi*, such a republic unleashes

it on the world. Perhaps less enduring, but more glorious and vibrant, this republic expands by nature.

Although the two Americans propose identical short-term foreign policies of defense against European machinations, their long-term visions diverge precisely along the fault line established by Machiavelli. Madison envisions a republic like Sparta, whose constitution is finely calibrated to ensure domestic liberty and tranquility. As a result, Madison hopes to maintain America's general defensive orientation towards the rest of the world, he eschews aggression and expansion. Hamilton, on the other hand, wishes to cultivate and unleash the adventurous commercial spirit of the American people. His is a Rome-style republic, outward-oriented and aggressive. Hamilton looks hopefully to the day when America might turn the tables on the great European states and hold for itself the balance of power in the world. Hamilton, not Madison, uses the term "American empire" as a suitable description of his ambition for the nation.

Drawing substantially from their understandings of man's character while in society and their differing ideals for the American republic, Madison and Hamilton go on to propose their plans for effectively empowering the government in some respects, while restraining it in others. Madison, whose greater fear of human vice and preference for a more quiescent republic focuses heavily on the issue of restraint. His complex system of checks and balances emerges as the only hope to effectively counteract the destructive effects of man's tireless *libido dominandi*. Hamilton's slightly less pessimistic view of man's character and his aspiration for a more vibrant and powerful republic lead him to

concentrate on ensuring that the government is sufficiently strengthened and empowered to carry out its tasks.

Both thinkers agree with Machiavelli that virtue is a political quality. As befits his general schema, Madison proposes a virtue that conserves the good qualities of the regime. The only virtuous instance of active initiative comes at the founding, where a good regime is instituted in place of the old. After this, the conservative virtue of the people manifests in an unreflective prejudice in favor of the constitutional order. Here Madison follows Machiavelli's principle that the great alone may found a regime, but that the people are the bedrock necessary to preserve it. During ordinary times, virtue of the great lies in the prudence to guide the republic through crises back to tranquility and in the firm abstinence from seeking inordinate political power. For Hamilton, his ambitions for American greatness and his drastically different conception of the character of the many lead him to envision a very different sort of virtue. Active and daring, the commercial spirit of the American people needs to be cultivated. This adventurous virtue will carry America to the height of power. Among the great, virtue is in some sense an intensification of the virtue of the people. Active, decisive and ambitious (in a public-spirited sense), the great not only overcome crises, but they push America forward along the path to power, prosperity, and ultimately: empire.

We see then, for all their apparent unity in support of the Constitution, seeds of division are already sown in the thought of the two primary authors of the *Federalist Papers*. Madison and Hamilton, join in their passionate advocacy for the ratification of the American Constitution, nevertheless have divergent hopes for what America may come to be under that Constitution. Madison, ever fearful of the demons of man's

character and fully committed to the dream of a nation built on liberty, constructs a system of restraint, of conservative virtue, and a restrained foreign policy. Hamilton, more optimistic about man's character hopes for a prosperous and strong America, constructs a schema of strong institutions, encourages the active and daring qualities of man's character, and envisions a more muscular foreign policy as befits an imperial republic.

Machiavelli's political writings offer many prescriptions and suggestions, principles and observations. In no way is all of his thought reflected in authors of the *Federalist Papers*. But, he does provide a compelling claim that the lust for power is an essential aspect of man's character. On the basis of this, he offers founders of republics two choices, Rome and Sparta, as the ways to accommodate this basic fact of human nature. Madison and Hamilton accept both Machiavelli's description of humanity and his stark choice. Yet, the New Yorker chooses Rome, and the Virginian Sparta. The overlaps and divergences that emerge from this dynamic are an essential part of what makes the *Federalist Papers* such a fascinating event in the history of America and political thought.

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