

OBED FRAUSTO GATICA
ORCID: 0000-0002-4769-958X
Ball State University

Federalist and Anti-Federalist: Two Divergent Concepts of Politics

Abstract: This article provides a theoretical framework to help us understand the controversies between the federalist and anti-federalists in the early history of the United States of America during the Federal Convention in 1787 as a conflict of two political philosophical traditions. The sources of these opposed traditions may be traced back to the disputes in ancient Greek philosophy, in thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle who defined politics in different ways. Plato grounds his definition of politics in *epistêmê*, which means that society should be ruled by the wisest. The federalist argued the best form of government is one where the people could avoid decision-making and leave the wisest representatives to handle politics. In opposition to this, Aristotle believes that politics should be inspired by the notion of *phrônesis*, which means that decisions should be considered collectively. Similarly, the anti-federalist believed that the government tends to be corrupted, and citizens should be suspicious of the government. They believed the ideal way to govern society is to have everyone involved in decision-making.

Keywords: federalist, anti-federalist, representation, Platonic political thought, Aristotelian political thought

The debates between federalists and anti-federalists in the early history of the United States of America are the result of controversies that arose during the Federal Convention in 1787. The intense debates were concerned with the theoretical problems of republicanism. Nowadays, a variety of interpretations of republicanism respond to the following questions: (1) Why did the American Revolution occur?

(2) Where do we find the sources of this revolution? At least three different approaches explain the origins of the modern American Republic (1776). The first and the most conventional approach sees the American Republic as novel and unique. The approach was created from the debates of the Philadelphia Convention and then when the Republic was ratified at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and 1788. The second and third approaches are much broader and more expansive in their time frames. The second offers an explanation based on the institutional structures of the British Empire,¹ and the third is focused on the ideology behind the debates that created the federation. Within this third approach, there are two branches of thought. The first is a scholarly consensus that the ideological influence exerted by the political theory of John Locke.² The second is a new historiographical perspective that stems from the origins of classical republicanism of English liberalism.³ Without a doubt, the main influence of this new perspective is J.G. Pocock's, *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975), which views the American Revolution as the paradigm of a tradition of republican thought, namely found in political thinkers, such as Aristotle and Polybius.

Following the interest of many historians and philosophers, I consider the importance in recognizing ancient history and classical thought to weave a likely scenario for the explanation of the debates between federalists and anti-federalists. In fact, in accordance with Gordon Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic*, the American Revolution and, finally, the consummation of independence was a result of the Founding Fathers' recurrent interest in classical thought. Woods explains that "For the Americans the mid-eighteenth century was truly a neoclassical age—the high point of their classical period. At one time or another almost every Whig patriot took or was given the name of an ancient republic hero, and classical references and allusions run through much of the colonist's writing, both public and private."⁴

My purpose in this essay is to draw a theoretical sketch that allows to understand the debates between the federalists and the anti-federalists as a struggle between two different traditions of thought. I find these traditions in Greek philosophy. One is based in the Platonic notion of *epistêmê*: the conception of king philosopher; and the other based in the Aristotelian notion of *phronêsis*: the conception of *zoon politikon* or *homo politicus*.⁵

¹ J.P. Greene, "Civil Society and the American Foundings," *Indiana Law Journal* 72 (1997), <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ilj/vol72/iss2/2> (accessed: 25.05.2018); D.J. Hulsebosch, *Constituting Empire: New York and the Transformation of Constitutionalism in the Atlantic World, 1664–1830*, Chapel Hill 2005.

² See L. Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution*, New York 1955.

³ G.S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787*, Chapel Hill 1998; B. Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge 1992; L. Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology*, Ithaca 1978; D.R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*, Chapel Hill 1980.

⁴ G.S Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, p. 49.

⁵ H. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, New York 2005.

The federalists and the anti-federalists constantly tried to discover examples in the history of republics to validate their recently formed American nation. Without a doubt, the federalists' ideas were based on a republic inspired by the works of Montesquieu, with modern values of efficiency, effectiveness, expertise, and technical rules. They believed that the foundation of the republic was sustained by the precise knowledge of the consequences of each law proclaimed in the republic. In addition, the republic required precise knowledge of human behaviour in order to predict its effects. And finally, the federalists believed in the idea of expertise because the experts possess the ability to put skills and knowledge to work to achieve certain ends. According to Oakeshott, the American constitution in the early history of the United States of America is an instructive episode of rationalism in politics.⁶ He defines rationalism as: "The Rationalist holds that the only element of knowledge involved in any human activity is technical knowledge."⁷ Among these values is the new notion of "representative."

Even when Montesquieu rejected many of Plato's arguments for the Republic,⁸ I have found that the basic notion of Oakeshott's rationalism in politics and MacIntyre's notion of managerial effectiveness could be likened to Plato's allegory of the rulers of the ship. It means that not everyone is qualified by nature to practice the art of government. Rather, those who are intelligent, rational, and self-controlled are well suited to make decisions in the name of the community. Definitely, behind the idea of the philosopher king we find the modern values of efficiency and effectiveness. MacIntyre in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* supports Plato's political philosophy (although Plato accepts a communist political conception), which abandons the prospect of participation in Athenian politics because of the death of Socrates. Thus, Plato conceives of a human being separated from the polis. Plato believes that justice as a virtue or the key element in the virtue of individual human beings is independent of and an antecedent to the organization of the polis.⁹

Plato believes that human values of knowledge and virtue are only possible in the private sphere of *oikos*. This means that the human being develops his best qualities when he is away from the collectivity and common sense (*doxa*). When a person is moving away from *doxa*, his destination is the world of the essences or truth (*episteme*). The only one who can make decisions is the expert. Nobody else can give sophisticated advice except the one who has the expertise to do so. There are some important requirements for social welfare: (1) virtue of knowledge. The best way to do politics is based on the values of efficiency and efficacy. Science provides sophisticated categories to organize disorder. Experimental categories and general theoretical models demonstrate that both nature and society act according to law. (2) Expert representatives. The only one capable of knowing the real need

⁶ M. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, London 1962, pp. 26–30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ E. Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 170–173; V. Sullivan, *Montesquieu's Peculiar Treatment of Plato in the Spirit of the Laws* (2012) APSA 2012 Annual Meeting Paper.

⁹ A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Indiana 1988, p. 96.

of the people is the representative. (3) Negative liberty. Liberty is expressed in the sphere of *oikos*, the private world. Liberty is personal. It is expressed in property, in life, and in the conscience.

Aristotle thinks that human beings belong to the “*polis*, where they live their best life.”¹⁰ It is said that human beings are only collective beings; they are only beings in the presence of others. A person develops his best qualities through encounters with the community, which achieves the common good as all people’s perspectives and positions are valuable so that collective decision making depends on public deliberation. There are some important requirements to reach the common good: (1) civic virtue, which means that citizens should participate actively in the solution of the problems in society; (2) political representatives, based on the idea that representatives should obey the interest and opinions of the people; and (3) positive liberty, meaning the people have the right to participate in politics.

I use those two opposite concepts of politics, the Platonic and the Aristotelian one, to construct a categorical framework in order to recognize that main arguments between federalists and anti-federalists are supported by reference to two different traditions or two different narratives of how politics should be conceived. Although the federalists and anti-federalists faced particular necessities and had a specific interest in the formation of a Union or Confederacy of autonomous states, the debates were the result of a new vision of the American colonies: autonomy and independence against the tyranny represented by the British empire and the power vacuum left after separation. This absence is filled with ideas of sovereignty and a republic emerging from and for the people. The American Revolution was an attempt to gain legitimate authority and to redefine the ideas of liberty and power.

Road to the American Revolution

The American Revolution is a perfect example of the struggle between liberty and power. One of the most important reasons why the colonies fought against the British empire was the king’s desire to control and dominate them, exemplified by George III decision to tax the Crown’s stamp in order to pay the debts left by the Seven Year’s War. The Seven Year’s War (1756–1763) is an essential event in explaining the causes of the American Revolution. For the British government, the victory in the Seven Year’s War demonstrated a major expansion of its commercial, naval, and colonial power. At the war’s end, the British triumph over France signified the consolidation of the global British empire. However, this conquest ended in corruption since the Crown and the British Parliament abused their authority and power over the colonies, taxing them to pay the war debts. The first tax was the Stamp Act in 1765 with the objective of keeping British troops in the colonies. The colonists rejected this measure because they did not have representation in the British Parliament. The dilemma is explained by Pocock: “If the perception of reality obtaining in the colonies was so much more fragile, part of the explanation may lie in the fact that they constituted a Country without a

¹⁰ Aristotle, *The Politics*, Baltimore 1962.

Court; they were not face to face with modern government as a force they must and could find means of living with, but while created by it at a distance, were not in a relation of immediate symbiosis.”¹¹

Increasing the discord among the settlers of the colonies, the English still taxed tea and other products. The settlers rejected the taxes. These events provoked the Boston Massacre on 5 March 1770, with tensions between British soldiers and settlers in Boston increasing. The death of five people stoked hatred for the British soldiers among the New England settlers. This restlessness and rebellion gave the settlers a new perspective, inspired a new way of thinking and a new conception in politics: a revival of the collectivity of public life rather than an individual and selfish interest.

The words of Thomas Paine in his celebrated pamphlet *Common Sense* aroused great interest in the colonies. Proclaiming independence from the mother country, the settlers created a Continental Congress where they worked toward a common good through intermediate bodies of representatives rather than monarchical authority. Little by little the idea of autonomy and liberty ran high in the minds of the settlers in the 13 colonies. Faced with imminent rebellion, George III sent his troops to end the riot without knowing that the Americans had begun to turn the New England Minutemen into the Continental Army. The Continental Congress, created amidst the struggle, was a group of colonial representatives that proclaimed their intentions. Consequently, Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson were elected to write the Declaration of the Causes and Necessities to take up Arms, which was the first draft of the Declaration of Independence.

The settlers considered themselves part of the British empire with certain rights in common, such as property, life, and self-preservation. In some ways, they thought of themselves as part of the commonwealth of the British empire, believing that they belonged to a brotherhood or were part of the same community. This is clear in Paine’s *Common Sense*:

It is pleasant to observe by what regular gradations we surmount the force of local prejudices, as we enlarge our acquaintance with the World. A man born in any town in England divided into parishes, will naturally associate most with his fellow parishioners (because their interests in many cases will be common) and distinguish him by the name of NEIGHBOR; if he meet him but a few miles from home, he drops the narrow idea of a street, and salutes him by the name of TOWNSMAN; if he travel out of the county and meet him in any other, he forgets the minor divisions of street and town, and calls him COUNTRYMAN, i.e. COUNTYMAN; but if in their foreign excursions they should associate in France, or any other part of EUROPE, their local remembrance would be enlarged into that of ENGLISHMEN. And by a just parity of reasoning, all Europeans meeting in America, or any other quarter of the globe, are COUNTRYMEN; for England, Holland, Germany, or Sweden, when compared with the whole, stand in the same places on the larger scale, which the divisions of street, town, and county do on the smaller ones; Distinctions too limited for Continental minds. Not one third of the inhabitants, even of this province, [Pennsylvania], are of English descent. Wherefore, I reprobate the phrase of Parent or Mother Country applied to England only, as being false, selfish, narrow and ungenerous.¹²

¹¹ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton 1975, p. 509.

¹² T. Paine, *Common Sense*, New York 1953, p. 14.

Settlers and Englishmen fought together against their adversaries, the French and Indians from the Seven Years War. The colonists believed that the mere fact of sharing weapons with the English gave them the same rights. Sadly, for the colonialist was not the case. On the contrary, British parliament began taxation without the colonists' consent. These events brought about an atmosphere of general disappointment within the colonies because they finally realized their unequal position within the British empire. Suddenly, a common language of resistance emerged with the possibility of creating a new community that should be established upon the natural principles of equality, freedom, and liberty to create a civil society and preserve those natural rights. The rational way to do that was to delegate the power to a body of representatives which then would guarantee the rights of everyone in that community. In this way, the colonists set up the Continental Congress where representatives of each colony would help to manage the revolution. For the colonists, they discovered their potential to defend their own lands against foreign and Native American wars fought in the name of the Crown and the motherland in the Seven Years' War, but now in defence of their own rights against the same motherland imposing taxes without their consent.

The American Revolution echoes civic humanist thought. In Pocock's book, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and Atlantic Republican Tradition*, the Machiavellian moment is defined as a model of citizenship with certain principles. These principles are: (1) life of action in the commonwealth; (2) civic virtue, i.e., dedicated service to the republic; (3) reason against *fortuna* or fortune; and (4) a mixed and balanced republic between the "few" (aristocracy) and the "many" (the common), not including the "one" (the king).

The republican conception held to these political principles in order to balance the different sources of power. Thus, it is important to recognize the autonomy of the citizens which means the liberty of men to work together for the common good; and the love of and service to the republic to achieve balance and cast out any form of tyranny.

The American Revolution allowed for an organization of the state to be built by the people. The organization emerged from the citizens' ideas in their opposition to English power and began to create a new source of power built from the bottom up. This power stemmed from the autonomy and liberty of each colonist. Later in the debates between the federalists and the anti-federalists, the issue of liberty and autonomy raised arguments and discussion about how liberty should be defined and whether it should be located in representatives or in the people. At the same time, these debates resulted in two different social models.

On one hand, the federalists emphasized the practical and technical considerations in government (grounded in the new science of Montesquieu) to manage economic and social affairs. Also, the federalists focused on building a powerful national bank, nationally subsidized manufacturing, and a standing army. Moreover, they conceived of a strong state to efficiently control financial and social affairs rather than giving autonomy and sovereignty to each local state. This representation is defined under the terms of the political theory in Hobbes: individuals do not have the capacity to discern for themselves the common good; they only act in their own

interests, even at the risk of disintegrating the society. For that reason, the representative has to be endowed by special qualities to maintain the order and common good, even at the expense of the will of the people.

The anti-federalists, however, emphasized localism. They were suspicious of the new kinds of power of federation and the new ranges of influence that money seemed to be opening up in America. They believed in the autonomy and sovereignty of each local state in the nation. Their idea of representation is closer to the political theory of Rousseau: representation is equitable and fair between the representatives and the people. The virtue resides in the people; it is only the people who are able to designate representatives. These representatives are reliable to the extent that those who elected them are able to control them.

I will describe the historical events in the American Revolution in order to show how the power of people and the interest of the American emerged in the formation of a new nation. Then, I will explain the road to the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Finally, I will focus on the arguments of representation, freedom, and virtue from the federalist and anti-federalist debates.

Road to Federal Convention

The Federal Convention of 1787 was achieved as a result of inconsistencies in the Articles of Confederation. Initially, the Continental Congress approved the articles in 1777, which were finally ratified by all the states and became the basis for the American government in 1781. The Articles of Confederation were the first official American constitution. The most emblematic figures in the early American independent nation, such as Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, George Washington, and James Wilson, argued over whether the Confederation lacked the power to control the recently-formed nation. Hence, they sought, especially, to give Congress wider taxing power, more control within the states, and the power to regulate commerce and conduct foreign affairs.

There were commercial problems and boundary disputes between Virginia and Maryland, however. During this time, a convention in Annapolis, Maryland in September 1786 was held to resolve the problems. However, the five states' delegations were not in agreement. The delegates who attended the convention at Annapolis proposed that a new convention meets in Philadelphia in May 1787 to render the constitution for a government adequate to the exigencies of the American union. The debates of the convention focused on the acceptance of two proposals: Madison's "Virginia Plan" agreed upon by the Virginia delegation, which implied that the Convention should frame a new government rather than merely modify the Articles of Confederation; and, the small-state delegates who counterattacked with the "New Jersey Plan," which was nothing more than reworking the Articles of Confederation to give Congress more power.

During the convention, the two different positions reached a deadlock. Both sides stood firmly by their own plans for governance. However, a grand committee was formed to end the impasse, known as the "Great Compromise" where the idea

of two houses was adopted. One would be the lower house, with representation according to population, and the other was the upper house, with equal representation from each state. Madison and Wilson, however, opposed the “Great Compromise” because it violated the republican principle of majority rule: “The cultivation and improvement of the human mind was the noblest object. With respect to this object, as well as to other personal rights, numbers were surely the natural and precise measure of Representation.”¹³

Having settled this major point, the Convention then discussed the power and election of the executive, the judiciary, the method of ratification, and the powers of Congress. On 6 August 1787, the first draft of the Constitution of the United States was written where it declared the three bodies of government: supreme legislative, executive, and judicial. The draft enumerates, generally, the powers of the Congress in both houses. Then they continued to dispute the power of the executive and its relation to the Congress. In addition, they discussed how to elect the executive, how he might exercise his veto, and how he might be joined with the Senate in appointive and treaty-making powers.

Even as the Constitution took final shape, three delegates rejected it: Edmundo Randolph and George Mason of Virginia, and Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts. During the period of the Constitutional Convention, they complained about many issues and particular points in the debate. They generally opposed the powers given to the new federal government. Their objection anticipated many of the arguments of the anti-federalists.

The ratification process was a struggle from the beginning. The proponents of the new constitution called themselves federalists. They supported the form of government embodied in the new Constitution. Alexander Hamilton and James Madison returned to New York to organize their campaign for ratification. They wrote a series of essays for the New York newspaper defending the new Constitution. They used the pseudonyms “Publius,” “Centinel,” “Brutus,” and, “The Federal Farmer.” The anti-federalists supported the Confederation, so they supported the central idea of the Articles of Confederation, which was a friendship league of states. The main anti-federalists were George Mason, Patrick Henry, and John DeWitt.

The Federalist

Now I will review the federalists’ main arguments about the importance of an efficient government.

Alexander Hamilton in “Federalist No. 1” discussed the unequivocal experience of the inefficiency of the Confederation. He held that the new Constitution was the guiding star of a powerful nation. He wrote: “The subject speaks its own importance; comprehending in its consequences, nothing less than the existence of the

¹³ J. Wilson. “Majority Rule the Basic Republican Principle,” [in:] *The Constitutional Convention Debates*, New York 1986, p. 111.

Union, the safety and welfare of the parts of which it is composed, the fate of an empire, in many respects, the most interesting in the world.”¹⁴

Hamilton responded to the criticism against the constitution in the following way. Against those who argued that it was necessary to decrease Federal power, he responded that humankind has a somewhat dangerous and unstable nature even when individuals have good intentions. “Candour will oblige us to admit, that even such men may be actuated by upright intentions; and it cannot be doubted that much of the opposition which has made its appearance, will spring from sources, blameless at least, if not respectable, the honest errors of minds led astray by preconceived jealousies and fears.”¹⁵ The central point referred to human being’s lack of capacity to make their own decisions. Many times, individuals reacted inappropriately to the circumstances. Thus, liberty could be dangerous when there were no limits and restrictions.

For that reason, Hamilton claimed that the government was essential to safeguarding the liberty. He pointed out in “Federalist No. 23” that the main purpose in restricting freedom was to preserve the public peace as well as to protect against internal or external attacks. An efficient government was required to establish commerce with other nations and among the states. Hence, the main role of the authorities and the government was for defence: raising armies, building and equipping fleets, and directing their operations. Hamilton set neither limits nor boundaries for defence: “These powers ought to exist without limitation: Because it is impossible to foresee or define the extent and variety of national exigencies, or the correspondent extent and variety of the means which may be necessary to satisfy them.”¹⁶

Thus, Hamilton was promoting the values of efficiency and effectiveness in the government institution. He affirmed that: “It rests upon axioms as simple as they are universal. The means ought to be proportioned to the end; the persons, from whose agency the attainment of any end is expected, ought to possess the means by which it is to be attained.”¹⁷

In sum, Hamilton considered that liberty was dangerous by itself, so individual rights should be limited to ensure security in the community. The primary aim was to establish a safe community instead of granting freedom to each individual in the community. On the contrary, the state had endless guarantees in exercising its power and authority in providing for the defence and protection of the community in any matter essential to its efficacy. This effectiveness was necessary to the formation, direction, and support of national forces.

In a republic, contrary to a monarchy, the government was up to the people: “The circumstances which constitute safety in the republican sense are a due dependence on the people, secondly a due responsibility.”¹⁸ However, Hamilton assumed the republic government should be constituted by a unique executive

¹⁴ A. Hamilton, “The Federalist No. 1,” [in:] *The Federalist Papers*, New York 2012, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁶ A. Hamilton, “The Federalist No. 3,” [in:] *The Federalist Papers*, p. 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁸ A. Hamilton, “The Federalist No. 70,” [in:] *The Federalist Papers*, p. 128.

power in order to satisfy the necessities of the nation. First, he described how the plurality in executive power would be inefficient and dangerous because it deprived the people of the restraints of public opinion and the security against corruption. Hamilton held that executive power requires a unity of power, “Junius pronounces to be deep, solid and ingenious,” that, “the executive power is more easily confined when it is one: That it is far more safe there should be a single object for the jealousy and watchfulness of the people; and in a word that all multiplication of the executive is rather dangerous than friendly to liberty.”¹⁹

Madison held that power and authority functioned better when unitary and homogeneous. The federalists described plurality and dissent as dangerous and undesirable. It is interesting how Madison described the will of the people as originating from dastardly passions. To secure the public good and private rights against the danger of such a faction a scheme of representation was required. Madison maintained that the scheme of representation in a republic must be thought of in two levels: “1) to a small number of citizens elected by the rest. 2) the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended.”²⁰

The desires and interests of the people should be controlled by a chosen body of citizens whose wisdom may best discern their true interests. Madison continues his argument as follows: “Under such a regulation, it may well happen that the public voice pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves convened for the purpose.”²¹

Those elected by the community are to play the role of the guardians of the public will. The representative is a good example of the expert. The superiority of the representative’s judgment is contrasted with the confusion of a multitude. For that reason, each representative must be chosen by a greater number of citizens periodically by elections. Madison believed that this rotation of representatives was fundamental to ensuring that the most qualified reach power. “It will be more difficult for unworthy candidates to practice with success the vicious arts, by which elections are too often carried; and the suffrages of the people being freer will be more likely to centre on men who possess the most attractive merit, and the most diffusive and established characters.”²²

The Anti-Federalist

The anti-federalists were sceptical of the American constitution. They were critical of the federalists’ hopes for a united authority, commercial development, and international prestige. The anti-federalists believed the federalists only lusted with ambition for a splendid empire. One of the most famous anti-federalists was

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁰ J. Madison, “The Federalist No. 10,” [in:] *The Federalist Papers*, p. 30.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 31.

John DeWitt. He was a Dutch patriot of the 17th century, who had defended the liberties of the people against an oppressive central government. He started his first essay by differentiating between the two types of organization. The first was characterized by despotic power and unequal justice, which derived from Europe. The second one came from the bottom up by civil society organizations in America. He asserted that the American organizations were formed in the first settlement of the country and founded upon equality, consent, and proportionate justice. Hence, DeWitt affirmed: "Civil society is a blessing."²³ However, the federal government, as the American constitution describes, was the beginning of a constant threat against the rights and liberties of the people. DeWitt thought that the interests in the efficiency and effectiveness by the federalists would result in luxury and vanity. While DeWitt agreed that commerce would bring richness and welfare, he argued that it would come at the expense of liberty and respect of human rights. "[...] I feel persuaded we are now approaching, wherein we shall discourage all foreign importations; shall promote the growth of our own country, and wear the produce of our own farms; and, finally, shall support measures in proportion to their honesty and wisdom, without any respect to men."²⁴

Another emblematic figure who criticized the constitution was Patrick Henry. He affirmed that the new government proposed by the federalists was dangerous to the liberties of the people: there was no guarantee against the ambition of the representatives (the few) when the government was promoted that supports unity and order instead of plurality and difference. Patrick Henry held that to maintain the republican spirit, the right of minorities to demand justice in laws of the government had to be recognized. "Of all the various modes and forms of Government, that is best which is capable of producing the greatest degree of happiness and safety, and is most effectually secured against the danger of mal-administration, and that whenever any government shall be found inadequate, or contrary to these purposes, a majority of the community hath, and indubitable, unalienable and indefeasible right to reform, alter, or abolish it, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to the public will."²⁵

According to Henry, the most valuable aspect of society was the people, not the government because the government could become corrupt and tyrannical. What must be pointed out is that the liberty of the common people to organize themselves made independence from the British Empire possible, not that their Government was strong or energetic. As Henry explained: "We drew the spirit of liberty from our British ancestors; by that spirit we have triumphed over every difficulty."²⁶ To Henry, the new constitution is a perfect example how the American spirit tends to be a powerful and mighty empire. Hence, "such a Government is incompatible with the genius of republicanism."²⁷

²³ J. DeWitt, "Essays I," [in:] *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, New York 2003, p. 190.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁵ P. Henry, "Speeches of Patrick Henry," [in:] *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, p. 205.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The imperialistic spirit appears in the constitution because the power of the president is similar to the power of the king. Henry attacked the new power of the Government since it had the authority to take property and apply taxes to the people without restriction: "Your president may easily become King: Your Senate is so perfectly constructed that your dearest rights may be sacrificed by what may be a small minority."²⁸

According to the anti-federalists, the foundation of each principle in politics was focused on civil liberty, which is promoted by a free discussion of public measures and the conduct of public men. To fully achieve this civil liberty required a balanced political system. The anti-federalists argued that it was impossible to accomplish this requirement when the federalist proposal was focused on reducing the power of the people. DeWitt in his third essay explained: "A President, a Senate, and a House of Representatives are proposed. The Judicial Department is at present out of the question, being separated excepting in impeachments. The Legislative is divided between the Aristocratical part and the Executive between the same Senate and the President who represents the Monarchical Branch. In the construction of this System, their interests are put in opposite scales. If they are exactly balanced, the Government will remain perfect; if there is a preponderance, it will firmly prevail."²⁹

The new constitution supported the values of efficiency rather than political participation. DeWitt asked: where are the people in the House of Representatives? The constitution granted too much power to the institutional bodies instead of the local assemblies. The model of representation, proposed by the federalist, according to DeWitt, would drive people away from decision-making. Hence, it is necessary to retain the vitality of local governments where rulers and ruled could see, know, and understand each other. DeWitt was concerned with possible corruption of the institutional bodies. He asked: "What man among you would betray his country and approve of it? And yet how infinitely preferable to the plan proposed? In the one case the elections would be annual, the persons elected would reside in the centre of you, their interest would be subject to your immediate control, and nobody to consult in their deliberations. But in the other, they are chosen for double the time, during which, however well disposed, they become strangers to the very people choosing them, they reside at a distance from you, you have no control over them, you cannot observe their conduct, and they have to consult and finally be guided by twelve other States, whose interests are, in all material points, directly opposed to yours."³⁰

In general, the anti-federalists suspected corruption, greed, and lust for power among those who ruled from above and without restraint. They believed that the progress of commercial society begets luxury; that economic development was the parent of inequality; and the financial issues were the foe of virtue. Even the institutional mechanisms were not sufficient to establish security against corruption.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 213

²⁹ J. Dewitt, "Essay III," [in:] *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, p. 313.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 315.

As “Cato” wrote: “You are then under a sacred obligation to provide for the safety of your posterity, and would you now basely desert their interests, when by a small share of prudence you may transmit to them a beautiful political patrimony, that will prevent the necessity of their travelling through seas of blood to obtain that, which your wisdom might have secured.”³¹

Conclusion

The debates between the federalists and anti-federalists are important for understanding two different notions in politics. One refers to the concept of *epistêmê* which means that the society shall be led by the wise. The Socratic metaphorical allusion to the cavern is fundamental to understanding this political principle. The group of people who were chained to the wall of the cave were deceived by the shadows projected on the wall of the cavern. There was, however, a wise person who was able to distinguish that those projections were illusions. His intelligence allowed him to perceive the true form of reality rather than the shadows.

This allegory refers to the special role given to the philosophers. According to Plato, the philosopher-king of the republic is the only one who can perceive truth and justice. This metaphor is similar to the philosophical idea behind the federalists’ arguments. I am not arguing that the federalists wanted a monarchy instead of a republic, but they wanted a strong political figure which is what they demanded in the constitutional debates. They granted power to the President rather than the other political bodies. In addition, they also gave too much power to representatives because the will of the people could not be trusted. Socrates in Plato’s *Republic* was of the same opinion when he claimed that the only way to achieve knowledge and reach the truth and justice is to stay away from public affairs or “the chains in the cave.” He gave this last speech to the assembly after he was condemned for corrupting the minds of the youth and for not believing in the gods of the state.

To Socrates, the knowledge of the people (*doxa*) is false. Dormant dangers of this type of knowledge have found a metaphorical expression in the death of Socrates, the wisest man. Hence, we must doubt the knowledge of the people because they tend towards anarchy. The federalists argued that the best way to govern is to keep the people away from decision-making because the efficient decisions are made by the few (elected by the many) who are experts in complex issues, such as finances, taxes, and military strategies. The concept of political representation is tantamount to the idea of the wisest managing the society without consulting the people. The only acceptable way that people participate are periodical elections. Eventually, these principles of representative and periodical elections became the norm in modern society, which is known as “Formal Democracy” criticized by Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Michael Foucault, and Alasdair MacIntyre.

The other notion of politics is invoked by the anti-federalists, and it refers to the general conception of *phrônesis*. According to Aristotle, the man is a *zoon*

³¹ Cato, “Letter V,” [in:] *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, pp. 318–319.

politikon, so the only way humankind could survive is within collectivity and partnership. To Aristotle, we are dependent on each other. Participation of the citizens is required for the greatness of our society. Every human activity is oriented to a certain good. All values are social in the sense that they are pursued by men in association with one another. Since this activity is concerned with the universal good, it is itself a good of a higher order than the particular goods that the citizen as a social animal might enjoy, and, through enjoyment of his own citizenship, contributing to the good of others. In this way, we can say the conception of the Greek *polis* is at the same time a universal community; the opinion of committed citizens are required to enrich the trials of decision-making.

According to the anti-federalists, citizens should be suspicious of the government because it tends to be corrupt. The permanent danger of a government is that the few live at the expense of the many. The ideal government is one where citizens actively participate in decision-making in the Agora, the market, the public sphere, by debating and discussing issues vital for the community. A government is alive when more people are involved in decision-making. The anti-federalists saw dangers in centralizing power in a federal government, with a constitution giving too much power to request taxes, to freely manage the army, and to control the trade.

Virtue resides in the people. For that reason, the representatives must obey the will of the people. If a representative is detached from the people, he could be corrupted easily. In reference to the myth of the cavern, the representative is like the philosopher who has been released from the chains, but no one can be certain whether the truth he preaches is genuine or just yet another shadow reflected on the wall of the cavern. In order to make good decisions, the representative must listen to the multitude in the cavern, he must discuss with the multitude in the Agora to understand the necessities of the people. In this notion of politics, the expert is not necessary. What is needed instead is a person able to listen to the people. The anti-federalist republican vision was thus characterised by a positive idealism. The American Revolution is characterized by the belief in the power of the people rather than political and commercial ambition of the federalists. To achieve this ideal, the anti-federalists looked to the classical vision of small republics where virtuous and self-reliant citizens managed their own affairs. For them, the centralizing power would create an empire instead of a republic.

Both political notions are fundamental to understanding the political sphere. Two opposing forces are vital for the balance in social relationships. Effectiveness is required to achieve success in decision-making, but, at the same time, it requires the bottom-up force of the people to enrich perspectives and points of view. There are dangers on both sides of the chasm: they reside in the institutional bodies, as well as in the people. But both approaches have their own virtues too: elitist approach makes for the effectiveness of the decision-making, while the strength of the democratic approach comes from the diversity of the people.

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