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Jonah Rink

**A Republic in its Own Time:
The Re-Imagining of Republican Theory in the *Federalist Papers***

In Federalist no. 48, James Madison remarked upon his own task of constitution building: “The founders of our republics have so much merit for the wisdom which they have displayed, that no task can be less pleasing than that of pointing out the errors into which they have fallen.”¹ This quote captured how Madison saw himself in the historic moment of creating an American federal constitution. It first demonstrates Madison’s clear admiration for the republics the states have created individually. More broadly, this was a recognition of the merit and wisdom which can be found in republican constitutions. Not only that, but Madison saw himself as a continuation of this intellectual tradition of republican thinkers, as he was tasked with learning from their mistakes and fixing them in the republic he and the other framers constructed. It was within this framework, of admiration for past ideas with the need to update them to their own circumstances, that the American framers found themselves. Though this task may not have been pleasing, it was a task that Madison and others nonetheless pursued as they saw the necessity of their historical moment.

The constitution imagined by the American federalist framers was a republic in its design. Their ideas about government were directly informed by their study of republics and republican theory throughout history, and this knowledge was taken and applied to their own

¹ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay, “The Federalist Papers” Congress.gov Resources. December 12, 2011. <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers> Federalist 48. From this point on, Federalist papers will be cited in the following format: Author Last Name, Federalist #.

task of constitution creation. These thinkers were educated in the republican tradition, their discourse was set in republican terms, the problems of government they feared were bred from the republican tradition, and the constitution held republican principles as its foundation. The classical republican tradition cannot be separated from the political ideology of the American framers. In imagining their new government, the American framers did divert from republican precedent in their conceptions of virtue and the individual, but only in an attempt to create what they saw as a more perfect form of republicanism. The Constitution of the United States certainly falls in line with the republican tradition as it is a result of the framers utilizing republican values and theory in order to apply them to the United States.

The discussion among historians surrounding the political philosophy of the framers has centered on the liberalism/republicanism dichotomy. At one end of the spectrum are those, such as Maurizio Viroli and Paul Rahe, who argue that the framers were products of liberalism and that they created a new, liberal system.² At the other end of the spectrum are authors, such as J.G.A. Pocock and Carl J. Richard, who argue the framers are in line with republican thought and are descendants of the republican tradition of thought.³ Others still, such as Isaac Kramnick, Gordon Wood, and Andrew Shankman, argue the framers fall somewhere between these traditions.⁴ They argue that what the framers created can be described as a sort of synthesis of

² See: Maurizio Viroli, *Republicanism*, Translated by Antony Shugaar, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern The Ancien Regime in Classical Greece*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994)

³ See: Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016)

⁴ See: Isaac Kramnick, The "Great National Discussion": The Discourse of Politics in 1787, In *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), pp. 3-32., PDF, Accessed: <file:///C:/Users/jonah/Downloads/Kramnick%20Discourse%20of%20Politics.pdf>; Andrew Shankman, *Original Intent Hamilton, Madison, and the American Founding*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), EPUB, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.wvu.edu/lib/wvu/detail.action?docID=4322022>

both traditions or at the very least that the framers drew on each so interchangeably that their specific blend represents a confusion of terms that creates a complicated blend of each. Finally, Joseph Postell argues that the liberalism/republicanism dichotomy does not exist in such a sharp distinction in the minds of the framers as they do for contemporary thinkers.⁵ Regardless, this balance between liberalism and republicanism has dominated the discourse surrounding the American founding in the desire to understand the framers' political ideology.

The argument of this essay, in reference to the existing debate of the intellectual traditions informing the framers, will focus on how they were members of the republican tradition. Though there are aspects of the framers' thought which can certainly fit under the broader umbrella of "liberalism", labeling the framers as liberal thinkers exclusively is a misrepresentation of their ideology. To begin with, there existed no comprehensive ideology of liberalism as it is understood today. Liberalism in contemporary discourse is a system based on natural rights which predate government, and are therefore immune from encroachment, which are centered on private property and personal liberty. Some of these ideas, such as natural rights, are present in the writings of the *Federalist Papers*. However, to assert their inclusion is indicative of a broader liberal basis of political ideology of the framers would misrepresent their thoughts. The framers were educated in republican theory and likewise republican thought formed the basis for their political discourse and understanding. They believed they were creating a republic and therefore their more liberal developments still can be viewed as consistent with their pursuit of creating a more durable form of republicanism. There was not such a strict distinction between uniquely republican and liberal ideas for the framers so it was

⁵ See: Joseph Postell, "Regulation During the American Founding: Achieving Liberalism and Republicanism", In *American Political Thought*, 01 January 2016, Vol.5(1), pp.80-108. PDF, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/ampolth5&id=82&men_tab=srchresults

not a matter of balancing the two in their mind, but their focus was on creating a republic which would be stable and resist the problems of past systems of government.⁶ Therefore, it is only fair to the framers to situate them as members of the intellectual tradition they saw themselves as part of and which dominated their political discourse: republicanism.

The analysis of this essay will be a close reading of the *Federalist Papers*. By focusing this analysis through the *Federalist Papers*, the conclusions drawn are by consequence narrow. Written by John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison under the pseudonym “Publius”, these essays had the purpose of convincing Americans to adopt the new constitution. All three authors are federalists and fall on the same side of the ratification debate, but these essays are not a comprehensive political manifesto of federalist thought. Though these essays represent a consistent ideology amongst the three authors, the ideas presented are of these authors alone. Therefore, when the terms “framer” or “federalist” are referred to throughout this paper, they should be understood as referring to these three men, as they were federalists and involved in the actual framing of the Constitution. This is important because the analysis in this paper is through the lens of the *Federalist Papers*, and therefore any broader federalist or framer thought represented in this paper is through the filter of these three authors.

These essays serve as an explanation of the authors’ understanding of republican thought and its relevance to the task of American constitution building. The authors spend a tremendous amount of time throughout their essays justifying their model of republicanism through the use of existing republican theory. These are also effective sources for analyzing the relationship of

⁶ Joseph Postell, “Regulation During the American Founding: Achieving Liberalism and Republicanism”, In *American Political Thought*, 01 January 2016, Vol.5(1), pp.80-108. PDF, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/ampolth5&id=82&men_tab=srchresults

those on both sides of the ratification debate to republicanism. The authors of the *Federalist Papers* respond to antifederalist concerns and made positive assertions about the merits of their own ideas. Thus, these essays are a valuable lens by which the federalists' relationship to, and ideas regarding, classical republican theory can be examined. The authors are building off the republican tradition and applying, and in some cases augmenting, republican precedent in order to lay out their vision of how the American republic should be structured.

To understand the intellectual tradition the authors are drawing on to form their conception of republicanism, a discussion of republicanism's intellectual history is necessary. Republican theory begins with the first republics in history, Greece and Rome, and continues as a basis of political ideology to the establishment of the United States. Authors such as Cicero, Livy, Polybius, and Plutarch are foundational in describing how these original ancient republics functioned. The ancient authors' manuscripts served as true observations of the nature of republicanism for later intellectuals. Though ancient accounts are viewed with more skepticism by modern historians, those engaged in republican political discourse, and certainly the authors of the *Federalist Papers*, saw these ancient authors as foundational to their own understanding of republicanism.⁷ The next influential author in the history of republican thought was Niccolò Machiavelli. The 15th century Italian author approached political theory with scientific rigor as he sought to answer his central question of what made the Roman republic work.⁸ His *Discourses on Livy*, a work which analyzes Livy's *Histories*, attempts to answer this question and outlines Machiavelli's own ideas regarding republicanism from his study of the ancient models. Building on republican thought, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* follows

⁷ Richard, *Founders and the Classics*, 53.

⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, Translated by Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

Machiavelli's precedent in trying to understand what it is that makes republicanism function. His work is concerned with understanding the essential spirit of republicanism in contrast with other forms of government.⁹ Montesquieu was clearly influential in the minds of the framers as he is quoted directly numerous times throughout the *Federalist Papers*, and his ideas are indirectly addressed when the framers are working outside of republican precedent. Finally, David Hume's contribution to republican theory is worth noting because he was more contemporary to the American framers than the other thinkers discussed thus far. He wrote in the early to mid-18th century, and the framers were certainly familiar with his work and his ideas were incorporated in their work.¹⁰ Hume was concerned, as were the framers, with making republicanism work in an increasingly changing modern world, especially making republicanism compatible with commercial society.¹¹ These authors are among the most influential in the republican intellectual tradition. They were certainly influential in the minds of the framers and their ideas form the basis of the American framers' republican knowledge.

From these authors of republican theory, a comprehensive understanding of republicanism can be described which would represent the basis of the knowledge the American framers possessed. To Madison, a republic was "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".¹² This quote underscores a few important aspects of classical republicanism as it was understood by the

⁹ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Translated and edited by Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Xlii.

¹⁰ Daniel W. Howe, "The Political Psychology of the Federalist" in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3, The Constitution of the United States (Jul., 1987), pp. 485-509; PDF, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1939767.pdf>, 490.

¹¹ David Hume, *Selected Essays*, Edited by Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Xviii.

¹² Madison, Federalist 39.

framers. The first being that republican power rests in its citizenry and is therefore responsible for providing for the good of all. The “common good” of republican theory is a common good which is in the interest of the perseverance of the community as a whole. In other words, it is not always what may be in each individual’s interest, but it is a common good which seeks to provide for the health of the community as a political entity.¹³ This common good was also a recognition of the interdependence amongst citizens. Individuals saw that their well-being was tied to that of their fellow citizens, which caused them to collectively pursue a common good.

The second crucial point Madison touched on with his definition is the idea of “good behavior”, which for the purposes of understanding republican thought can be used to highlight the role of “virtue” in republican systems. Virtue was the force that motivated citizens to act in accordance with the pursuit of common good. It was the love of one’s homeland which instilled in citizens a preference of the public interest over their own.¹⁴ For citizens in ancient republics, this was expressed in its fullest form through warfare. Displaying glory on the battlefield in protection of one’s homeland was the ultimate expression of virtue because citizens are risking their own life for the security and freedom of their homeland.¹⁵ Warfare was also the most palpable example of interdependence for Republican thinkers. Warfare made it nearly impossible to deny one’s interdependence with their countrymen, as individual soldiers’ lives relied just as much on the men fighting to either side of them as their own skill in war. The expression of interdependence in warfare its most clear example in republics, and along with virtue and pursuit of a common good formed the *sine qua non* of republican government. The framers derived their understanding of republicanism from their classical education, and it is from this foundational

¹³ Maurizio Viroli, *Republicanism*, Translated by Antony Shugaar, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 11.

¹⁴ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 36.

¹⁵ Viroli, *Republicanism*, 75.

knowledge of republican government's essential principles that the framers created their own republic.

This paper will consist of three sections. The first section will discuss the classical education of the framers which instilled in them their knowledge of and reverence for classical Greek and Roman authors. This section will also discuss the fundamental principles of republicanism, namely enlightened rule and pursuit of the common good, which the framers adopted directly from the classical tradition. Then, the paper will transition to a discussion of how the federalists sought to solve the problems of licentiousness and tyranny as they appear in republican thought. This section, along with the first, will situate the framers within the intellectual context of classical republican thought. Therefore, in the transition to the third section, which discusses the changes to republican thought the framers instituted, it will be clear how they are creating change that is compatible with the established republican tradition. The changes that will be discussed are the new conceptions of virtue and of the individual in relation to the republic instituted by the framers. By focusing on these three areas, this paper will make clear the American framers were the products of classical republican thought and that this intellectual tradition provided the basis for the creation of the American Constitution.

I. Classical Roots of Republican Principles

The framers of the American Constitution were clearly out to create a republic and their understanding of government was forged in the republican tradition. Their vast knowledge of the classical republican tradition solidified their vision of how a government should function and its goals. This classical understanding of governance is manifested in the federalists' insistence on

creating a government ruled through the virtue of the best of a community in the interest of the common good.

Education for the intellectuals involved in the formation of the United States consisted almost exclusively of the classics. Greek and Roman authors dominated the education system and instilled in students a certain reverence for their works. The classics constituted the largest share of a grammar school student's material each day.¹⁶ What this did was instill the classics as the intellectual basis of the framers at a young age which clearly stuck with them beyond their youth. Hamilton and other framers maintained "commonplace books" after their education. These were books that would be filled with passages and quotes that they saw as interesting and that they would want to reference later. Madison's commonplace book, for example, was filled with Latin quotations of ancient authors such as Aristotle, Sallust, Cicero, and Tacitus.¹⁷ It was true as well that the framers saw themselves in classical terms. They found kinship with their ancient counterparts in their struggle against tyranny and in their role as republic builders.¹⁸

This connection to a classical tradition is also apparent in the writing of the *Federalist Papers*. Perhaps the most obvious allusion to antiquity was the authors' adoption of the pseudonym "Publius". Publius, as Plutarch said, was one of the original founders of the Roman Republic. The name Publius then, was a statement in itself, aligning the authors of the *Federalist Papers* with ancient republican framers. The *Federalist Papers* are riddled with allusions to antiquity when discussing the authors' own ideas. Federalist no. 63 highlighted the errors of Socrates' trial that are used as justification for later checks on the passions of the many.¹⁹ In

¹⁶ Carl J. Richards, *The Founders and the Classics Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) 14.

¹⁷ Richards, *Founders and the Classics*, 24-25.

¹⁸ Richards, *Founders and the Classics*, 8.

¹⁹ Madison, Federalist 63.

Federalist no. 18, Hamilton described the Grecian republics as the most considerable of ancient confederacies.²⁰ Later republican thinkers are utilized as well in conjunction with the Federalist's own use of classical examples. In Federalist no. 9 Hamilton lets Montesquieu's own words justify his thoughts on the strength of confederate republics.²¹ What these examples make abundantly clear is Publius' own conception as a part of this republican tradition and that their task was to create a republic. Hamilton captures this desire to institute a republic as central to the task of the framers, as he said in Federalist no. 1. A central object is the assurance of "conformity of the proposed constitution to the true principles of republican government".²² In this way, the classics served not only as a trove of knowledge for the federalists to learn from, but they understood these texts as truth and therefore directly took ideas from the classics which they applied to their own task of constitution building.

The first of these ideas which is referenced throughout the *Federalist Papers* is that republics should be governed by the best of a community. This idea has clear roots throughout the republican intellectual tradition. Niccolò Machiavelli held an aristocratic view of how liberty is to be maintained in republican government. He saw the best of the community, the nobles, as being able to best preserve liberty because of their detachment from passions of ambition, and therefore their focus is on maintaining the republic.²³ Likewise, David Hume professed skepticism of "the lower sort of people" and their ability to discern what is good for the community in higher offices of republics.²⁴ Thinkers in America echoed this republican desire to have the best among the community in positions of leadership. The Americans rejected any ideas

²⁰ Hamilton and Madison, Federalist 18.

²¹ Hamilton, Federalist 9.

²² Hamilton, Federalist 1.

²³ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 32.

²⁴ Hume, *Selected Essays*, 308.

of an entrenched aristocracy in favor of the idea of a “natural aristocracy”.²⁵ This consisted of people in the community who were of exceptional ability and would therefore be able to govern and discern the good of the community most astutely.

The federalists make abundantly clear that virtuous rule by the best of the community was an objective of theirs for their new constitution. Federalist no. 63 outlines clearly the need for the Senate to serve as the “enlightened” guardians of the public good in the face of the unruly passions of the people.²⁶ This was a real point of emphasis for the federalists as enlightened rule was both a principle of republicanism, but was also something they perceived as being lacking in their own time. What both proponents of the Constitution and those against ratification saw was the inability of the people to identify the few that constituted the “natural aristocracy”, and therefore the people were not being led by those best able to discern the common good and rule with virtue, but were elevating demagogues in their place.²⁷ This insistence on hierarchy to produce positive results was also a manifestation of the Publius’s view of human nature. The conventional view being that human nature was governed by reason, interest, and passion – virtue being the highest form of reason – therefore just as an individual must be governed by an internal hierarchy, so too must a community elevate those who could act in accordance with virtue in order for the community to be governed well.²⁸ These ideas of human nature and of natural aristocracy informed their view of government and its overwhelming need to be ruled by the best of the community. Therefore, the federalists set out to create a government which could

²⁵ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 515.

²⁶ Hamilton or Madison, Federalist 63.

²⁷ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 516.

²⁸ Howe, “*The Political Psychology of the Federalist*”, 491, 500.

effectively filter through the passions of the many in favor of the maintenance of an over-arching common good.²⁹

The structure of the government that the framers created reflected their devotion to the idea of enlightened rule by the natural aristocracy of the community. The framers of the Constitution strengthened the offices most immune to the passions of the many, such as the senate, the president, and judiciary branch precisely because of their desire to ensure enlightened rule.³⁰ The Senate acts as this check on passions within the legislative branch. Publius said that by selecting senators indirectly through state assemblies, the Senate “will in general be composed of the most enlightened and respectable citizens, there is reason to presume that their attention and their votes will be directed to those men only who have become the most distinguished by their abilities and virtue, and in whom the people perceive just grounds for confidence”.³¹ Likewise, the electoral college serves the same function in selecting the president; by creating an impartial body, removed from influence of the people and self-interest, the framers were hoping to reinforce the idea of selection based on virtue rather than unruly passions.³² The indirect aspects of the institutions the framers created were meant to ensure rule by the best of the community, in line with what they saw as a foundational principle of republican thought.

Rule by an enlightened few in the framer’s government was by no means intended to create a self-concerned, tyrannical, oligarchy. On the contrary, elevating the most virtuous of the

²⁹ Isaac Kramnick, The "Great National Discussion": The Discourse of Politics in 1787, In *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), pp. 3-32., PDF <file:///C:/Users/jonah/Downloads/Kramnick%20Discourse%20of%20Politics.pdf>, 12-13.

³⁰ Howe, *Political Psychology of the Federalists*, 501.

³¹ Jay, Federalist 64.

³² Hamilton, Federalist 68.

community was intended to provide for an even more fundamental principle of republican government: the need for the government to discern and execute policies which are in the interest of a common good. The end of government was the procurement of a common good, and this idea was another that the federalists observed as true in the classical tradition, and therefore was an idea they sought to apply themselves. Niccolò Machiavelli establishes that a prudent follower of a republic is one who desires to serve not his own interests, but those of the common good.³³ With common good as the goal of a republic, it is also stated by those in the republican tradition, that a government must have checks that push people towards the pursuit of a common good and away from the private interests referenced by Machiavelli. David Hume picks up on this thread when he said that institutions of government must battle against the “depravity” of man, lest they bring the government to ruin.³⁴ Indeed, virtues such as frugality and equality must be practiced by the community as a whole and reinforced by institutions, said Montesquieu, in order for a healthy republic to persist.³⁵ The desire to serve the common good and civic virtue are not things necessarily inherent in individuals, so it is the role of good government to foster engagement in public life and provide for a common good.³⁶ Republicanism, therefore, relies on government to turn the community towards the pursuit of common good as central to creating a healthy republic.

The need to create and maintain a common good is not lost on the authors of the *Federalist Papers* and they make clear their insistence of government’s role in fostering a common good. Publius makes clear from the beginning in Federalist no. 2, that above all government ought to see the common good as its goal and that the states are at their best when

³³ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 45.

³⁴ Hume, *Selected Essays*, 20.

³⁵ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 44.

³⁶ Viroli, *Republicanism*, 14.

united under one union and the wisest among them are focused on maintaining this unity.³⁷ Federalist no. 6 picked up on this idea and stated “Commercial republics, like ours, will never be disposed to waste themselves in ruinous contentions with each other. They will be governed by mutual interest, and will cultivate a spirit of mutual amity and concord”.³⁸ Significantly, what Publius demonstrated in this line, is the thought that the citizens of an American commercial republic must recognize their own interdependence in order to procure a common good. Individual contention, as Publius said, only leads to ruin, whereas concord and mutual interest can lead to overall communal well-being. All this to say that Publius’s desire for unity and communal good is crucial because it is how they conceive of a healthy republic functioning based on their understanding of previous republican doctrine and therefore they saw the need to instill these principles in their new government.

The institutions of the framers’ government reflected their desire to create a sovereign power which was solely concerned with providing for a common good. The framers recognized the need for institutions to foster and protect the pursuit of a common good in the inability of the Articles of Confederation to adequately achieve this. The federal government was not strong enough to force individual states to comply to its policies, therefore states could act against the mandates of the whole with no fear of repercussions.³⁹ This was a problem which, as is stated in Federalist no. 22, struck at the very heart of republican theory which relied on rule by the majority in perceiving the common good.⁴⁰ Likewise, the framers saw the need for the federal government to possess the authority to direct the resources of the republic towards the pursuit of

³⁷ Jay, Federalist 2.

³⁸ Hamilton, Federalist 6.

³⁹ Andrew Shankman, *Original Intent: Hamilton, Madison, and the American Founding*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 14-15.

⁴⁰ Hamilton, Federalist 22.

a common good. Concerning taxation, Federalist no. 30 states the necessity that “the resources of the community, in their full extent, will be brought into activity for the benefit of the Union”.⁴¹ It was in this context which the federalists saw the role of government in regulation. Its goal, in essence, was to ensure individual pursuit was still in line with what would benefit the community as a whole.⁴²

Finally, in the federalists’ strongest check against the self-interest destroying the common good, they took great care to emphasize sovereignty resting ultimately in the hands of the people. The ultimate need to be re-elected to keep power and the direct reliance of popular support in being selected to the House of Representatives was intended by the framers to ensure that representatives never forget what they are ultimately tasked with; the promotion of the common good.⁴³ This, as well as the authority given to the new constitution, were all attempts to provide for the common good as the framers saw its crucial place in republican government.

The federalists’ conception of government is representative of their understanding of the classics and is greatly informed by the republican intellectual tradition. With their understanding of the objectives of a republican government in place, the federalists also looked to tradition to perceive the potential pitfalls of a republican system.

II. The Imperfection of Republican Government

⁴¹ Hamilton, Federalist 30.

⁴² Postell, *Regulation During the American Founding*, 89.

⁴³ Madison, Federalist 58; Jay, Federalist 64; Hamilton, Federalist 71.

In Federalist no. 9 Hamilton paints previous republics in history as having some fatal flaws which must be overcome in order to produce a stable government. Hamilton described republics of the past vacillating between extremes of anarchy and tyranny with few periods of stability interrupting the states of chaos. Licentiousness and tyranny existed on opposite ends of a spectrum. Licentiousness was a state of extreme liberty where individuals have no interests but their own and indulge their own self-interest to the extreme. Tyranny, conversely, was the loss of liberty at the hands of an individual or faction in power which exerts their own will arbitrarily over the citizenry. Luckily, in Hamilton's eyes, the problems of classical republics were not so immutable as to be impossible to overcome, as he said "They are means, and powerful means, by which the excellences of republican government may be retained and its imperfections lessened or avoided".⁴⁴ Licentiousness and tyranny have been problems which thinkers throughout the republican tradition have had to wrestle with, and problems which the republics of history have failed to find concrete solutions for. With this as their basis, the federalists wanted to create a republic that could effectively resist both. Their institutional changes were therefore not antithetical to the republican tradition, but were meant to fix what had always been seen as the fatal flaws of republicanism. The debate was classical in scope and their solutions were meant to create a better republic.

Licentiousness was a problem that the framers first found themselves tasked with ameliorating if they wanted to create what they saw as a more perfect republic. Licentiousness is an obvious problem for republics, as they rely on the procurement and maintenance of a common good amongst its citizens. Publius saw this inability of authority to resist anarchy and licentiousness as a problem well-documented in its potential to cause the ruin of great republics.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, Federalist 9

Publius also observed licentiousness as being a flaw in the ancient Greek republics which contributed to their eventual fall to the Macedonians and later the Romans. Because the Greek states became so distracted by in-fighting, their confederacy fell apart, as each state was concerned in their own pursuits rather than in maintaining the confederacy.⁴⁵ When this phenomenon manifests in individuals under a system of government not strong enough to corral their ambitions it can be equally damaging to republics. Montesquieu called this a state of “extreme equality”. In this state, each individual sees themselves as completely equal and there exists no regard for authority. The result is that individuals see themselves as their own sovereign authority, and therefore all semblance of common good is lost, as each individual sees their own conception of right as what is best.⁴⁶ This represented a great problem in need of a solution for republican thinkers because to lose the pursuit of common good is to lose the very nature of republican government.

The federalists’ fears of licentiousness, stemming from its place in classical tradition, was compounded by their observations of American life around them. What they saw was a nation which had waxed overly-revolutionary. The federalists saw the people to be too self-interested and beholden to their own passions for government to effectively promote a common good. What many of the federalists observed was an “excess of democracy” in the state legislatures as they felt they were overly-beholden to public opinion.⁴⁷ In terms of republican theory, the state legislatures were not focusing on a common good but instead catering to the passions and interests of individuals. This would have also represented a breakdown in interdependence amongst citizens, another key aspect of a republican system. If everyone was pursuing their own

⁴⁵ Hamilton and Madison, Federalist 18.

⁴⁶ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 112.

⁴⁷ Woody Holton, *An "Excess of Democracy": Or a Shortage? The Federalists' Earliest Adversaries*. In “Journal of the Early Republic” Vol. 25, No. 3 (Fall, 2005), pp. 339-382, 346.

interests, then there was no recognition of communal good or communal dependence. It was also thought by some of the federalists that government had become hijacked by demagogues who were driven by their own ambition and had therefore turned their back on ruling through virtue and in the public interest.⁴⁸ In essence, government was failing to adequately quell the ambition of individuals after the revolution and the federalists saw this as a threat to order and stability for the new union.

The Articles of Confederation's inability to check ambition and steer the union away from the perils of extreme liberty was one of the main reasons licentiousness was taking hold in the United States. Licentiousness was one of the greatest factors which united Hamilton and Madison under the federalist cause. They were mutually concerned with creating a "durable liberty" which required a stronger federal government that could effectively unite individuals in the pursuit of common good.⁴⁹ The Articles of Confederation possessed no such authority, and therefore the union was precipitously reliant on the voluntary cooperation of its members. Federalist no. 22 speaks of the ability of individual states to ruin federal treaties simply by choosing not to enforce them, therefore the "faith, the reputation, the peace of the whole Union, are thus continually at the mercy of the prejudices, the passions, and the interests of every member of which it is composed".⁵⁰ This created a fear in the minds of the framers that stability in the republic was continuously at risk to the passions of individuals under the Articles and that left unchecked, licentiousness had the power to dissolve the newly formed union.

⁴⁸ Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), EPUB, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.wvu.edu/lib/wvu/reader.action?docID=4321937&query=>,70.

⁴⁹ Shankman, *Original Intent*, 9.

⁵⁰ Hamilton, Federalist 22.

Keeping these fears in mind, the federalists went about creating a national government which could effectively check what they perceived to be the unruly passions of the masses and instead provide for the common good. What the framers created was an essentially aristocratic government in order to check the democratic tendencies they saw all around them.⁵¹ In creating a government that was less responsive to the passions of individuals, the framers hoped to avoid the problems of demagoguery they were seeing in the states and elsewhere.⁵²

The specific institution that best reflects this desire of the framers to separate passions from governance is the Senate. As there are only two senators per state, they are responsible for considerably more constituents than those in the House of Representatives, and are therefore more detached from local interests. This was done in the hopes that they will not be as likely to “yield to the impulse and sudden violent passions” of individuals and communities.⁵³ Another broader fix to this problem of licentiousness was to make laws handed down by the federal government directly applicable to individuals. In making law apply directly, as Publius in Federalist no. 16 stated, the federal government’s authority is not dependent on the whims of individual states, but is binding, thereby eliminating the ability of states to reject common measures in favor of their own interests.⁵⁴ These fixes were manifestations of the federalists’ fear that unchecked interest was fatal to republics as well as a recognition that only a government imbued with adequate authority could avoid the dangers of licentiousness.

⁵¹ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), EPUB, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.wvu.edu/lib/wvu/detail.action?docID=4322022>, 513.

⁵² Holton, *An Excess of Democracy*, 349.

⁵³ Hamilton or Madison, Federalist 62.

⁵⁴ Hamilton, Federalist 16.

The fears over licentiousness drove the framers to create a government vested with enough authority to resist the passions of the masses. However, this process of establishing a strong government was a double-edged sword. A government too weak could not effectively prevent licentiousness, but a government that is too strong ran the risk of tyranny.

The fear of tyranny was consistent amongst republican thinkers of the past and it was certainly something the federalists wanted to prevent in their republic. Tyranny was understood by republican thinkers and the federalists to be arbitrary interference at the will of another or of a faction. Conversely, liberty would be the assurance that citizens of a republic are not subject to arbitrary interference or domination at the hands of an individual or faction.⁵⁵ Tyranny has the power to undermine republican values and is just as dangerous as licentiousness in its ability to cripple republics because tyranny also represents a departure from pursuit of the common good. It is for this reason that classical historians spent so much time discussing military and political subjects. It is because they were chiefly concerned with figuring out what causes tyranny, and how they could learn from the past to prevent it in their own time.⁵⁶ The federalists recognized this, and Publius said in Federalist no. 22 that “history furnishes us with so many mortifying examples of the prevelancy” of republics being undone by leaders who turn away from the interest of the public in order to wield power to benefit themselves.⁵⁷

The federalist framers, being students of the republican tradition, adopted these fears of tyranny. They saw the Articles of Confederation as being equally inept at preventing licentiousness as they did potential tyranny. The relative weakness of the federal Constitution allowed for licentiousness through its inability to force states to comply to its mandates, but it

⁵⁵ Viroli, *Republicanism*, 36-37.

⁵⁶ Richards, *Founders and the Classics*, 87.

⁵⁷ Hamilton, Federalist 22.

also opened the door for tyranny in the ability for states to exercise powers that they did not possess. Publius noted in Federalist no. 22 that tyranny had sprung more often from assumptions of power under a weak constitution, than from the authority of strong constitutions exercised fully.⁵⁸ Likewise, power was too concentrated under the Articles. Legislative, judicial, and executive powers were all vested in the legislature, prompting Publius to observe through the words of Thomas Jefferson that “concentrating these in the same hands, is precisely the definition of despotic government”.⁵⁹ It was the relative weakness to prevent power grabs coupled with the lack of checks on concentrated authority which caused the federalists to fear the Articles lacked the capacity to effectively prevent tyranny.

The federalists were not the only thinkers who were concerned with the threat of tyranny to a republic, but the individuals who were opponents of the Constitution also expressed their desire to eliminate the potential for tyranny in the new government. What was especially concerning to these opponents was the thought that the Constitution of the federalists had swung the pendulum too far on the scale of authority, and that the result was something resembling a permanent aristocracy.⁶⁰ Their fears of aristocracy, however, were not wholly incompatible with the federalists’ views on aristocracy’s role in government. Opponents of the Constitution did not fear the rule of the natural aristocracy, but were worried about a hereditary oligarchy taking hold. In creating a distant and powerful Senate, the federalists had provoked oppositional cries to balance its power with a lower house which was equally strong, and therefore be able to check the body which those against ratification saw as most susceptible to tyranny through the

⁵⁸ Hamilton, Federalist 22.

⁵⁹ Madison, Federalist 48. This is consistent with other republican thought. Reference Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 20.

⁶⁰ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, 515.

establishment of a permanent aristocracy.⁶¹ However, those on both sides of this debate held conceptions of liberty which largely lined up. They both saw the achievement of liberty through the limiting of potential for arbitrary power, but also believed that there are areas of life which government has legitimate authority to control, and that powers which are legitimate should be strong enough for government to be effective.⁶² This, arguably, is exactly what the federalists sought to do in finding a balance between extremes of licentiousness and tyranny.

With arguments of some antifederalists in mind, as well as the long tradition of tyranny's threat to republicanism, the federalists were tasked with explaining how their new government was to be resistant to tyranny. Consequently, the framers designed each aspect of government with the fear of tyranny in mind. More broadly, the federalists – especially Madison – recognized that tyranny could be sourced from factions or individuals but also from the majority of citizens.⁶³ Therefore, the government sought to both protect the rule of the majority while still protecting the rights of those in the minority.⁶⁴ More specifically, the framers baked in a resistance to tyranny in the Constitution through the separation of powers and the assurance of sovereignty resting in the hands of the people. As stated before, the concentration of all powers within one body was the federalists' definition of despotism. Therefore, the Constitution separates these powers into different branches of government so that each can check and balance one another.⁶⁵ This disallowed any one part of government from wielding power in an unchecked way.

⁶¹ Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 69-70.

⁶² Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 54.

⁶³ Shankman, *Original Intents*, 50-51. In Reference to Madison, Federalist 10; Madison described this fear as stemming from the fact that if a minority were to become tyrannical they could be defeated by a common vote by the majority. However, republics have no natural check to a majority which is tyrannical, thereby creating a need for Madison to create a republic which could effectively do that.

⁶⁴ Madison, Federalist 51.

⁶⁵ Madison, Federalist 46, 47, 51.

This same line of thinking also caused the framers to vest sovereignty amongst the people as a whole. If the government owes its existence to the authority of the people and is dependent on them to remain in power, then they must act in a way that is conducive to the common good or else lose their power altogether.⁶⁶ Publius laid out the difficulty of corrupting a body such as the Senate because of the complex and counter-balanced system the framers created. For the Senate to institute tyranny it would have to itself become corrupt, then corrupt the state legislatures to keep them in power. Then, the people likewise would need to be corrupted lest the state legislatures lose their power, and finally the House of Representatives would need to be equal in this tyrannical plot because of their equal share in legislative power.⁶⁷ All this to say, the framers' fears of tyranny drove them to create a system with so many checks that authority could not be wielded in capriciousness.

The very recognition of the dangers of licentiousness and tyranny can be observed in republics throughout history and were equally present in the *Federalist Papers*. Thus, the federalists sought to employ solutions that they saw as ways to create a more perfect republic. Therefore, what manifests as the federalists' most novel invention in their Constitution still rests on republican thought. It is only after the federalists' republican conception of government's function was established and their solutions to classically republican problems solved, that the framers were free to innovate and adapt republican government so that it could adequately be applied to the American system.

III. An American Virtue

⁶⁶ Madison, Federalist 45.

⁶⁷ Madison, Federalist 63.

What the federalists created in the American Constitution can certainly be called a new brand of republicanism. To remove the classical republican aspects of the framers' work, however, is to fundamentally misrepresent their thinking. Their new visions of virtue and the individual was not an abandonment of common good and republican values, but were both efforts to create a more durable kind of virtue and a government that was more capable in accomplishing the goal of creating and maintaining a common good. What the framers of the American republic attempted to do was capture these positive effects of a system built off virtue institutionally, thereby removing the reliance in past republics on individuals to bring virtue into the system of government. What this did was redefine an individual's relationship with governance and create a new kind of virtue within the American republic. However, these developments still must be viewed within a republican context. The framers innovated within this framework to create a more durable form of republican government which could function in the United States.

Virtue's place within republican intellectual history cannot be understated, as it is seen as the animating factor of republicanism throughout its history. Montesquieu identifies the spirit of republicanism as "love of one's homeland" which then leads to a desire to serve it.⁶⁸ Republicanism placed reliance on virtue because of its ability to motivate individuals to subvert their own needs to those of the community.⁶⁹ It is this desire to serve publicly which drove republican government because of the way in which it drove citizens to participate in government and sustain it. Therefore, in a system based on virtue, the individual is only ever referenced in their capacity to serve the common good. In other words, the worth of an individual

⁶⁸ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Xli.

⁶⁹ Kramnick, *The Great National Discussion*, 14

is measured according to their contribution to the overall health of the community.⁷⁰ Aristotle said that in order to become fully realized as a human individuals must be engaged in politics, as that is the only activity which provides adequate meaning to one's life.⁷¹ Therefore, virtue creates a system that definitively ties individuals to their community. Individuals are not only supposed to act in virtue but are meant to play an active role in ensuring the government is focused solely on virtuous rule as well. The thought was that representatives would become vulnerable to corrupting forces while in power, therefore it is necessary for them to return to their constituents, by means of reelection. Then, their constituents would remind them why they are ruling and on what principles – virtue – they must stand.⁷² In this way, it was the virtue within each citizen which was the check to corruption in republics. The system relied on an active and virtuous society made up of engaged citizens for the health of the republic. This is what the federalists would have known about the prominence of virtue in a republican system and how virtue had been presented in the existing republican tradition.

With the intense focus on the public good as the goal of republics built on virtue there existed is a need in the mind of previous republican thinkers for the citizenry to have a shared perception of what the common good is. Therefore, the thought for much of the intellectual tradition of republicanism is that republics can only exist in small, homogeneous communities. This idea operated on the need for individuals to all perceive the common good in the same way, though there may exist slight differences between citizens on how to obtain a common good, they were still viewing the same common good just through different eyes.⁷³ Montesquieu

⁷⁰ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 523.

⁷¹ Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern The Ancien Regime in Classical Greece*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 21.

⁷² Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 519.

⁷³ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 520

echoed this sentiment when describing the size of republics in reference to their overall health. He stated that republics work well being based in virtue, but can only work in small states, because of the need for a unified education to instill in its citizenry the same view of virtue.⁷⁴ He continued later in his work and said larger republics cause citizens to develop varying interests which serve to drive people away from the essential principles of virtue, thereby undoing the republic.⁷⁵ The thinkers of the American founding were split on this issue. The federalists ultimately split from tradition, opting instead for a diverse and large republic, whereas some antifederalist intellectuals stayed consistent to the republican tradition, thinking a small, homogeneous republic to be best.

Arguments from some antifederalist points of view echoed these arguments that republics must be centered on small, homogeneous communities. Their vision of government existed locally because of this classical emphasis on the necessity of a communal ethos. They first objected on the grounds that a large, disinterested state, could never account for the diversity of needs throughout the United states, therefore power needed to rest more locally to truly reflect the common good of communities.⁷⁶ However, even more egregious in the eyes of these opponents to the Constitution was the fact that the new government did not promote a shared vision of morality. Just as with republics of the past, they thought government should act as an example of communal morality.⁷⁷ They especially desired religion to fill this void and unite the country under one school of thought. Most notably, Samuel Adams envisioned America being organized as “Christian Sparta”; a state with a communal morality and a strict focus on the good

⁷⁴ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 38-39.

⁷⁵ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 124.

⁷⁶ Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 65.

⁷⁷ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, 485.

of the community over that of individual citizens.⁷⁸ These arguments were classic in nature and reflected the insistence in the classical tradition for a shared sense of virtue which could unite individuals in pursuit of a common good.

The federalists were not convinced of the need for communal homogeneity. Instead, they insisted that republics could function in the opposite extreme through a multiplicity of interests. Where previous thinkers had rejected private interests as mere passions that destroyed republics, Publius reconceptualized interests as rational, and therefore affirmed their place in human experience.⁷⁹ Consequently, private interests would need to be accounted for in their new republic. As Madison described in Federalist no. 10, there are two methods to mitigating the dangers of interest-based factions, which are eliminating their causes or their effects. To eliminate factions' causes would be to destroy the liberty that allows them to flourish. Therefore, the only reasonable remedy is to try to limit the dangers of its effects. For Publius, the way to achieve this is to multiply exponentially the amount of interests so that no specific one can dominate on their own, therefore the only thing left for differently interested groups to agree on is a common good.⁸⁰ This idea from Publius represents a clear understanding of private interests and that these exist alongside virtue, which made traditional models of the small, homogeneous republics insufficient in accounting for the diversity of interests that would exist in the American republic.

The acceptance of interests within the American republic was unique, but it is only an aspect of the truly revolutionary shift in republican thought that the American framers ushered in with the creation of the Constitution. They acknowledged that individuals did not always act

⁷⁸ Kramnick, *The Great National Discussion*, 11.

⁷⁹ Howe, *The Political Psychology of the Federalists*, 490.

⁸⁰ Madison, Federalist 10.

with virtue in mind, and therefore they removed virtue as the necessary component to their republic. Publius said in Federalist no. 51 that if men were angels, no government would be necessary; yet men are not, and therefore government cannot rely on the hope that men always act in virtue.⁸¹ Though the capacity for virtue existed in Publius's conception of human nature, interests and passions were coequal parts. What is worse, is that the hierarchy of human nature which Publius saw as leading to virtue – rationality, then interests, then passions – was inverted in the minds of men when they were exposed to the corrupting influence of power.⁸²

Compounding this problem, the federalists generally perceived a drop in virtue amongst American citizens in comparison to their ancient counterparts. It was precisely because of the framers' recognition of private, especially commercial, interests that they saw the martial aspects of classical virtue as especially incompatible with the American paradigm. Hamilton said in Federalist 24 that the continued mustering of militias would cause more harm than good, as it would cause individuals to be removed from their family and industry for long periods of time, thereby hurting the public through lost productivity and hurting private industry.⁸³ This represented a rejection of martial manifestations of interdependence on the part of the framers. It is because of this perceived drop in virtue amongst the American citizenry in conjunction with the framers' recognition of private interests that Gordon Wood says the framers set out to create a system that was "no longer founded in virtue".⁸⁴ To remove virtue as a central ingredient in their republic was remarkable considering virtue's privileged position in republics throughout history.

⁸¹ Madison, Federalist 51.

⁸² Howe, *The Political Psychology of the Federalists*, 491.

⁸³ Hamilton, Federalist 24.

⁸⁴ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, 475.

However, this was not a complete abandonment of virtue on the part of the framers. There was still room in the American republic for people of virtue, and the system still benefited from these types of people. Essentially, virtue became federalized in the sense that the leaders were still meant to rule through virtuous means, but the everyday citizenry lost their active role. However, the aspect of virtue that the framers valued and wanted to capture was its effects and its role creating a common good, not the reliance of each member of society to bring virtue to the system through their civic engagement. The system of checks, balances, and separations of powers were built into the federal structure by the framers so that interests could flourish without corrupting the system.⁸⁵ Where a republic based in virtue would rely on the virtue of its citizens to check unruly ambitions of those in power, this American system sought to divide government so that should one piece become corrupted, it would not cause the ruin of the whole, but the other pieces of government could resist corruption because of their coequal powers. Madison praises the American “compound republic” in its ability to resist the corrupting aspects of interests by dividing itself into multiple departments which check one another and are likewise checked themselves.⁸⁶ No one branch can govern independently, and therefore the need to find common ground is engrained into the federal structure resulting in a republic which does not rely on virtue to overcome interests, but institutionally forces competing groups to govern collaboratively in pursuit of a common good.

In a system, designed by the federalists, that no longer relies on individuals to provide virtue, there is room for a new type of individual within the American public. This new mode of republicanism also created a new definition of virtue and a restructuring of the relationship

⁸⁵ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 522.

⁸⁶ Madison, Federalist 51.

between individuals and virtue in the community. What this system did was essentially make the individual irrelevant in terms of their own civic agency; rather, a system un-reliant on virtue viewed citizens in an undifferentiated mass in terms of their public contributions.⁸⁷ This loss of individual civic agency was offset by gains made in the expansion of private life and the embracing of interests under the American republic. This can only be labeled as a new brand of republicanism because the very nature of government changed through the framers' recognition of individual interest in their system. Where the end of classical republics was the procurance of communal political freedom, political freedom was the means of the American republic to achieve an end of private well-being.⁸⁸ This restructuring of republican thought was truly revolutionary by the framers as it created a model of republicanism that could still achieve the essential goals of republicanism (i.e. rule of the majority in the interest of a common good) without depriving individuals of a private existence to sustain the community.

Thus, the American republic was built to account for the individual and did not wholly rely on virtue. However, the rhetoric of virtue was not lost in America. Despite the diminishing role of virtue in the public sphere, virtue took on a different meaning privately. The virtuous individual was still seen in their ability to contribute to the overall welfare of the community, but this was no longer a product of civic engagement, but a measure of one's economic activity.⁸⁹ Economic activity is naturally a self-interested activity, but thinkers in the early American republic recognized its potential to produce virtue. Jefferson echoed previous republican thinkers in his praise of the yeoman farmer, who's industry, in their view, contributed to individual

⁸⁷ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 524.

⁸⁸ Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 23.

⁸⁹ Kramnick, *The Great National Discussion*, 22.

virtues such as temperance and moderation which made them productive members of their community.⁹⁰

What this shift in virtue represents was not a rejection of virtue, but rather an acknowledgment of self-interest's place in a society. Essentially, the federalists' restructuring of virtue was more a move of pragmatism than a rejection of the classical tradition. In order to preserve the spirit of republicanism in its quest for common good, the framers had to account for or even embrace self-interest or else see their republic become crippled by individual interests in the same way past republics had. A common good was still obtainable even in a system built to allow private interests to flourish. Hamilton, in Federalist no. 35 outlined how this could work; he said that individuals in different industries should possess the recognition that their own well-being was tied to the well-being of those in other industries. He said, "Will not the merchant understand and be disposed to cultivate, as far as may be proper, the interests of the mechanic and manufacturing arts, to which his commerce is so nearly allied?"⁹¹ Through this recognition of mutual dependency amongst citizens, Publius believed that the need to pursue a common good would never be forgotten in the American republic. Now the manifestation of interdependency would be in set in economic terms rather than necessitating war to be maintained. Hamilton clearly believed that interdependence would not be lost in this system, just that it would be seen in an economic context. Therefore, the framers' encouragement of commerce and specialization can be understood in the context of attempting to create a more durable and dynamic form of virtue, one which could account for self-interest while still fostering a common good.⁹² This is the essence of Madison's Federalist no. 10; that factions may compete in favor of their own

⁹⁰ Richards, *The Founders and the Classics*, 160-161.

⁹¹ Hamilton, Federalist 35

⁹² Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 530

interests, but by allowing a multiplicity of interests no one can dominate, and therefore what can be agreed upon is the common good.⁹³ This self interest was still different from that of liberalism in the sense that it both recognized interdependence among individuals as well as the necessity of a common good.

The development of private interests and a private sector under the American republic is inseparable from a classically republican context. It is only in the pursuit of a better, more stable conception of virtue that a private life is formed in the American republic. The fact that virtue does not leave the rhetoric of American life even though the framers removed it as central to their system was a testament to the republican disposition of American intellectuals. Private life and industry, though more commonly referenced as evidence of America's founding as fundamentally liberal, is therefore a misrepresentation of what the framers were trying to accomplish. It is only through the attempt to create a more durable republic that the framers arrived at these new conceptions of individual rights and privatized virtue. The American founding was set in republican terms and is subsequently a byproduct of the framers working to apply republican ideas in a way that suits American life.

Though historians have argued over the intellectual legacy of the framers, the American republic is a product of the intellectual history of republicanism. The framers of the American Republic were educated in republican theory and their ideas and rhetoric are colored by their republican background. Their goal of fostering a common good and the government's role in creating it rings republican. Federalist fear of licentiousness and tyranny are based in past

⁹³ Madison, Federalist 10.

republics' inability to resist them, therefore resulting in their ruin. Even the federalist view of virtue, though augmented in their model of republicanism, is a response to how they observed virtue in past republics. Removing republican thought as the framers' intellectual basis in creating the Constitution is a mischaracterization of how their ideas came to be. The American republic was built on the republican intellectual tradition and the framers applied republican thought to their own contemporary government.

The significance of understanding the American framers and their republican influence is essential to understanding American political thought. In modifying republicanism as they did, Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, fundamentally changed republican theory. The necessity of updating classical models of republicanism to suit the American paradigm illustrated the framers' recognition that they were not perfect. Therefore, changes had to be made for a republic to persist in America. However, the fact that the framers nonetheless insisted on their government being a republic demonstrates the value they saw in the classical models. Though existing republican theory could not be applied perfectly to the American system, it was clearly important to the framers that their Constitution be viewed within a republican context.

Part 2

A Liberal Conception of The American Republic: How American Ideology Augments Government Structure

With the basis that the American republic is founded on republican ideals, the juxtaposition of how a liberal ideology is applied to our American system can be examined. In popular understanding of American governance, the discussion is always set in liberal terminology. I was not exposed to republicanism as a school of thought until college, and that was largely because of my own interest in the subject and being a history major. This means the majority of Americans have no real conception of what it means to live in a republic other than institutional aspects. In this, the animating spirit of republicanism is lost, and as was demonstrated previously, that is a crucial aspect of the system. Instead, liberalism has become the common creed of America's social ideology. I am not saying this is a bad thing as certainly liberalism has numerous positive contributions to our way of life. The protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of property are clearly things that improved the lives of individuals in America. However, the application of liberal ideology to a fundamentally republican system is bound to, and has, created problems. The relationship between liberalism and republicanism in America has produced interesting dynamics in American life that are observable today. In a moment such as ours where large portions of the American populace are realizing the seeming inabilities of our system to work for everyone it is important to examine why this may be the case. By examining how liberalism has been applied in America, and where it has come in conflict with our republican roots, we may be able to see how the tensions and problems which exist today may stem from.

The solution to any of the problems observed in America is not to adopt solely a republican system and reject liberalism, nor is it the opposite. If republicanism and liberalism existed on two opposite ends of an ideological spectrum, then I see our answer existing somewhere in the middle. However, what I have observed is that American ideology has lies primarily at the liberal extreme of the spectrum. Again, this is not in itself a negative, but the fact is that we live under a system of government which is foundationally republican, and this creates tension. No tension is greater in American life than the divide between public and private life. This tension itself is a manifestation of the divide between the republicanism and liberalism dichotomy, as republicanism is a largely community-oriented system whereas liberalism is almost solely focused on the individual. The exploration of the relationships between public and private, the individual and the community, and republicanism and liberalism are the central relationships explored in this paper. They will help us examine the central question of how we can effectively apply liberal ideology to our republican system in such a way that we can reap the best of both ideologies.

Formally, this paper will mirror my preceding work on the republican basis of the American founding. However, in this paper rather than just exploring how republican ideology informed the choices of the American framers, I will explore how our contemporary liberal interpretation of the framers' work has fundamentally changed how our American system, as it is manifested today, is different from the one imagined by the framers. Also useful in the analysis in this paper will be the use of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. This is a text written about Tocqueville's tour of the United States in the 1830s. His account of his observations will be useful in the sense that it allows us to see the beginning of liberal ideology sweeping the nation. Tocqueville's tour seemed to take place at a moment when there were still

republican sentiments clearly alive in the American republic, but where an undercurrent of liberalism was clearly also beginning to take hold of American ideology. His analysis will be useful in assessing our own time in reference to the early American republic.

In beginning this dive into the complex relationship between republicanism and liberalism it may be beneficial to return to some operational definitions of these ideologies. Republicanism is a political theory concerned with maintaining the political liberty of the community through the virtue of its citizens as a recognition of their interdependence. Therefore, republicanism is chiefly concerned with providing for the common good and is focused not on the individual, but the community at large. Liberalism, conversely, is a political theory which states the chief objective of a political community as the protection of life, liberty, and the property of its individual members.⁹⁴ Liberalism's focus is on the community only in reference to its ability to allow individual freedom and liberty. These definitions do not speak to the intricacies of either system, however they will allow us to form a basis of understanding to begin to explore the relationship between them at length.

Liberal Interpretations of the Foundations of Government

The superimposition of liberalism on the work of the framers both misrepresents what the framers saw as the basis of government as well as changes what contemporary Americans see as the fundamental goal of government. For the framers, that was collective security and liberty, for liberal thinkers, it is individual security and liberty. Understanding this initial divide will help us

⁹⁴ Viroli, *Republicanism*, 58.

to further understand how both traditions view leadership and their concepts of the common good.

As we begin further exploring the divide between the thought of the framers and liberal thinkers, it is important to first acknowledge the threat that liberalism poses to the work of the framers. Liberalism was not a comprehensive ideology at the time the framers were constructing the United States constitution. The first liberal ideas were around, and the framers certainly knew them. John Locke published his famous second treatise in 1689, therefore well before the formation of the constitution, and the framers almost directly quote in The Declaration of Independence with their insistence on the importance of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. However, the term “liberalism” as it is understood as a political ideology did not begin to be used until the early 19th century.⁹⁵ Therefore, when the framers were incorporating ideas of personal liberty and the idea of the individual, it was not a total adoption of a liberal philosophy, but a something they saw as adding to their republican system. This is important because if liberalism did not exist in the way in which it does today, therefore there is no way the framers could have adequately accounted for its effect on their government. Had they been able to predict liberalism’s profound impact on American ideology, they may have been more explicit in their insistence on a republican basis for their government. However, as it stands, it is important to analyze how the framers viewed the role of government in contrast to what later liberal thinkers have described as government’s basis.

As discussed previously, the basis of republican government is the political freedom of the community at large, and the individuals of the community act in virtue to protect this because

⁹⁵ Kirchner, Emil. *Liberal parties in Western Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2.

of their recognition of shared dependence. At the risk of belaboring this point, it is important to understand the sense of shared duty individuals in a republic feel, because it differs from the type of unity that exists in liberalism. In republics, the only goal of an individual was demonstrating virtue in service of the community. The government acted with communal interests at the heart of their decisions as well, doing whatever was necessary to protect the community. In the context of ancient republics this often meant war. However, this pervasive focus on communally motivated virtue explains the eagerness often displayed by ancient citizens to go to war, as it was an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the community. I think it is safe to say that we as a contemporary nation do not want war as a common part of society and that was rightly left out of the DNA of our republic by the framers. However, I believe the framers still believed that a devotion to one's community would be present even without war that would motivate individuals to act with their community in mind. Instead, this is where liberalism has complicated the relationship between an individual and their community under our modern system.

In contrast with republicanism, liberalism is focused on the good of the individual. The community is a way to ensure individual liberty and security rather than a common focus for individuals. This reverses the relationship between an individual and their community outlined in republican thought, and this often creates an adversarial relationship today between individuals and the broader community. Policies which are intended to procure collective good may be opposed by individuals because they feel they infringe on their own liberty. This is not a concern in republican thought because what is for the good of the community is the good of everyone. Yet, that is not seen the same way today in America, individuals cling to their own liberty and see any attempt to limit it as an attack from the community. A tangible example is the debate

over the second amendment. The actual text of the amendment demonstrates the communal focus of the framers as the right to bear arms in their capacity “as a member of a well-regulated militia”. Yet, in liberal political discourse it is interpreted as an individual right, that should it be limited in any way, is a breach of the fundamental freedom of an individual. I am not commenting on the validity of either argument, I am merely pointing out the fundamentally different interpretations of the role of community and government under republicanism and liberalism.

What is concerning in liberal thought in terms of American government is the hostility it creates between the community and individuals. Republicanism fosters a collective goal which individuals strive for as part of a broader community of equally motivated citizens set on providing for a common good. Liberalism fragments the community because of its individual focus and makes the community valuable only in its capacity to meet the needs of each individual. This is not a sustainable model as there is no way a community can possibly account for the needs of every member of a community, and the result is reminiscent of what we see today, which is mass loss of faith in the community and individuals retreating from the community to their own individualistic desires. To tie this into the framing of the United States government, the framers could not have wanted a society structured around disinterested individuals, as the system they created is a participatory republic.

What causes this divide between republicanism and liberalism is their base conceptions of what liberty means, as both see liberty as a goal, and in understanding how each conceive of liberty this divide may be able to be bridged to find a middle ground. The difference is between positive and negative liberty. Positive liberty is the freedom *to* do something, whereas negative liberty is freedom *from* interference. Ancient republics only had positive freedom and it was

manifested in their service to their community. In this sense, the ancient citizen was free to live their life to the fullest within the confines of their system. They lacked negative freedom in the sense that any imposition that the government made in restricting what an individual could do was legitimate. In other words, there was no check on the ability of the community to dictate the lives of its individual members, so long as everyone in the community saw their lives as affected equally it was fair. The development of negative liberty is a much needed and valuable development in contemporary understanding of liberty. We, as Americans, have set limits on which “inalienable” rights cannot be infringed upon. We also have positive liberty as we are free to pursue a good life within the American system. Therefore, in modern America we should be able to embrace the positive liberty that republicanism promotes while also adopting the negative liberty of liberalism which protects us as individuals. However, the problem is we have swung too far in terms of negative liberty where many Americans view any limitation of liberty as an attack on their basic rights as an individual. I think in returning to some aspects of positive liberty we may be able to more effectively promote the common good that the framers saw as so crucial in their system while still maintaining the important check of negative liberty. These two ideas do not have to be at odds, but only in the recognition of the emphasis liberalism has put on negative liberty over positive liberty, can we return to a more balance system.

An equally fundamental question that causes tension between republicanism and liberalism is the question of who should govern. Republicanism stresses the importance of elevating the best of the community to rule. This is good in the sense it attempts to place those most able to govern in positions of power, however it is problematic in its elitist connotations. Liberalism augments the idea of leadership because of its emphasis on the equality of individuals. If under liberalism, everyone is their own equally capable individual, then reason stands to follow that everyone is

capable of leadership. The drawback of this reasoning is that it makes it easier for those the framers referred to as demagogues to gain power and attacks intellectualism at a fundamental level. Again, the best leadership lies between these extremes of a strictly liberal or republican system.

The positives of a detached and intellectually driven ruling class are outlined previously as laid out by the framers. However, what has not been discussed is the extent to which this is an extremely elitist view. By saying there are a limited number of people in any community suited to lead and lead well republicanism assumes very little of the capacity of the “masses”. This also makes republicanism a less-democratic system. Elite rule exists in republican government in order to ensure the masses are not being led astray from the common good, but that in itself assumes that the majority of the community is not able to properly discern what is best for the whole. It is true that republican citizens have been deceived by a candidate who is able to speak well, but these examples are surely outliers in the history of republics. A certain degree of responsiveness by elected officials should be in place, and is something that certainly us as moderns see as extremely valuable in government.

Another aspect of elite rule overlooked by the framers, but that is certainly a reality of modernity, is the extent to which those who already have power in other sectors of life are the ones who gain power politically. This is especially true of money in American politics. Those who are economically powerful have an outsized voice in politics both in influence and ability to run for office. According to an article written in 2012, the average contributions for candidates running for the House of Representatives was \$1,689,580.⁹⁶ This number only increases as you

⁹⁶ Aliyah Frumin, “How much does it cost to win a seat in Congress? If you have to ask...”, *MSNBC*, (March 10, 2013). Accessed: <http://www.msnbc.com/hardball/how-much-does-it-cost-win-seat-congre>

move higher in the government. The problem with this is that the House, which by the framers own design was supposed to be the most democratic element of their government, is still incredibly out of reach for the average American financially. This means the only ones running are those who are already powerful, thereby reinforcing their position as a member of the elite.

Liberalism, in contrast, encourages a distinctly more egalitarian view of governance. Tocqueville speaks of the beauty of equality in America as he says the seeds of aristocracy are not sown in America as it is in other countries, and this allows citizens to have a greater influence than ever before in the affairs of government.⁹⁷ This is certainly a good thing, by breaking down the hierarchical nature of previous thought of humanity, liberal ideology certainly allowed more people to become active members of their community politically. This, of course, was extremely limited in actuality in the time Tocqueville toured America, yet in theory the liberal ideal of individual agency was something that could break down previously existing social distinctions and make it easier for non-elite members of society to achieve political power.

While liberalism discourages the elite view of republican governance, it certainly makes it easier for the framers' fear of demagogues to be realized in American government. The insistence in liberal ideology of absolute individual agency breaks down the bonds between citizens as well as dilutes expertise in government. In the midst of describing the beauty of equality in America, Tocqueville also speaks of its ability to divide. The static nature of hierarchical society ties individual together as a recognition of their interdependence whereas democratic societies encourage individualism and thereby sever the links between citizens. Tocqueville says that this "dries up the source of public virtues".⁹⁸ In relating this to leadership

⁹⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (The Library of America, New York: 2004), 52.

⁹⁸ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 585-586

under liberal ideology, it increases the likelihood that leaders will not keep their focus on the common good, but pursue power for their own benefit. The goal of the framers' system was to create a government detached enough from interests to be able to pursue the common good. However, if liberalism breaks down the sense of duty to pursue a common good, then there is nothing left for elected officials to pursue but their own gain. In creating a system that only looks inward for individuals, liberalism creates governance by demagogues.

Besides the danger of self-interested rulers, liberalism also strikes at the very heart of what is supposed to make participatory government so great: discernment through deliberation. This is often hailed as the hallmark of a democratic system, that citizens may come together to work collectively to solve problems in ways that benefit them all. However, the emphasis put on individual capability and agency of every individual dilutes this aspect of democratic governance. For Tocqueville, individualism both encourages new thinking, but also creates a sort of servitude to the whims of the majority. Individuals in a relatively equal system judge themselves to be their own best judges of what is right. Because they are on equal footing with their fellow citizens, then they assume a relatively equal ability of everyone else to come to logical conclusions of their own. Therefore, individuals are left with no objections to the desires of the majority, as they differ to its conclusions.⁹⁹ This system assumes enlightened participation of individual citizens, yet it crushes the deliberative aspects of democratic governance which are supposed to bolster its effectiveness. This may seem counterintuitive, but consider how potent public opinion can be on guiding policy. Even things not based in fact are accepted and acted upon today simply because it is found in a "reliable" source, or distributed broadly. In leadership,

⁹⁹ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 491

it is best to have individuals in place who are intellectual and deliberative in nature, and these are the individuals the framers wanted as well.

The extremes of liberal and republican thought in terms of what constitutes effective leadership both hold negative aspects. The elitism of a classically republican conception bars large portions of the population from participating in governance. Yet, the liberal system of extreme equality in capacity to govern also cripples the effectiveness of government. Therefore, this is another example of where modern American government should work to blend the two. Policies such as civil service exams and protection are a step in this direction. They are inclusive in that anyone can enter the program as well as secure in the fact they are attempts to ensure individuals who can govern effectively are the ones given the opportunity to lead.

Liberal Insistence on the Threat of Tyranny

The problems of licentiousness and tyranny, as discussed previously, are clearly problems which the framers went to great lengths to ameliorate in their republic. As with the foundations of government, these are aspects of the American system which are complicated with the addition of liberalism. The problem of licentiousness I see as being particularly amplified by liberal ideology. The intense focus on the individual apparent in liberal ideology would seem to make a state of licentiousness even easier to devolve into. The problem of tyranny, however, seems to allow for some common ground between republicanism and liberalism. Both ideologies wish to protect against and rid themselves of arbitrary interference, and through this common desire to guard the community against tyranny there may be room to

strike a balance on authority in such a way to adhere to both liberal and republican fears of tyranny. These fears are something addressed consistently by the framers of the American constitution and the solutions they devised were from a republican perspective, therefore to understand how liberalism has shaped these issues in American government today it must be through the lens of how liberalism shapes our own understanding of what the framers created to solve these problems.

Licentiousness, as defined previously, is a state of extreme self-interest where individuals possess no regard for anything but their own desires. This represented an obvious threat to republicanism for the framers as it goes against all that republicanism stands for. In a licentious state there is no common good, virtue, or recognition of interdependence. The framers' solution to this was as ideological as it was institutional. Ideologically the framers fell back on republican tradition in the hopes of resisting licentiousness. The encouraging of virtue and of recognizing citizens' interdependence were crucial in keeping a communal perception for the framers. Institutionally, the framers created aspects of the government meant to resist the self-interests of the many. As discussed previously, the senate and president were supposed to be lofty and untouchable positions so that they could focus on the common good. Underscoring the framers' response to the dangers of licentiousness was their desire to vest enough authority in the government they were creating in order to resist individual ambition. This was evident in the framers' critiques of the Articles of Confederation, as they felt it did not have the power to force compliance of the individual states. It was obviously a point of emphasis for the framers to create a system resistant to the perils of licentiousness and its ability to divide their republic.

Liberalism undermines the efforts of the framers to guard against licentiousness. Specifically, liberal ideology strikes against the ideological checks against licentiousness that the

framers adopted from republicanism. Virtue and interdependence are substituted for ambition and self-interest in a liberal system. Without these ideological checks, the institutional checks will also suffer. The ability of bodies such as the Senate to unite the nation in pursuit of a common good are only as capable as its members. It would be difficult to conceive of individuals rising to power which are only concerned in the common good from a society which encourages liberal pursuit of self-interest above all. Therefore, all that the institutional checks of the framers are good for is to block individual ambition in government stagnation rather than heading a unified effort towards a common good. That is how the Senate seems to operate today, as a place where measures die, not a body devoted to the common good. This is due to the loss of an ideological framework resistant to fragmentation in self-interest, rather, liberalism only seems to move us closer to a state of licentiousness in its inability to unite individuals precisely because of its emphasis on individual self-interest.

To be fair to liberalism, much of its emphasis on negative liberty and the protection of the individual stems from its intense focus on resistance to tyranny. This is an area where some overlap can be observed between liberalism and republicanism as both are concerned with guarding against the influence of tyranny. As stated previously, tyranny can be understood as the arbitrary imposition of the will of another. The crucial difference in both ideologies' conception of tyranny is where they see it stemming from. Republicanism is primarily concerned with tyranny from abroad. Classical republicanism focuses on the political liberty of the community, and so long the community is free from tyranny as a political unit, then they would conceive of themselves as free. Liberalism, again as an extension of its emphasis on negative liberty, also fears tyranny from within the government over individuals. Therefore, under liberalism, the government can be tyrannical in a way that is not conceived of under republicanism. Recall that

citizens of ancient republics did not see any interference in their lives as unjust, so long as it affected every citizen equally. This is not the case in liberalism, as liberalism sets a limit on the extent to which government can control individuals. This limit is the unalienable rights which are meant to predate government and therefore be beyond reproach.

These different conceptions of tyranny create disagreement between republicanism and liberalism in the amount of authority which should be vested in government. Early shades of liberal resistance to an overly-authoritative government can be observed in the original debates over the American Constitution. There were those who were against the Constitution on the grounds that the framers had created a system which ceded all authority to the federal government, thereby robbing the liberty of individual states' power. Today, in a society which has almost entirely adopted this liberal point of view, too much emphasis is placed on negative liberty in the attempt to guard against tyranny from within. This is another area in which liberalism has had an outsized voice. Again, by taking aspects of each ideology, a balance can be found which incorporates liberal developments while also including the republican principles that our system was founded on. Namely, the republican emphasis on political liberty of the community and procurance of the common good need to reenter our political lexicon in order to check liberalism's tendency to fragment communities into a state of licentiousness. I think this political isolation can be seen today as the polarization of our system seems a direct result of liberalism's rejection of a common good approach to government for one which serves to affirm the individual only. If we were to adopt more republican ideology, we could refocus government on the pursuit of a common good, and by keeping liberal emphasis on allowing intervention only to the boundary of inalienable rights, we can strike a balance between licentiousness and tyranny

that the framers would have wanted in their system and one which can move us past our modern fragmentation.

A Liberal Individual

The new conception of an individual and community relationship was an important aspect of the system that the framers designed, however it is also the most easily corrupted by liberalism. It is more crucial to understand the ideological basis of this aspect of what the framers created than any other piece of their system. The framer's decision to make room for private interests and redefine virtue in individuals was in an effort to create a more durable form of republican virtue rather than an adoption of liberal ideology. This is significant because it is contemporary theorists which have tried to attach liberal ideology to this relationship, not the framers. By defining this relationship through liberal ideals, the divide between individuals and their political community has only deepened. What is worse, is individual relationships have suffered as well as we have embraced a system of competition rather than cooperation. The framers never intended for individuals to forget their interdependence on one another for our well-being, yet I think today Americans adhere to a system which rejects this relational basis for our individual and community relationship.

The redefinition of the individual by the framers was at its core a redefinition of virtue. What the framers crucially realized is that past republics had been crippled by citizens' inability to separate themselves from their self-interest in such a way that their actions would always align with virtue. Ancient republics relied too heavily on the virtue of the everyday citizens so the framers established a new relationship between the individual and their commitment to communal virtue. For the purposes of analyzing this relationship, it is best to think of virtue as

becoming federalized in the American system. In this sense, virtue was only required and divided amongst certain levels of the American system. The average person was left free to pursue a private life because the system no longer required them to bring virtue to it. Yet, the American system was still open to, and indeed encouraged, virtuous citizens who were focused on a common good to pursue roles in government. Institutionally they ensured that even if individuals operated without virtue, a common good could still be procured through government, or at the very least ambition could not break the system. Virtue, for the individual, took on an economic context in the American republic. The worth of an individual was no longer measured by their contribution publicly, but in their ability to be economically productive members of society. This shift had many causes, from the want against continued warfare, to the Protestant conceptualization of virtues which took on the context of work ethic, but most importantly it was an attempt of the framers to create a more durable form of virtue. This new form of virtue was more durable because it allowed room for self-interest. Where previous republics had relied on citizens to place aside self-interest, the American framers realized it could not be easily eliminated, and therefore rather than risk self-interest undermining their republic, they allowed it to flourish.

The self-interest envisioned by the framers was not one that was unlimited, but one that had clear confines. For one, the framers never envisioned a commitment to self-interest that would eradicate our sense of interdependence. As previously noted by Hamilton, the merchant would recognize in a commercial society that the good of the merchant was reliant on the good of the farmer. This tied individuals together that though their aims may have been individual, they were all pursuing economic well-being the same way. The economic pursuit envisioned by the framers did not pit neighbors against one another but united them in pursuit of a better life.

Tocqueville speaks of this form of pursuit as integral to the early American identity. Individuals were not pursuing opulence, but were attempting to carve out a modest or restrained wealth for the goal of slightly bettering their position. Most importantly, Tocqueville notes that Americans refused to sacrifice their own moral convictions in order to obtain more, but would only seek to obtain within their moral boundaries.¹⁰⁰ The transitioning of virtue to economic rather than political terms was never intended by the founders to create a system hostile to cooperation and interdependence.

The addition of liberal ideology to the economic system envisioned by the framers does not make the same considerations to the protection of virtue and interdependence that a republican ideology did. Tocqueville described the early warning signs that a different kind of economic system than the one envisioned by the framers was beginning to take hold in America. Because every individual is pursuing the same goal of material well-being, they naturally come into competition with one another. Therefore they continuously chase material gratification in order to try to reach a greater degree of well-being, but this constant pursuit of equality is unattainable says Tocqueville.¹⁰¹ This drive for a goal that is unfulfillable causes a tension to exist in American life which Tocqueville notes. Even amongst modest well-being, Americans are always searching for more material gratification to satisfy themselves.¹⁰² It is easy to see how this system turns inward on itself and divides individuals. Anything that one's neighbor has is something they do not themselves possess. Therefore, they are in competition with one another to collect and hoard as much wealth as possible because they both possess an ever-consuming desire for more.

¹⁰⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 621

¹⁰¹ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 627

¹⁰² Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 625

As liberal ideology has progressed to modernity, we find ourselves in a system completely hostile to a restrained and cooperative economic style of pursuit. We live in an economic paradigm which is ripe with examples of individuals forfeiting the good of those around them for the pursuit of economic gain. Take for example the outsourcing of entire companies to other places or nations, often to the great detriment of their original communities. Cities like Detroit or Pittsburg stand as reminders of the damage that can be felt from the loss of major industries. Yet, the companies that left did so, seemingly, with little regard for their original homes. Rather, they would sooner leave and allow the demise of their community in favor of better tax rates and cheaper labor. Even on a micro level, everyday interactions are only seen in their transactional capacity, and a good deal is one where the individual making it comes out ahead in some way. How often is the question “what is in it for me?” asked when individuals are petitioned to join a cause or assist their community members? An oft cited passage from Adam Smith, considered by many to be the father of capitalism, states that it is not by the benevolence of the butcher, brewer, or baker we expect our dinner, but because of their own self-interest and their desire to obtain what they want themselves.¹⁰³ What this passage does not say, is that the butcher should be taken advantage of, so as to extract the most meat possible for the least payment. Though it is transactional for Smith, it is still not hostile to mutual benefit. However, that is not how individuals are taught to conceive of economic exchange today. Rather, everything is in play so long as it contributes to an individual’s economic success. We are encouraged to “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” and do everything on your own. The result is a system with no room for compromise, and one which makes our greatest rival anyone else who is pursuing a better life for themselves.

¹⁰³ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, (Modern Library, New York: 1994), 15.

Overall, liberal economic ideology's greatest threat to the American system is the abandonment of any sense of interdependence. By putting us all at odds with one another, all communal trust and loyalty is destroyed, and we are left as isolated and fragmented individuals. This is not conducive to a republican system built on the ideals of cooperation and shared ambition. Our modern conception of the individual undermines what the framers were trying to create and leaves us with an incomplete system.

The American Dream

As was stated at the beginning of this paper, the true tension between republicanism and liberalism is how each conceive of the relationship between public and private life. Each ideology associates one or the other as constituting what we can call the "good life". For republicanism, this is in public life, as serving the community is the greatest thing an individual can do. Conversely, liberalism associates private, especially economic, life as holding the key to true happiness. Becoming economically potent and powerful is the measure of an individual. In order for us to solve the inherent contradiction between the two ideologies pulling at American society, there must be a conversation regarding what we can agree constitutes the good life. What is important in life, where we derive meaning, and what gives us purpose are the questions that must be sorted out for us to ever strike a balance between republican and liberal thought.

The particular aspect of liberalism which has redefined American life is its application to economic theory. Though liberalism was conceived of as a political philosophy, it has transformed to take on greater significance economically. While liberal ideology is certainly invoked in terms of government deregulation and in limiting government power, it is the

economic sector which has benefitted from this shift. The powers which liberalism strips from government do not disappear, but simply shift to other areas of American society. Take for example healthcare, if government is relieved of its responsibility to provide healthcare to its citizens, healthcare does not disappear. Rather, it has just become privatized in American life. Likewise, where we place value in American life has shifted to the private sector over the public as a part of liberalism's effect on republican government power. The ramifications of this aspect of liberal ideology is twofold. First, the government has been limited in its ability to perform its fundamental function of providing for the well-being of all, to the point that the American republic does not hold unified sovereignty. Second, because liberalism values economic success as the greatest achievement for an individual, Americans have lost the ability to achieve fulfillment in their lives. Rather, our system encourages ceaseless acquisition at the expense of all else. Without a renewal of republican ideology our American republic will continue to be weakened and any sense of communal interdependence will be completely forgotten.

At the root of how liberal ideology has reduced the ability of our republic to provide for a communal good is the splitting of American sovereignty. This is a problem which has long been flagged as dangerous by political theorists. When sovereignty is split between two or more entities, there exists the potential for conflict. If two bodies, equally capable of imposing their will have conflicting interests, then there is not authority adequate to resolve this disagreement. It is this reasoning that the framers opted for a strong federal government in the first place. Without it, there existed no power to resolve issues between equally powerful states under the Articles of Confederation. However, the framers created an important check on their federal government that was meant to ensure it would not become tyrannical. Sovereignty was not vested in the federal government, but in the people of the United States. This is crucial because it is only

through the consent of us as citizens that our federal government has power. In other words, the government is only a vehicle through which we, the people, are able to enact our will as the seat of sovereignty. In this way, the federal government is fundamentally beholden to the interests of all its citizens equally, and holds a responsibility to provide for our common good.

However, liberal ideology's fear of central authority, as it concerns individual rights, has caused the American republic to be weakened in the sense that we have decided there are areas of life that the government has no legitimate authority over. The sector that American liberalism has most shielded from government intervention is the economic sector. Again, just because the power is taken away from government does not mean that it disappears, but that it is moved. In this way, the American people have ceded some of its sovereignty to the private sector. Yet, crucially, unlike the government, the private sector owes nothing to individual citizens for its sovereignty. The private sector is driven by indifferent forces aimed solely at the expansion of capital, not the good of its individual actors.

Take for example benefits distributed by companies, such as paid time off or sick leave. Workplaces provide these benefits to better attract highly qualified workers, yet if a company decides it will no longer provide benefits there is nothing to say it cannot. Sure, it may lose many of its workers, but what of those workers who cannot afford to quit and find another job? What responsibility does the company have to provide for the well-being of these workers? So long as they are fulfilling their contractual agreement to pay individuals for their labor, they are providing all our system says is owed of them. What can this be called other than implicit recognition that the private sector holds significant power over our ability as individuals to obtain well-being? Agrarian republican thinkers, such as Jefferson, saw wage labor as a form of "slavery" precisely because the wage worker is beholden to the will of whoever is paying. Yet,

the American republic has become dependent on the private sector to provide for individual well-being, which has in turn divided sovereignty in American life between public and private. No better tangible example of this exists than the 2008 financial crisis, which fully highlighted the way in which American livelihood is divided. The facts that banks, who had run themselves into bankruptcy through predatory and opportunistic lending practices at the expense of the American people, were termed “too big to fail” clearly shows the inability of our republic to ensure the well-being of its citizens. Rather, we have become beholden to private entities which are not equally beholden to us, and this has severely limited our republic’s ability to ensure any semblance of a common good.

Tocqueville, in imagining what the American system could become, saw the grave danger of pursuing economic self-interest at the expense of ceding sovereignty. He says that as individuals become chiefly occupied with their self-interest, they forget the relationship that exists between their own particular well-being and the prosperity of all. These citizens then become unconcerned with governance as it is viewed as an inconvenience or a distraction from their true task of creating their fortunes. He says “there is no need to strip such citizens of their rights: they let those rights slip away voluntarily”. In attending only to what they see as their own affairs, they neglect what Tocqueville describes as their chief affair: being their own masters.¹⁰⁴ It is this process which can have seemingly taken hold in modern America. It may seem like a perfectly sound decision to limit government’s ability to regulate the economic sector because of it hinders an individual. But in only taking a self-interested view, an individual loses sight of how weakening the government only strengthens private actors to act with impunity.

¹⁰⁴ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 630

An example of this phenomenon is prescription drug prices in the United States. They are absurdly high compared to the rest of the world. Private medical firms are able to raise their prices because it is good for them and because the republic has been told it does not have power over them. Individuals who work for drug companies, seeing the opportunity to increase their own fortunes by deregulating the drug industry, obviously would want this. However, the ability for drug companies to endlessly raise their prices allows them to gain power over individuals. In a paradox of self-interest, by tying the hands of government out of individual economic pursuit, we have become beholden to these private entities. Now, a common situation for individuals is that they may not be able to afford drug prices that they need to keep themselves alive, so they turn to the government for help. Yet the government has been rendered powerless because liberal ideology states that the government has no ground to interfere, or that somehow regulation would be an overreach. Now, an individual is left looking towards these companies to lower their prices out of benevolence and regard for a common good, but of course private entities are not tasked with providing for individual “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. So, the individual sits in a hopeless situation where they have now become beholden to private actors because they literally hold the power over their life. We have now clearly reached the extent of Tocqueville’s fears as our misguided attempts to pursue self-interest have left us servile to the whims of an unchecked private sector, stuck under the sort of tyranny liberal ideology has long been hostile to.

The important concept when discussing authority over the economic sector is regulation. Republicanism is not socialism. Republics of the past did not own the means of production, but were integral in ensuring they operated in a healthy way which promoted the goals of the community. For example, Rome had laws restricting conspicuous displays of wealth as an

attempt to curb extreme wealth inequality. Likewise, their economic paradigm encouraged reinvestment from the wealthiest individuals for the betterment of the community. Liberal economic theory, especially in the United States, has become increasingly hostile to any economic regulation. It seems there exists only two options in American economic thought: laissez faire or socialism. Republicanism, if it is allowed to re-enter American thought, offers a third solution. It allows for government to possess the ability to ensure our economic system can operate for the good of all rather than for just a few at the top. Republican regulation can be compatible with a capitalist system as well. People can still be allowed to pursue private ends, just not at the expense of the collective good. Capitalism meshes with a republican system when it is imagined the same way it was imagined by the framers; not as a zero-sum system of competition, but one where individuals recognize that by raising the well-being of all, they see their own well-being rise as well. However, the ability of the American republic to curb economic self-interest has been all but eliminated, which leaves us in an economic system without interdependence, and one which has rendered us at the mercy of its desires without the power to control it.

Liberal economic theory has clearly produced problems at a system wide level, however it has also changed us at a fundamentally personal level. Economic pursuit has become how we, American society, has defined the idea of living well. By living well, I mean what we value as a society or what we view as the picture of a perfect life. In other words, Americans tend to measure whether or not a person has a good life based on their economic status. A billionaire is the peak aspiration of what can be achieved in America, likewise middle class members are doing well but could have more in life, and those in poverty are judged by some as not having lived up to the potential of the American dream.

On the outside, this system of endless pursuit of economic gain seems simple, but upon deeper examination it has real complexity. If any individual were to be asked why they want more money, there are usually motivations besides simply having more wealth. Answers may be along the lines of providing a better life for them and their family, getting their kids in school, or simply being able to stop working and retire eventually. At the heart of these answers is what we as a society may truly see as important in life: each other. If we were to truly examine the heart of economic pursuit it would be that money is a means to the end of being able to enjoy time with those we love. Be it our families, friends, or other loved ones, time with them and enjoyment is what people are ultimately striving towards. The problem is that liberalism does not make room for this part of the equation. If the goal of liberalism is individual liberty and security, and the means to this is individual acquisition of wealth, what is to say how much is enough? We have never defined what living well means in our liberal system besides that it means being economically better off than you were yesterday. This leaves no room for anything besides striving towards economic gain, because if it is the only vehicle to obtaining our American understanding of living well, then what other option is there to pursue it wholeheartedly?

The true tragedy of this unattainable goal of American society is that it causes individuals to pursue wealth at the expense of the very things we are supposedly striving to ensure. Tocqueville observed this phenomenon in its beginnings. He says of the pursuit of “material gratification” amongst Americans that they grasp at everything that comes before them as if they “suffer from the perpetual fear of passing away before finding the time to enjoy them”.¹⁰⁵ Because Americans’ well-being were so intertwined with their ability to acquire wealth, it is no

surprise that they lived in a constant state of fear of not having enough resources to allow them to live well. This phenomenon seems just as true today as it did for Tocqueville. We choose the pursuit of economic gain over the enjoyment of loved ones constantly. How often is the narrative that if you devote yourself wholly to your job in your twenties that you may reap the benefits at an older age? Parents are often forced to miss significant moments in their children's lives because jobs only allow for so much vacation time a year. Because our only method of living well is economic, we are afforded no choice in the matter. It is either devote yourself to your work or lose any ability live well, and this tears us from the aspects of life which we truly value. We may devote ourselves to economic pursuit because it is a means to live well, but the economic sector demands a level of devotion that leaves us unable to enjoy the aspects of life which add value.

Relentless economic pursuit is only half of the picture of how liberal economic ideology breaks down the individual under the guise of self-interest. It's emphasis on the necessity of individualism in economic gain isolates us from one another, and most importantly leaves us without a safety net. Economic gain is an individual practice in American society. The mantra of "pulling oneself up by their bootstraps" is pervasive in American culture, but is also a signal of the dividing aspect of American economic thought. Therefore, when an individual is not able to "pull themselves up", there exists no capacity for the community to help them achieve living well. Because individuals are viewed as adversaries to the ultimate goal of wealth acquisition, how would helping a fellow individual be in one's self interest? The fact is that it is not in the American system. This is a direct result of the emphasis on individualism present in liberal ideology. It creates a system which assumes that any failure to economically advance is a result of a defect in that individual, thereby creating no incentive to improve the well-being of all. This

is a fundamental mistake in liberal ideology as it completely destroys the interdependence that is so crucial to keeping us united as a republic. Republican ideology is unafraid to help all members of the community because its focus is not on individual well-being as an end, but in collective well-being which in turn provides individual security in the fact that no one is alone in their pursuit of a better life. Until American society can recapture this aspect of republican thought, we will all be left chasing individual well-being, amongst individuals who we view as enemies, and devoid of any assurances that we will ever be able to live well.

Recontextualizing what we, as members of the American republic, are striving for is crucial to feeling security in the fact that we might all achieve a level of living well. Republican emphasis on the idea that we are united in creating a collective well-being brings a sort of reassurance that liberalism lacks. With this assurance, it leaves room for the aspects of life identified previously that I believe can be agreed upon as the best things in life. The focus of republics of the past was never economic, but in public things. Participating politically alongside your fellow community member for the good of your family and friends is the greatest thing an individual could do. It is this animating spirit that must be recaptured. Money and economic pursuit is something that never satisfies and always leaves individuals wanting more. Conversely, the fulfillment that can be gained through community is one that is infinite and uniquely beautiful. Without it, the profound frustration and fear felt by so many today is no surprise, as individuals are stuck in a system that can never be won and which ultimately leaves individuals isolated. Until we can have a restructuring of our priorities as a society, I fear that we will only be driven further apart and unable to settle on what it means to live well.

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