

The Dictionary
of Early American Philosophers

edited by J. Shook

only "Madison, James"

CONTINUUM

his own era such as Philip II, Louis XIV, and the Stuarts. For Madison, the history of the rise and fall of monarchs (as well as republican governments) was the workings of Providence.

In this context, Bishop Madison believed that the founding of the American republic had been an act of God, a renewed hope for Christian liberty. As such, republican religion provided the inspiration for the major themes of American nationalism. In pamphlets, petitions, sermons, and letters, Madison revealed that the United States was a Republic of Virtue, the home of liberty and equality, free inquiry, and creative social justice. As the New World Zion that sought the realization of a natural rights ideology, it was the new promised land. For the remainder of his life, Madison was convinced that America's mission was to end the tyrannical rule in the world by establishing republic principles that the rest of the world's nations would embrace.

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MADISON, James (1751–1836)

Heralded as the "Father of the Constitution," James Madison was, besides one of the most influential architects of the U.S. Constitution, a man of letters, a politician, a scientist, and a diplomat who left an enduring legacy

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to American philosophical thought. As a tireless advocate for the ratification of the Constitution, Madison advanced his most groundbreaking ideas in his jointly authoring *The Federalist Papers* with John JAY and Alexander HAMILTON. Indeed, two of his most enduring ideas – the large republic thesis and the argument for separation of powers with checks and balances – are expressed there. In his life's work, Madison fused together the three dominant philosophies of post-revolutionary, antebellum America: Lockean liberalism; classical republicanism; and Christian Protestantism.

Born on 16 March 1751 on Belle Grove Plantation near Port Conway, Virginia, Madison's love of knowledge led him on a long course of studies in the classics, philosophy and theology. Beginning his formal education at a Calvinist boarding school, he continued his studies at the College of New Jersey at Princeton (now Princeton University) followed by a year of postgraduate work in Hebrew and political philosophy. In boarding school, Madison studied the works of several philosophers, including Locke, Plato and Montesquieu. In nearly all the subjects studied, including logic, there was a dose of Christian theology, as evidenced in the syllogism Madison wrote in his notes: "No Sinners are happy. Angels are happy; therefore Angels are not sinners." At Princeton, Madison spent his last two years under the tutelage of college president and moral philosopher John WITHERSPOON, a Scottish Presbyterian Calvinist minister, whose ideas about the depravity of human nature and the need for divided government likely influenced Madison's later political thought.

During Madison's long service to his country, his sympathies shifted between liberal and republican political philosophies. Service in government was for Madison a "calling" or Christian vocation. Madison served in the Virginia state legislature from 1776 to 1779 and helped draft the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. He was a delegate to

the Continental Congress during 1780–83, and then served as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1784 to 1786. During this period he composed his *Memorial and Remonstrance* in 1785 to defeat a proposal for a tax to support teachers of religion. While he subscribed to Locke's idea that a legitimate government had a duty to protect the peoples' rights to life, liberty, and property, he was more skeptical of the French Jacobins' call for revolution in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity. Madison assisted with enabling the compromise with anti-federalists that brought about the Constitution's ratification. As a leader in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1789 to 1797, he aided President George Washington in assembling and organizing America's first federal government. Madison is known as the "Father of the Bill of Rights" for his role in composing the first ten amendments, the Bill of Rights, that protect civil liberties.

Though an early ally of Washington, John ADAMS, and Hamilton, all champions of strengthening the federal government's powers, Madison later broke with their ranks. He joined Thomas JEFFERSON in the formation of the Republican Party, later called the Democratic-Republican Party, to offer an alternative to the Federalists' vision of a strong central government. This alternative was republicanism, the view that the legitimacy of federal power derives from the consent of the people, and thus depends on a compact between the federal government and the states. Madison and Jefferson anonymously authored the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, opposing the Alien and Sedition Acts passed in 1798 under the Adams administration.

During Jefferson's two terms as U.S. President, Madison served as Secretary of State from 1801 to 1809, overseeing both the successful Louisiana Purchase (doubling the nation's size) and the unsuccessful Embargo Act of 1807 (trying to disentangle the U.S. from British-French hostilities, but

eventually causing the War of 1812). While his tenure as President was initially beset by numerous problems (a series of defeats at the start of the War of 1812, a divided cabinet, and an obstructionist Congress), he eventually saved the reputation of his presidency by championing many of the same federalist reforms he had initially opposed on republican grounds, such as a national bank, a standing army and navy, federal financing for the construction of road and canals, and a tariff-based taxation system.

Madison spent his later years living at Montpelier, his plantation home in Orange County. He editing his personal papers for posterity, served as rector of the University of Virginia Board of Visitors from 1826 to 1834, and participated in the convention of 1829 to revise Virginia's state constitution. Madison died at Montpelier on 28 June 1836, the last of the Founding Fathers to die.

Perhaps Madison's most impressive political, as well as philosophical, accomplishment was to draft the Bill of Rights, which helped to forge the compromise between federalists and anti-federalists necessary for ratifying the Constitution. Federalists desired the strengthening of the central government with more powers to prevent the catastrophic results of the earlier Articles of Confederation during the Revolution, whereas anti-Federalists wanted assurances that self-government and local control would be reserved for states and their citizens. Madison initially opposed a Bill of Rights on several grounds. He argued that it is superfluous, since most of the powers it protected the people and states against were not among those the federal government had been delegated in Article I; that it is disruptive, since it grants specific rights that could be understood as excluding other rights; and ineffective, since most state bills of rights were unable to reign in unwanted exercises of state power. However, Madison did respond to the anti-Federalist demand for a bill of rights as a condition of ratification,

by undertaking the task of reviewing over two-hundred proposals and distilling them into an initial list of twelve suggested amendments to the Constitution, covering the rights of free speech, religious liberty, right to bear arms and *habeas corpus*, among others. While ten of those suggested amendments were ratified in 1791, one missing amendment (stopping laws created by Congress to increase its members' salaries from taking effect until the next legislative term) would have to wait until 1992 to be ratified as the Twenty-seventh Amendment. Madison's concern that the Bill of Rights should apply not only to the federal government would eventually be accommodated with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment (especially its due process clause) in 1868 and a series of Supreme Court cases throughout the twentieth century interpreting each of the ten amendments as "incorporated" and thus protecting citizens against state governments as well.

Most of Madison's theoretical writings were in some way related to his political activism. This was especially true of his contributions to the *Federalist Papers*. In order to persuade the states to ratify the Constitution, Madison shared with John Jay and Alexander Hamilton the task of writing a series of pseudonymously authored essays, totaling eight-five articles mostly published in New York City newspapers, during 1787 and 1788. Later scholarship generally agrees that Madison composed twenty-six essays: numbers 10, 14, 37–58, and 62–63.

In *Federalist* #39, Madison asks and answers the question: What is the nature of a republic? In Madison's words, a republic is "a government which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure for a limited period, or during good behavior." It is a representative form of government, since citizens are (at least indirectly, if not directly) self-governing, for "no other form

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would be reconcilable with the genius of the people.” Nevertheless, several examples of foreign (European) governments persist which are not republican in this sense, yet still enjoy that name. Madison insists that it is important to specify the tenure or term limit of an office, just as Aristotle proposed in his *Politics*, for the longer a person is in office the more he grows accustomed to it and greedy of sustaining that power. The House of Representatives receives its mandate directly from the people, whereas the Senate is indirectly selected by the people (by the state legislatures). The President is also indirectly chosen through the selection of electors in each state, and even Supreme Court justices are indirectly selected through appointment by an elected representative, the President. Madison compares the term limits and procedures for impeachment to those established by state constitutions and finds that in most cases they are the same or even more stringent, saying that “The President of the United States is impeachable at any time during his continuance in office.”

In Federalist #39, Madison also discusses the relationship between the concepts of federalism and nationalism. He borrows the term ‘federal’ from the anti-Federalists, conceding that each state is sovereign prior to its decision to give up certain liberties “to be bound by its voluntary act” to the union. Thus, “the new Constitution will, if established, be a federal and not a national constitution,” a kind of a Lockean social contract between the states. The “idea of a national government” is distinct from the idea of federalism. The nation is “an indefinite supremacy over all persons and things, so far as they are objects of lawful government.” So, “all local authorities are subordinate to the supreme” – all state and local legislative bodies and their laws are superseded by the national legislature and its laws. The House of Representatives is national in character, not federal, because it receives its mandate directly from the people, whereas the Senate

is federal, not national, because its mandate derives from the several states and its legislatures. So, in one sense, the “general” government is not national because any powers not expressly enumerated by the Constitution are reserved to the states. When clashes arise between the states and national government, Madison thinks that a “tribunal” will settle disputes about the distribution of powers so as “to prevent an appeal to the sword and a dissolution of the compact.” The Constitution and the central government are both federal and national: in their creation, federal; in their operation, national (depending on the “supreme and ultimate authority” of the majority of the people); and in the amendment process, a hybrid, neither wholly one or the other (two-thirds of both Houses propose an amendment and three-fourths of state legislatures or their conventions can ratify it).

In Federalist #10, Madison explains the problem of factions, namely, that the development of groups with shared interests (advocates or interest groups) is inevitable and dangerous to republican government. “Complaints are everywhere heard that our governments are too unstable,” Madison writes, “that the public good is disregarded in the conflict of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of a superior and overbearing majority.” If we try to vanquish factions, then we will in turn destroy the liberty upon which their existence and activities are founded. Baron d’Montesquieu, the seventeenth-century French philosopher, believed that the only way to have a functioning republic, one that was sufficiently democratic, was for it to be small, both in population and land mass (on the scale of ancient Athens or Sparta). Montesquieu also advocated separation of powers between three branches (executive, legislative and judicial), and the anti-Federalists sided with Montesquieu on both points. Responding to

the anti-Federalists, Madison summoned the specter of majority tyranny, warning that in such a small republic large factions would form that may extinguish individual liberty (e.g. Athens' trial and execution of Socrates, recounted in Plato's *Apology*).

Besides the problem of faction, Madison also outlines his extended republic thesis in Federalist #10. He argues that a large and diverse republic will stop the formation of a majority faction; if small groups cannot communicate over long distances and coordinate effectively, the threat will be negated and liberty will be preserved ("you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens"). When factions form inside the government, a clever institutional design of checks and balances (first John Adams's idea, where each branch would have a hand in the others' domain) would avert excessive harm, so that "ambition must be made to counteract ambition" and, consequently, government will effectively "control itself." In Federalist #47, Madison agrees with Montesquieu that a republican government should be divided between three branches. However, Madison rejected the anti-federalists' contention that the Constitution's mixture of powers with checks and balances was insufficient to prevent "accumulation of powers, legislative, executive and judiciary in the same hands," thereby threatening liberty.

In Federalist #51, Madison proposes to "form a more correct judgment of the principles and structure of the government planned by the Constitutional Convention" by addressing one of the most pressing questions of political philosophy: What is the relationship between government and human nature? Government, he asserts, is necessary because humans are not "angels," but can be selfish, ignorant, vengeful, harmful to other humans, so that "you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control

itself." Madison's belief that human nature is fundamentally flawed and depraved can be traced to his upbringing and education in the Calvinist faith. This belief also becomes Madison's justification for a bicameral legislature. The legislative must be divided so that it is less powerful and dangerous to the other branches. "In republican government," he writes, "the legislative authority necessarily predominates." Although worries over the growing power of the executive branch have become common in the twentieth century (especially with the growth of the federal bureaucracy and the so-called "imperial presidency"), in Madison's times the legislative branch was more feared. Nevertheless, Madison believed that Congress, especially the Senate, would include among its members many "Enlightened Statesmen" who would "refine and enlarge" public opinion by filtering out the selfishness and ignorance of the masses.

Madison's political ideas were essential to the founding of the American republic. Moreover, his intellectual legacy resonates throughout the history of modern political philosophy. These ideas influenced Madison's contemporaries. For instance, quoting Madison, Alexis de Tocqueville acknowledged the imminent threat of anarchy "in a society under the forms of which the stronger faction can readily unite and oppress the weaker." More recently, Madison's writings have found both a receptive and critical audience among political philosophers, economists and political scientists. Political philosopher James Fishkin (1991) notes that "Madison's problem of constitutional design was, in large part, to define the conditions under which an extended republic would produce circumstances 'favorable to the election of proper guardians of the public weal', that is, representatives who would achieve this kind of deliberative consideration of the public good." According to the constitutional economist James Buchanan (1997), "James Madison, the most important of the

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American founders, sought to forestall the emergence of coalitional or factional forces by incorporating several procedural checks and balances into the constitutional structure." Renowned political scientist Robert Dahl (2005) wrestled with Madison's constitutional ideas, eventually concluding that they were defective for three reasons: "(1) as an empirical proposition, his conjecture that increased size reduces the danger of factionalism is contradicted by subsequent experience; (2) in his conception of basic rights, Madison excluded more than half the adult population: women, African Americans, and American Indians; and (3) he actively supported the provision in the Constitution that gave to slave states an increase in representatives amounting to three-fifths of the slave population." Whether defective or not, the ideas alive in James Madison's political and philosophical writings have had an undeniably lasting effect on American political thought.

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MAHAN, Asa (1799–1889)

Asa Mahan was born on 9 November 1799 in Vernon, New York. His religious upbringing in a devout Congregationalist home was tinged with frontier revivalism and marked by intense struggles against traditional Calvinist doctrines of election and total depravity. At

the age of seventeen, Mahan experienced an "absolute intuition" of God's purity and love, resulting in a long-sought assurance of his salvation and a conversion that dramatically reoriented his piety in a more activist, "soul-winning" direction. The New Light and New Divinity revivalism of this period – originally inspired by colonial preacher and theologian, Jonathan EDWARDS – was undergoing a shift toward softer varieties of Calvinism that readily accommodated a greater emphasis on emotions and on freedom of the will as focal points of conversion. Mahan immersed himself in this ethos of revivalism at every opportunity, abandoning accustomed notions of limited atonement and "natural inability" in favor of the more optimistic New Divinityologies of Nathaniel EMMONS and Nathaniel TAYLOR.

Mahan began to formally define his voluntarist position and the rudiments of an intuitionist "common sense" realism while he studied theology at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. Heated debates between various rival schools of moderate Calvinism provided additional impetus to theological and philosophical reflection at Andover Theological Seminary, where he began graduate studies in 1824 upon his graduation from Hamilton. Mahan's recollections of Andover were not happy ones: "We solved our problems of theology as we had done those of geometry, when in College, and with no more seriousness or reverence in the one case than in the other." (1882, 154) What preserved his religious enthusiasm and his curiosity regarding the nature of the human will was his ongoing participation in revivals and his growing concern about slavery. He married Mary H. Dix in 1828 and was ordained pastor of the Congregational Church at Pittsford, New York, in 1829. A few years later he was called to the Sixth Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati, Ohio, where his involvement in Lane Theological Seminary afforded new