

Summary and Analysis of Essay #10

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

Both supporters and opponents of the plan are concerned with political instability produced by rival factions. The state government has not succeeded in solving this problem; in fact the situation is so problematic that people are disillusioned with all the politicians and blame government for their problems. Consequently, a form of popular government that can deal successfully with this problem has a great deal to recommend it.

Given the nature of man, factions are inevitable. As long as men hold different opinions, have different amounts of wealth, and own different amounts of property, they will continue to fraternize with people who are most similar to them. Both serious and trivial reasons account for the formation of the factions but the most important source of faction is the unequal distribution of property. Men of greater ability and talent tend to possess more property than those of lesser ability, and since the first object of government is to protect and encourage ability, it follows that the rights of property owners must be protected. Property is divided unequally, and, in addition, there are many different kinds of property; men have different interests depending upon the kind of property they own. For example, the interests of land owners differ from those who own businesses. Government must not only protect the conflicting interests of property owners, it must, at the same time, successfully regulate the conflicts that result from those who own, and those who do not own, property.

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

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

If the new plan of government is adopted, Madison hopes that the men elected to office will be wise and good men the best of America. Theoretically, those who govern should be least likely to sacrifice the public good to temporary conditions, but the opposite might happen. Men who are members of particular factions, or who have prejudices or evil motives might manage, by intrigue or corruption, to win elections and then betray the interests of the people. However, the possibility of this happening in a large country, such as ours, is greatly reduced. The likelihood that public office will be held by qualified men is greater in larger countries because there will be more representatives chosen by a greater number

of citizens. This makes it more difficult for the candidates to deceive people. Representative government is needed in larger countries, not to protect the people from the tyranny of the few, but to guard against the rule of the mob.

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

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

Madison concludes that he presents the previous argument because he is confident that those who will not listen to those “prophets of gloom” who say that the proposed government are unworkable. For this founding father, it seems incredible that these gloomy voices suggest abandonment of the idea of coming together in strength the state still have common interest. Madison concludes that “according to the degree of pleasure and pride we feel in being Republicans, ought to be zeal in cherishing the spirit and supporting the character of Federalist.”