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Cornerstone or Threat? Political Ambition and The Federalist

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Bridgewater State University

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In “Federalist 47,” James Madison defines tyranny as “the accumulation of all powers legislative, executive and judiciary in the same hands, whether of one, a few or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed or elected.” In order to prevent tyranny, Madison argues in “Federalist 51” that it is first necessary to separate powers among the three branches of government and between the state and national governments. While this separation is a necessary protection against tyranny, it is not sufficient. In addition, second, it is also necessary to conform “the interior structure of the government, as that its constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places” (Federalist 51). This happens when each department (House, Senate, Presidency, and Supreme Court) has “a will of its own; and consequently, should be so constituted, that the members of each should have as little agency as possible in the appointment of the members of the others” (Federalist 51). With both of these institutional protections in place, Madison famously identifies political ambition as the motivation that drives the system of checks and balances, protects liberty, and allows government to pursue its end—justice. Madison writes, “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition” (Federalist 51). Ambition, according to Madison, is the cornerstone of America’s constitutional system rather than moral and religious motives which “lose their efficacy in proportion to the number combined together; that is, in proportion as their efficacy becomes needful” (Federalist 10).

Despite the centrality of political ambition to American political thought, scholars have paid little attention to this topic. To the extent that political theorists do, they generally follow the lead of their empirical colleagues and assume that political ambition equals the desire for reelection. The primacy of reelection is well established in the political behavior literature and is identified as the primary motive for members of Congress (Mayhew 2004, Fenno 2002) and the

President (Canes-Wrone 2010). Political theorists who pay attention to political ambition tend to locate it within the larger political theory of a particular thinker. Michael J. Rosano (2003), for example, focuses on Alexander Hamilton's conception of human nature and identifies the ambition for nobility as one of many different and potentially conflicting aspects of Hamilton's account of human nature. These other aspects include love of liberty, Christian philanthropy, liberalism, and power. Rosano's focus, however, prevents him from considering the relationship between Hamilton's conception of human nature (and ambition in particular) and his account of political institutions like the presidency. These remain, in his analysis, two separate entities.

The notable exception to how political theorists have pursued the issue of political ambition is Douglass Adair whose *Fame and the Founding Fathers* (1974) focuses on the desire for honor, fame, and glory that developed in the late 1700s. Providing a detailed account of some of the greatest American minds and how their perceptions of fame and honor differ, Adair's analysis begins with a focus on the American Revolution and creation of patriotism, self-sacrifice, and high performance in the defense of liberty. Adair quotes de Tocqueville in saying "ambitious men in democracies are [little] engrossed with the interests and judgements of posterity; the present moment alone engages and absorbs them. They are more apt to complete a number of undertakings with rapidity, than to raise lasting monuments of their achievements; and they care much more for success than for fame" (Adair 1974, 7-8). Adair profiles George Washington's ambition in seeking success as a military general rather than fame and recognition of his name. Adair also profiles Benjamin Franklin as someone who desired to build a "lasting monument" (Adair 1974, 9) rather than finding fame. He spent his later years as a philosopher, teacher and public servant and devoted his time to the people rather than himself.

In all of these accounts of the “greatest of great generation,” Adair finds a common element-- an obsessive drive for fame and recognition (Adair 1974, 9). That desire for fame overtakes their minds and everything they do, and their only achievements are ones that grant them a notoriety. In making this argument, Adair makes a clear distinction between fame, honor, and glory. Adair defines honor as an inherent part of an individual’s identity and a characteristic that is rooted in “regard to the censure of the world” (Adair 1974, 13). Adair claims that all too often honor is linked to one’s social status or privilege, when in reality it is the exact opposite of that. Fame, however, is defined by how large of an audience an individual can garner with their actions and notoriety. Adair insists that fame must be earned and that the main reason individuals desire fame is because it makes them immortal in the sense that they are remembered. Those who desire fame long for a legacy. Adair quotes Hamilton saying “A man of virtue and ability, dignified with so precious a trust, would rejoice that fortune had given him birth at a time and placed him in circumstances so favorable for promoting human happiness. He would esteem it not more the duty than the privilege and ornament of his office to do good to all mankind” (Adair 1974, 21). In terms of a representative or individual in politics, someone seeking fame should do it for the good of the people and not for their own selfish reasons.

Despite the implications of Adair’s argument, the closest scholars come to following his lead and providing a fuller treatment of political ambition in American political thought are those interested in the nature of executive power. This is not surprising, though, given the centrality of political ambition to Hamilton’s account of the executive in *The Federalist*. In “Federalist 72,” Hamilton writes:

The position will not be disputed, so long as it is admitted that the desire for reward is one of the strongest incentives of human conduct; or that the best security for the fidelity

of mankind, is to make interest coincide with duty. Even the love of fame, the ruling passion of the noblest minds, which would prompt a man to plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public benefit, requiring considerable time to mature and perfect them, if he could flatter himself with the prospect of being allowed to finish what he had begun, would, on the contrary, deter him from the undertaking, when he foresaw that he must quit the scene before he could accomplish the work, and must commit that, together with his own reputation, to hands which might be unequal or unfriendly to the task.

Harvey C. Mansfield's reading of this passage comes close to making a connection between political ambition and the extent of executive power. In his formulation, there is distinction to be drawn between "a knight answering a challenge" and "a merchant seeking gain" (Mansfield 1989, 263.) In contrast to the merchant who seeks the private gain of profit, the knight ambitiously upholds the US Constitution and in doing so pursues the common good. Without explicitly drawing this conclusion, Mansfield suggests that the form of political ambition that informs the Founder's understanding of executive power is honorable ambition (see also Epstein 1984, 111-125; Walling 1999; Flaumenhaft 1992).

Similarly, Clement Fatovic (2004) also attempts to connect ambition to the executive. Focusing on presidential prerogative from the perspectives of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, Fatovic concludes that the Constitution grants the president the use of prerogative. In other words, the president has the "power to act according to discretion, for the public good, without the prescription of the law, and sometimes even against it" (Locke 1980, 84). Fatovic's argument in favor of executive prerogative raises a series of interesting questions. As Fatovic (2004, 422) might ask: what is the understanding of political ambition that first enables the

presidency to “deal with the ordinary and extraordinary problems of politics” and, second, prevent the presidency “from becoming threats to the liberties and other values that they are appointed to preserve?”

My project addresses these interrelated questions by making the connection between political ambition to executive power in American political thought. In order to do this, it is first necessary to establish a baseline understanding of political ambition. In other words, I need to determine what understanding of political ambition animates American political thinking more generally. To achieve this goal, I use Robert Faulkner’s (2008) *The Case for Greatness* to identify various forms of political ambition available to the Founding Fathers. Unlike Adair who focuses exclusively on Francis Bacon’s typology of ambition and greatness, Faulkner draws more broadly from the history of political thought and identifies the following forms of ambition:

- **Imperial Ambition:** Those who have imperial ambition, such as Thucydides’ Alcibiades, are not searching for everyday honor but rather are searching for glory, superiority, and accomplishment.
- **Grand Ambition:** Those who have grand ambition, such as Socrates’ account of Alcibiades, have a passion for ever increasing fame and power and see pride as a disadvantage.
- **Noble Ambition:** Those who have noble ambition, such as Xenophon’s Cyrus, desire true superiority.
- **Honorable Ambition:** Those who have honorable ambition, such as Faulkner’s analysis of George Washington, seek security as an end of their ambition. They desire preservation and empowerment of the nation, from which they derive

honor. They tend to have a strong sense of duty and a deep obligation to their country.

In this thesis, I test for the presence of these forms of political ambition in the argument offered in support of ratifying the US Constitution. I do this in the following steps. First, I consider the role political ambition plays in the theory of checks and balances more generally. To do this, I select broadly from *The Federalist* with an eye to identifying the fundamental political problem identified by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay (Federalist 9 and Federalist 10) and the solution to this problem as provided by the Madisonian model (Federalist 47-59). Having established the role of political ambition within the proposed system of government at a macro level, the argument made here, second, turns its attention to the executive power. Here, I conduct a close textual analysis of the sections of *The Federalist* that focus on the executive (Federalist 67-77). Finally, the thesis concludes by offering some thoughts on the implications of the argument made here for the current state of American politics. In particular, I consider the importance of a healthy form of political ambition given recent developments like unitary executive theory. I also consider how political parties explain the movement away from the understanding of the political ambition envisions by the Founders.

Throughout this study I will employ the method of textual analysis re-discovered by Leo Strauss. In *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Strauss (1988) articulates a method of inquiry devoted to the objective of understanding past thinkers as they understood themselves. This requires three things of the researcher. First, one must suspend one's own questions to see the questions of the author. Second, one is to rely, as much as possible, on what the author says directly (exoteric) and indirectly (esoteric) and as little as possible on extraneous information. Finally, the researcher should strive to use the terms and premises of the author and avoid using

foreign terms and premises. Thus, the method of textual analysis I will employ in this study differs from other methods that view past thinkers as reflections of their historical time or their thought as deriving from psychological or economic causes.

### **Ambition in the System of Checks and Balances**

The argument in favor of ratifying the proposed constitution provided in *The Federalist* centers around the defense of popular or republican government.<sup>1</sup> The greatest threat faced by popular government is faction. Writing in “Federalist 9,” Hamilton posits that a “firm union will be of the utmost moment to the peace and liberty of the states, as a barrier against domestic faction and insurrection.” Madison begins “Federalist 10” in similar fashion, contending that “Among the numerous advantages promised by a well-constructed union, none deserves to be more accurately developed, than its tendency to break and control the violence of factions.” The concern with factions is grounded in human history and American political experience. With regard to the former, Hamilton identifies factions as the primary source of the “disorders that distinguish the annals of those republics” which have subsequently been employed by “the advocates of despotism” against “the forms of republican government” as well as “the very

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<sup>1</sup> In “Federalist 10,” Madison makes an important distinction between a pure democracy on the one hand and a republic on the other. What differentiates the latter from the former is the presence of representation requiring the people to elect those who conduct politics on their behalf. In a pure democracy, the people gather to conduct the business of politics themselves. Madison’s distinction has been the source of a misunderstanding of the nature of the American political system. Taking Madison literally and deliberately misrepresenting the distinction he makes; some contend that we never contended to place the American political system on a broadly popular foundation. Those holding this position often argue in favor of severe restrictions on the right to vote. The problem with this interpretation of Madison is that his understanding of republican government focuses narrowly on the system of representation. In order for this system to work, democratic elections must take place. Madison only argues against pure democracy. Most arguments to extend the right to vote made throughout American history or those arguments to make voting as easy as possible do not contend for pure democracy. Rather, following Madison, these arguments seek only to place the system of representation on its proper democratic foundation.

principles of civil religion” (Federalist 9). As for American political experience, Madison identifies faction as the source of the “instability, injustice, and confusion” that characterizes America’s public counsels (Federalist 10).

In taking up this challenge, the authors of *The Federalist* face a very specific challenge. Advocates of ratification must remain a “friend of popular government” and not violate “the principles to which he is attached” while at the same time providing a cure for the “mischiefs of faction” (Federalist 10). In other words, it is necessary “To secure the public goods, and private rights against the dangers of such [majority] faction, and at the same time to preserve the spirit and the form of the government ...” (Federalist 10). It is thus necessary to secure the proper ends of government without violating the central tenet of popular government—the principle of majority rule (see Gibson 2020, 263-79). This is identified by Madison as “the great object to which our inquiries are directed” (Federalist 10). To realize this object, Hamilton identifies developments in the “science of politics” that “were either not known at all, or imperfectly known to the ancients” as the key (Federalist 9). These developments include the following:

1. The regular distribution of power into distinct departments.
2. The introduction of legislative balances and checks.
3. An independent judiciary.
4. Legislative representation.
5. The extended republic.

The remainder of this section focuses on the argument made in *The Federalist* for how the proposed constitution will control the effects of faction. In particular, it focuses on the role political ambition plays in this model.

*Federalist 10*

In “Federalist 10,” Madison offers social solutions to the problem of majority tyranny, stating “There are two methods of curing the mischiefs of faction: the one, by removing its causes; the other, by controlling its effects” (Federalist 10.) Madison does not deny that factions will form regardless simply due to human nature. As long as man has the ability to exercise opinion, factions will form. Madison, however, uses that self-interest as a way to make government safe, by making the first object of government the protection of “different and unequal faculties” which include property and possessions (Federalist 10). By securing the distribution of property, it is less likely for individuals to “fall into mutual animosities” (Federalist 10.) Madison goes on to state “the causes of faction cannot be removed, and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects” (Federalist 10.) He suggests that a republic is the solution to this problem of faction, just as Hamilton does in “Federalist 9.” Madison states that the republic will solve this issue in two ways – the delegation of government and a greater number of citizens.

Madison’s first solution to controlling the violence of factions is to emphasize representation. According to Madison, not only does the presence of a system of representation differentiate a republic from a pure democracy, it facilitates government’s ability to regulate the “various and interfering interests” of society and this is identified by Madison and “the principle task of modern legislation” (Federalist 10). Necessarily involving “the spirit of party and faction,” representation is characterized by its ability to “refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice, will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations” (Federalist 10). In Madison’s understanding of representation, elected officials are responsible for “refining” or removing from public opinion

any impurities. Impurities, in this instance, can be understood as those aspects of public opinion that are overly particular and, consequently, inconsistent with the public good. The ability of representation and representatives to do this is a source for Madison's optimism. While not perfect, because "Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm," representation makes it more likely that the public view articulated by elected officials "will be more consonant with the public good" than if the American people deliberated in person (Federalist 10).<sup>2</sup>

Representation makes possible Madison's second solution—the extended republic. By placing political responsibility in the hands of elected officials, it becomes possible to incorporate a "greater number of citizens, and extent of territory ..." (Federalist 10). The latter, according to Madison, is a circumstance "which renders factious combinations less to be dreaded" (Federalist 10). The reason for this is laid out by Madison in the following: "Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other" (Federalist 10). Not only does the extensive size of the American republic make it less likely for factions to coordinate their efforts, but by

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<sup>2</sup> Madison's faith in representation is informed by his faith in the voter. He raises the question of what would happen if people of "factious tempers, of local prejudice, or of sinister designs" were to be elected (Federalist 10)? In response, he offers two arguments. First, he contends that by increasing both the size of the nation and its population, the people will have a greater number of fit characters to choose from. Importantly, Madison assumes that ration of fit to unfit (he never specifies what this ratio is) characters found in a small republic remains constant as the size of the republic increases. To the extent that this is true, the people are still required to select these persons and Madison is optimistic in their ability to do this. He argues, "... 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 more free, will be more likely to centre in men who possess the most attractive merit, and the most diffusive and established characters" (Federalist 10).

increasing both the size of the national and the number of citizens a situation is created where the sheer number of factions make it less likely that a majority faction will form. If a majority faction were to form, Madison points to the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances as the means of controlling the effects of faction.

*The Madisonian Model (Federalist #47-59)*

Madison returns to the topic of majority tyranny in “Federalist 47.” There, he takes up the Anti-Federalist objection that the proposed constitution does not keep the three political powers separate and distinct. They contend that the principles of separation of powers are violated and, subsequently, the proposed constitution opens the door to tyranny (see Storing 1985, 187, 208, & 217-18). Madison responds to this concern by first providing a common definition of tyranny. He defines tyranny as the “accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective” (Federalist 47). The main objective of “Federalist 47” is to demonstrate that the Anti-Federalist understanding of the separation of powers is faulty. In particular, Madison sets out to show that their understanding is at odds with historical political experience broadly construed and America’s own political experience. Madison uses his analysis of the British Constitution to demonstrate the former and his analysis of the state constitutions to demonstrate the latter. Both analyses show that the Anti-Federalist argument that the legislative, executive, and judicial department ought to be completely distinct is a mistake. As Madison states in the subsequent essay, “the degree of separation which the [Anti-Federalist] maxim requires, as essential to a free government, can never in practice be duly maintained” (Federalist 48). Madison’s analysis shows that the separation of powers is properly understood in terms of partial agency. It is ultimately on partial agency that Madison will build his famous argument for the separation of powers in

“Federalist 51.” Before he takes up this argument, Madison must first deal with a larger problem—attachment to the Constitution. While this may seem like a digression, the argument that the Constitution is the proper object of attachment and concern helps one to understand the argument made in “Federalist 51” and, in particular, helps to clarify what Madison says there about the proper object of political ambition.

“Federalist 49-50” provide Madison’s response to Thomas Jefferson’s argument in favor of frequent recourse to the American people. Madison quotes Jefferson’s *Notes on the state of Virginia* as follows: “that whenever any two of the three branches of government shall concur in opinion each by the voices of two thirds of their whole number, that a convention is necessary for altering the constitution, or correcting breaches of it, a convention shall be called for the purpose” (Federalist 49). Madison agrees with Jefferson that the people “are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter ... is derived; it seems strictly consonant to the republican theory, to recur to the same original authority ...” (Federalist 49). He departs from Jefferson on how often there should be recurrence to the people. He writes, “that a constitutional road to the decision of the people ought to be marked out and kept open, for certain great and extraordinary occasions. But there appear to be insuperable objections against the proposed recurrence to the people, as a provision in all cases for keeping the several departments of power within their constitutional limits” (Federalist 49).

Following Hume, Madison worries that “every appeal to the people” carries with it “an implication of some defect in the government” (Federalist 49).<sup>3</sup> To the extent that this is true,

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<sup>3</sup> On Hume’s constitutionalism see Manzer (1996) and on the relationship between Hume and *The Federalist* see Manzer (2001). Adair (1974) identifies the following essays by Hume as key to linking his thought to that of Madison: 1) “Of the First Principles of Government,” 2) “Of the Independency of Parliament,” 3) “Of Parties in General,” 4) “Of the Parties of Great Britain,”

frequent appeals to the people would be an indication of numerous defects in the Constitution and, subsequently, this would result in the government created by the Constitution being deprived “of that veneration which time bestows on every thing, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest governments would not possess the requisite stability” (Federalist 49). If, as both Madison and Hume contend, all governments “rest on opinion,” then frequent recurrence to the people will have the effect of undermining the requisite confidence the public needs to have in its government (Federalist 49; see Hume 1987, 32-33). One of the best means of generating the requisite confidence is to provide the people with political examples that are “ancient, as well as numerous” because doing so shifts the prejudices of the people from having doubts and reservations about the Constitution to supporting the Constitution (Federalist 49). Thus, while Jefferson’s plan of frequent recurrence to the people will likely have the effect of “disturbing the public tranquility, by interesting too strongly the public passions,” the amendment process laid out in Article V of the Constitution allows the “reason of the public alone” to “sit in judgment” and “control and regulate the government” (Federalist 49). For Madison, there is no need for frequent conventions as a virtue associated with frequent elections is “their aptitude for *enforcing* the constitution, by keeping the several departments of power within their due bounds; without particularly considering them, as provisions for *altering* the constitution itself” (Federalist 50). What is important here for the argument Madison will make in “Federalist 51” and beyond is the idea that the Constitution provides both voters and elected officials with criteria for holding government accountable and maintaining the proper relationship between the branches of government. Given the role played by the Constitution here, it is thus imperative that both the

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and 5) “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth.” To this list, Spencer (2002) contends that Hume’s *History of England* should be seen as an important influence on Madison’s thinking about faction.

public and elected officials venerate the Constitution in both word (think of the Oath of Office taken by all elected officials) and deed. How this should play out in practice is the topic Madison turns to in “Federalist 51.”

In “Federalist 51” Madison argues that the key to preventing tyranny is “contriving the interior structure of the government, as what its several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places.” By shifting his focus to “the interior structure of government,” Madison moves away from the separation of powers and focuses on the system of checks and balances which was identified by Hamilton as one of the developments in the “science of politics” that has “received great improvement” (Federalist 9). Madison’s shift in focus actually began in “Federalist 48” where he initially discusses the importance of blending the branches without there being an overabundance of reliance on each other. There, Madison shows “that unless these departments be so far connected and blended, as to give to each a constitutional control over the others, the degree of separation ... can never in practice be duly maintained” (Federalist 48). For Madison, key to maintaining the separation of powers provided by the Constitution lies not in “parchment barriers,” but in “contriving the interior structure of government, as that its several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper place” (Federalist 51).

From an institutional perspective, this is accomplished by first making sure that “each department should have a will of its own” (Federalist 51). Given the nature of republican or popular government, this can be interpreted to mean that each department is held accountable by a different group or constituency. Madison suggests as much when he says that “each department should be so constituted, that the members of each should have as little agency as possible in the

appointment of the members of the others” (Federalist 51).<sup>4</sup> Second, it is “equally evident, that the members of each department should be as little dependent as possible on those of the others, for the emoluments annexed to their offices” (Federalist 51). In language that harkens back to *The Declaration of Independence*, Madison speaks of the danger when one branch of government is able to make another branch dependent on its will. In *The Declaration*, Jefferson speaks of the King making “judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries” (Declaration). In order to prevent efforts by one branch to reduce another to a state of dependence, it is necessary, finally, to make sure that each branch has the “constitutional means” to “resists encroachments of the others” (Federalist 51). Madison’s institutional mechanisms are necessary but not sufficient means for maintaining the proper balance between the three branches of government. To this, it is necessary to add the proper motive, and this is where attachment to the Constitution and political ambition play key roles.

Madison clearly identifies ambition as the personal motive that will prevent the types of encroachments that lead to tyranny. He famously writes, “The provision for defence must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of the attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man, must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place” (Federalist 51). Madison clearly states that the mutual relationships between the three branches of government are driven by ambition. What is less clear is the object of ambition. Here, he speaks of the connections between elected officials and “the constitutional rights of the

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<sup>4</sup> Madison does recognize that the judiciary violates this general principle as the executive is responsible for nominating federal judges and the Senate has the power to confirm these nominations. Despite this, the independence of the judiciary is seen as an adequate solution preventing the Court from being dependent on either of the other two branches of government (see Federalist 78-82).

place.” Interestingly, Madison does not speak of ambition for reelection. His concern with “constitutional rights of the place” suggests that the proper object of ambition is the Constitution or, to be more precise, a particular section of the Constitution. Clarifying the meaning of Madison’s use of place helps to put this into sharper focus. One can think of the various departments of government as being directly connected to particular parts of the Constitution. Article I, for example, is most relevant to the House and the Senate as it is here that the Constitution formally lays out the express powers granted Congress (Article I, Section 8), but also those powers unique to the House and Senate (see Article I, Section 7 as well as Article II, Section 2). Similarly, Article II is most relevant to the Presidency and Article III to the Court.<sup>5</sup> What Madison suggests here is that each department of government ambitiously seeks to protect itself from the other departments. He does not expect, nor does he require elected officials to put the common good ahead of private interest. But by defining private interest in terms other than reelection, Madison expands the object of ambition just enough to believe that the “policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives” is the key to securing justice which is “the end of government” (Federalist 51).

The conclusion that Madison defines the proper object of political ambition in constitutional terms can be tested by considering the argument he makes with regard to the House in “Federalist 52-59.” In particular, Madison’s responses to two questions help to clarify the understanding of political ambition provided in the reading of “Federalist 51” just offered. The first question is who should govern and the second question concerns Madison’s understanding of the proper relationship between the people and their elected officials.

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<sup>5</sup> With regard to the Court, a strong argument can be made that the entirety of the Constitution is the rightful object of the Court’s ambition given the fact that they exercise the power of “judgement” in interpreting the Constitution as a whole (see Federalist 78).

Madison's answers to these questions have the added benefit of allowing one to compare his view of political ambition to that provided by Hamilton which, in turn, allows the interpretation of *The Federalist* provided here to speak to the possibility that Publius suffers from a split personality.

To understand Madison's perception of ambition it is important to understand who Madison believes is properly suited to govern. Madison takes up that question by looking at the intentions of those who govern. The most important intention of those who govern should be the concern and knowledge of those they govern. On this, Madison writes that it "is a sound and important principle, that the representative ought to be acquainted with the interests and circumstances of his constituents" (Federalist 56; see also Hamilton in Federalist 36). This should not be interpreted, however, to mean that representatives should simply follow the dictates of public opinion. With regard to these limits, Madison argues that the influence of these "interests and circumstances" extend no further than to "those circumstances and interests to which the authority and care of the representative relate" (Federalist 56). In other words, constitutional limits (think of the express powers provided in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution as well as the limitation places on the legislative power in Article I, Section 9) have the effect of limiting the negative ambition of legislators.

Another important aspect of those who govern is their experience. Madison feels that there must be a sufficient level of experience among representatives. This is evident in his understanding of a competent legislator. According to Madison, in addition to an "upright intention and sound judgment," this person must also possess a "certain degree of knowledge of the subjects on which he is to legislate" (Federalist 53). While a portion of this knowledge may

be acquired through means of information available to all private persons, the rest can only be acquired “by actual experience in the state which requires use of it” (Federalist 53).

Madison’s analysis of the competency of representatives as well as his understanding of human nature speaks to the bigger picture of ambition. It is accurate to say that Hamilton is open to the notion that elected officials will be motivated by electoral self-interest. This is evident in “Federalist 35” where Hamilton recognizes that it is natural for “a man who is a candidate for the favour of the people, and who is dependent on the suffrages of his fellows citizens for the continuance of his public honours, should take care to inform himself of their dispositions and inclinations.” Unlike those who contend that electoral self-interest is the driving factor that explains the relationship between the people and their elected officials, Hamilton concludes that rather than following the wishes of their constituencies, members of Congress should “allow them [dispositions and inclinations] their proper degree of influence on his conduct” (Federalist 35). Thus, Hamilton’s understanding of this relationship is open to influences other than electoral self-interest. This fact indicates that what Hamilton provides on representation in “Federalist 35-36” actually compliments the understanding of Madison provided later in the text.

Writing in “Federalist 57,” Madison agrees with Hamilton that representatives should have a connection to their constituents. He describes this affection as “temporary” and emanating for the fact that they hold public office (Federalist 57). Where Hamilton gives special attention to electoral self-interest in “Federalist 35,” here Madison will clarify the other motives alluded to by Hamilton. Madison indicates that other “marks” will characterize the relationship between representatives and the people, and these include honor, favor, esteem, and confidence (Federalist 57). Ultimately, the ties between the people and their representatives “are strengthened by motives more selfish in nature. His pride and vanity attach him to a form of

government which favors his pretensions, and gives him a share in its honors and distinctions” (Federalist 57). The interpretation of the motivations of representatives offered here closely resembles that suggested by Adair (1974). He contends that all politicians are motivated by self-interest, but that what really matters is the object of this self-interest. As indicated here, the proper object of political ambition is the Constitution and the principles this represents. Given the special place of the Constitution in American politics, Mansfield (1989) is correct in emphasizing the importance of upholding the Constitution. His interpretation does not go far enough, however. Madison, in particular, demonstrates that representatives should concern themselves with more than reelection. They must also be motivated by duty and gratitude. This is why, at the end of “Federalist 55,” Madison offers the following summary of the moral requirements of elected officials. He writes:

As there is a degree of depravity in mankind, which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust; so there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in higher degree than any other form. Were the pictures which have been drawn by the political jealousy of some among us, faithful likenesses of the human character, the inference would be, that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government; and that nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another (Federalist 55).

The virtue Madison speaks of here is reminiscent of the honorable form of ambition associated with George Washington. This honorable ambition is one that is driven by a sense of duty and a “deep conviction of his obligations to his country” as articulated in the Constitution (Faulkner

2008, 181). It is a drive to preserve and empower oneself, where security is the object of ambition rather than honor or fame.

The honorable ambition that upholds the Constitution and its principles can be contrasted with the negative ambition associated with factions. In “Federalist 10,” Madison defends the Constitution by stating it establishes a government capable of mediating violence and damage created by factions. These factions are groups of people who form to protect their own special interests and opinions, whether it be economic or political. These groups work against the public interest and infringe on the rights of others for their own personal gain. In these factions we see a sort of grand ambition as described by Robert Faulkner in *The Case for Greatness*. Here, Faulkner uses Socrates’ Alcibiades to detail a form of grand ambition where there is a passion for ever increasing fame and power and where pride is a disadvantage to Alcibiades. However, Madison’s form of government as established in the Constitution is structured to counteract that ambition. Madison understands that these factions are inevitable due to human nature but with the structure of Congress, the object of that ambition can be used for the good of the government. With representation put in place, the public can elect their officials based on both the public and private interest of the representatives. The latter is rendered safe as the object of one’s ambition is the same as the public interest.

Madison is justified in drawing this conclusion because of his understanding of how the republican system of government proposed by the Constitution maintains itself. Madison identifies two key solutions. First, he conceptualizes elections as contests of merit (Federalist 57). This speaks to the importance Madison places on the requirements of office. For there to be no professional, economic or religious requirement for office, it is truly based on the virtue and merit of the individual seeking election. The emphasis Madison places on the idea of merit

naturally raises the question of how does he understand this term? He provides an answer in his understanding of the purpose of every constitution. According to him, “The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust” (Federalist 57). At the heart of Madison’s constitutionalism rests a noble understanding of politics. This is suggested by his emphasis on “wisdom to discern” and “virtue to pursue” the common good and not the private good. Additionally, it is imperative to keep elected officials “virtuous.” Were the Constitution to fail at this, a majority could sacrifice both the “rights of other citizens” as well as the “permanent and aggregate interests of the community” (Federalist 10).

The second solution that Madison offers in order to maintain this system of government is the best way to combat corruption. For Madison, ambition serves as a check on corruption (see Federalist 55). For Madison, an individual’s desire to hold office will outweigh any sort of influence that would lead to them forfeiting their title. Madison uses the example of the Congress in place at the time of the Revolution. Even with the offer of foreign gold, they held strong and did not allow the temptation to cost them their title. Their ambition for office was sufficient to counteract the corruption that could have crept in. The object of a representative’s ambition must be their position and the office itself, as well as their constituents in order for them to avoid corruption.

### **Ambition in the Executive**

The nature of the political ambition that characterizes the executive branch has long been a topic of interest for historians and political theorists. Emphasizing Hamilton’s concerns with

self-sacrifice and patriotism, writers such as J.G.A. Pocock and Gordon S. Wood argue that civic republicanism offers the best understanding of what motivates the presidency according to Hamilton. According to these authors, civic republicanism involves more of a “willingness of the individual to sacrifice his private interests for the good of the community” (Wood 1969, 68; see also Pocock 1975, 184). This is the type of civic republicanism that is seen in “Federalist 70” and “Federalist 71.” According to this reading, one finds in Hamilton an executive that can be understood in Aristotelian terms. This is an executive concerned with corruption and virtue and doing what is best for the good of the nation as a whole. Lance Banning (1992), however, rejects this understanding of civic republicanism. He contends that the divide between civic republicanism and liberalism that informs the arguments of Wood and Pocock is incorrect. Banning argues that civic republicanism shares with liberalism a common understanding of virtue (see also Gibson 2010). Closer inspection of Banning’s argument suggests a similarity to Harvey C. Mansfield’s account of the executive.

Mansfield believes in a much more Machiavellian executive. Mansfield feels that the executive is implicitly republican, or popular, and that winning over the people serves as the key to their success. Mansfield references Publius’ idea of a “feeble executive” (Mansfield 1989, 250). This implies that the executive should not be stronger than the people who elected him. This also brings into question whether or not the executive power has extended beyond its original limits. Here, Richard Neustadt (2001) argues that the presidential office has been weakened by various factors over time. He suggests that Congress is one of the biggest catalysts for the breakdown of presidential power. Neustadt credits this weakening to the idea that formal powers of the President have been trimmed by congressional behavior. Neustadt feels that the separation of power between Congress and the president has become aggressive in areas such as

foreign policy and emergency situations. Consequently, considerable authority has been taken away from the president. Neustadt states “Contemporary presidents have no authority to alter organizational arrangements in the so-called ‘executive branch’. Nor do they any longer have the freedom to ‘impound’ – thus saving – funds appropriated by Congress to departments” (Neustadt 2001, 2). As additional support for his argument, Neustadt also introduces evidence showing that public opinion demeans the presidency and its effectiveness, and growing cynicism of the presidency is limiting the office’s power and authority. However, looking at presidential and congressional approval ratings over time, Neustadt’s position can be challenged. Gallup polls show that while presidential approval ratings have been rising and falling over time, so have congressional approval ratings. While Ronald Reagan had an overall approval rating of 52.8 percent, George H.W. Bush saw an approval rating of 60.9 percent. While this was a large increase in the overall approval of a president, Barack Obama saw an approval rating of 47.9 percent. These numbers are fluid and rise and fall over the years. Congressional approval ratings also rise and fall among the public over time. Since the beginning of 2021, over 71 percent of Americans disapprove of the way Congress is handling their job (Gallup 2021). The vast majority of Americans greatly disapprove of Congress which indicates that Neustadt’s suggestion that Congress challenges presidential authority may not be correct.

An alternative interpretation of the current state of executive power is provided by William G. Howell’s “Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action.” Howell set out to show that rather than losing power, the presidency has actually increased its power over time. Howell illustrates this point through the example of executive orders. Howell states “Between 1920 and 1998, presidents issued 10,203 executive orders, or so roughly 130 annually. As might be expected, presidents issued thirty-three such orders, most of which dealt

with the management of governmental personnel” (Howell 2003, 250). Presidents utilize their power through executive orders as a way to circumvent Congress, eliminating congressional oversight. This period of time that Howell examines is a period in which presidential approval fluctuated the most, rising and falling some twenty points at times. Howell, as his title suggests, offers that persuasion is a large part of the president’s ability to hold power. Howell states “Power was contingent upon persuasion, and persuasion of all the personal qualities individual presidents bore; and so, the argument ran, what the presidency was at any moment critically depended upon who filled the office” (Howell 2003, 252). Howell suggests that ambition and character are a large part of the office and its functions. All of this leads to the issue of a unitary executive. According to unitary executive theorists, Article II of the Constitution puts the president in charge of executing the law and that therefore no other branch may limit presidential discretion over executive matters.

#### *Federalist 68-76*

“Federalist 68” discusses the need of the Electoral College as a means of tumult, disorder, cabal, intrigue, and corruption. We can see this parallel in “Federalist 10,” where factions are warned against because of their ability to give way to demagoguery. When read in conjunction with “Federalist 10,” “Federalist 68” reminds the reader of Publius’ concern with the motives of our elected officials. In particular, it helps us to better understand the need for “auxiliary precautions” in response to the possibility of bad motives like personal gain (Federalist 51). As originally conceptualized, the Electoral College was viewed as a mechanism that would prevent persons of poor ambition from being elected to nation’s highest office. Hamilton argues that while the sense of the American people “should operate in the choice of the person to whom so important a trust” has been conferred, this is only one of a number of factors

that should inform the decision of who the President is (Federalist 68). As a temporary body that serves the single constitutional purpose of selecting the President, the Electoral College must also concern itself with those “qualities adapted to the station” of the presidency (Federalist 68). Above all else, the Electoral College should avoid selecting persons inclined to “low intrigue and little arts of popularity” (Federalist 68). Such persons will not ambitiously protect the institution of the presidency and preserve the constitutional equilibrium necessary for avoiding tyranny.

Hamilton continues to develop his understandings of political ambition and the presidency in “Federalist 69” where he takes up the question what makes the president worthy of indefinite reelection? In the last paragraph of this paper, Hamilton points to the concern of the president with legacy. Presidents, according to Hamilton, will be concerned with how they are viewed by history and the entire structure of “Federalist 69” suggests that the exercise of executive power can be guided by this concern. Consisting of eleven paragraphs, the first ten paragraphs of “Federalist 69” provide an account of the president’s express powers. It is in the final paragraph where Hamilton lays out his understanding of the proper motivations for the exercise of these powers or, to put in another way, the necessary motives to ensure that these powers are not abused and used for the public good. Unlike the king of Great Britain, the president is eligible for reelection every four years and Hamilton conceptualized elections in terms of an opportunity for the American people to punish a bad president with removal from office or reward a good president with another four years in office (Federalist 69). While this is a fairly straightforward view of elections, what matters for Hamilton’s argument is how a president who seeks and fails to gain reelection will be viewed by the public and himself. Here, Hamilton speaks of “disgrace” (Federalist 69). Not wanting to be seen as a disgrace by others or himself, the president is to pursue policies and exercise executive power in a way that garners the esteem

of the American people. Relying on the president to be cognizant of the trust the public puts into them and their position is, by itself, an inadequate solution to the potential dangers associated with political ambition. What is necessary is a sense of shame. Shame, however, should not be understood as the feeling one has when they do something they know to be morally objectionable. Rather, shame should be understood in constitutional terms. As Faulkner's analysis of Washington suggests, honorable ambition focuses on the ability of the president to provide security to the nation. Like Washington, Hamilton understands that the executive's primary ambition is to preserve and empower the nation. The motivation behind this is not concern for the common good. The motivation resides in the desire for honor. The president should demonstrate a strong sense of duty and a deep obligation to the welfare of the nation. What is important to understand here is that the duty of the president and the nature of his obligation are prescribed by the Constitution. Thus, the ambition pointed to here is actually a combination of Faulkner's honorable ambition and Mansfield's emphasis on the Constitution. To simplify, what is honorable is constitutional and vice versa.

In "Federalist 70," Hamilton explores the consequences of negative ambition, which we can also see parallels in "Federalist 47." The main concern of these negative consequences is the aspiration to tyranny. The two elements of the aspiration to tyranny focused on are sedition and bad ambition becoming self-serving. While there is general agreement among the friends of republican government that this should happen, there is disagreement over how best to accomplish this goal. Anti-Federalists contend that an energetic executive is inconsistent with the genius of republican government (see Storing 1985, 308-15, 320, & 327). In response, Hamilton contends that the advocates of republican government "must at least hope, that the supposition is destitute of foundation" (Federalist 70). In order to reap the administrative benefits of an

executive characterized by decision, activity, secrecy, and dispatch, it is necessary to maintain due dependence on the people as well as due responsibility (Federalist 70).

Key to making the executive safe is avoiding a plural executive. On arguing against a plural executive, Hamilton offers insight into the nature of executive responsibility and the proper motivations of the nation's chief executive. A plural executive, according to Hamilton, creates a situation where differences of opinion may undermine the common enterprises of the nation. This would result in a loss of respectability for both the office of the president and the national government itself (Federalist 70). With the authority of the national government weakened, a plural executive will "impede and frustrate the most important measure of the government, in the most critical emergencies of the state" (Federalist 70). Hamilton does not regard "critical emergencies" as simply responses to catastrophic events. As he indicates in "Federalist 72," presidents "plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public benefit." Spurred by the love of fame, Hamilton argues that presidents will pursue policies that require "considerable time to mature and perfect them" in the name of advancing the common good (Federalist 72).

As bad as undermining the ability of government to pursue and execute good public policy, a plural executive is much more likely to exacerbate the problem of factions. According to Hamilton, "what is still worse, thy [plural executives] might split the community into violent and irreconcilable factions, adhering differently to the different individuals who composed the magistracy" (Federalist 70). Hamilton's worry about the consequences associated with the violence of factions, particularly the dissolution of the union itself, speaks to honorable ambition's emphasis on security. That a plural executive would also undermine the proper objects of government also speaks to honorable ambition. On these objects, Madison says that

they be may divided into two general classes. In the first, are those “depending on measures, which have singly an immediate and sensible operation” (Federalist 63). These are not the policies Hamilton is concerned with and sees the President having an important role in developing and executing. Rather, he is concerned with the second class: those “depending on a succession of well chosen and well connected measures, which have a gradual and perhaps unobserved operation. The importance of the latter description to the collective and permanent welfare of every country, needs no explanation” (Federalist 63).

With regard to how one ensures that the executive will pursue these objects, Hamilton relies on human nature. The executive, like all humans, seeks positive things and tries to avoid negative things. As an elected official, the executive can be held to two forms of responsibility—censure and punishment (Federalist 70).<sup>6</sup> The first of these is the most important negative consequence for elected officials as it is more likely that they will act in ways that violate the public trust than in ways that violate the law (Federalist 70). In order to reap the benefits of the desire to avoid public censure, it is necessary to place the president in a position from which they can take steps to avoid this. This means that not only is a single executive preferable, but that the executive’s term of office should be sufficient, and they should be eligible for reelection. According to Hamilton, it is a general principle of human nature that people are interested in whatever they possess “in proportion to the firmness or precariousness of the tenure by which he holds it ...” (Federalist 71). If the tenure is not very secure due to “a momentary or uncertain title,” one is less attached (Federalist 71). Given this understanding, in order to attach the president to the office of the presidency a term of at least four years is deemed sufficient. The

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<sup>6</sup> Hamilton does not use censure here in terms of a Congressional censure of the President. When he uses censure, he is referring to public censure and an elected official’s failure to get reelected.

four-year term also has the advantage of insulating the president from the convulsions of public opinion. While the executive should be governed by “the deliberate sense of the community,” it does not require “an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze of passion, or to every transient impulse which the people may receive from the arts of men, who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests” (Federalist 71). Thus, it is the duty of the presidency to act as the guardian of public interest which is consistent with the idea of honorable ambition.

“Federalist 72” continues to develop the argument for honorable ambition. Here, Hamilton focuses on the second aspect of duration in office, eligibility for reelection. Eligibility for reelection should have the effect of giving the person in office “the inclination and resolution to act his part well” (Federalist 72). Were the president to be limited to a single term, the primary inducement “to good behavior” would be removed (Federalist 72). As to why this would be the case, Hamilton argues that people are motivated by reward and that this desire is “one of the strongest incentives of human conduct” (Federalist 72). The reward Hamilton has in mind here is the honor of reelection as well as the honor associated with the successful pursuit of those long-term policies that benefit the nation discussed earlier. If term limited, Hamilton believes that it is unlikely that such policies would be pursued as the incentive to pursue such objects is effectively removed from consideration. Consequently, term limits mean that the best that can be hoped for is “the negative merit of not doing harm, instead of the positive merit of doing good” (Federalist 72).

“Federalist 73” and “Federalist 74” continue Hamilton’s analysis of the presidential motivation. In the absence of a properly structured presidency, Hamilton worries that the person holding this office will treat it as a source of financial gain (Federalist 73; see also Federalist 75). In response to this, Hamilton asks his reader to consider the question of how best to ensure that

this does not happen. Following Madison's lead in "Federalist 10," Hamilton does not look to wisdom and virtue as potential solutions (Federalist 73). Rather, the solution lies in getting the president to understand the role of his office in the system of checks and balances. Hamilton argues that it is necessary that the president understand that the "legislative will not be infallible; that the love of power may sometimes betray it into a disposition to encroach upon the rights of the members of the government; that a spirit of faction may sometimes pervert its deliberations ..." (Federalist 73). Recognizing this and informed by a concern with his good reputation, the president must first be enabled to "defend himself" (Federalist 73, see also Federalist 51). Of secondary importance is concern with increasing "the chances in favour of the community against the passing of bad laws ..." (Federalist 73).<sup>7</sup> Note the ordering employed by Hamilton. Presidents are primarily motivated by political self-preservation. If Congress were to take possession of a considerable amount of the executive power, the system of government that enables one to seek political glory would be destroyed and one's political ambitions cast to the side. Relying on this motivation allows, secondly, the president to protect the community against bad laws. While avoiding bad laws is more in line with the public good, it is important that this is

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<sup>7</sup> Hamilton is well aware that the power to prevent bad laws also entails the power to prevent good laws. This is possibility he is willing to accept. He writes, "... that the power of preventing bad laws includes that of preventing good ones; and may be used to the one purpose as well as to the other. But this objection will have little weight with those who can properly estimate the mischiefs of that inconstancy and mutability in the laws, which form the greatest blemish in the character and genius of our governments. They will consider every institution to restrain the excess of lawmaking, and to keep things in the same state in which they may happen to be at any given period, as much more likely to do good than harm; because it is favourable to greater stability in the system of legislation. The injury which may possibly be done by defeating a few good laws, will be amply compensated by the advantage of preventing a number of bad ones" (Federalist 73). For Hamilton, a bad law that is predictable is preferable to the political condition of the states where the inconstancy and mutability of the law undermines the requirement of predictability. Without predictability, neither citizens or elected official can fulfill their responsibilities.

of secondary importance for Hamilton. He does not expect that this would be a primary human motivation. Given our selfish nature, it is far better to rely on this and attach it to something that simultaneously facilitates the public good. As indicated previously, this can be accomplished by relying on one's concern to avoid a bad reputation.

“Federalist 74” discusses in more detail the motivations of the president. This time, Hamilton’s situates his discussion within the context of the discretionary powers of the President. If any problems with Hamilton’s reliance on a concern for glory and reputation were to present themselves, it would be here as it is more difficult to object to discretionary powers based on the text of the Constitution as discretionary powers allow the President to do what they feel is necessary in situations such as emergency. Today, we tend to view the ability of the president to exercise discretionary powers in a vacuum. This is to say, that the logic of unitary executive action removes Congress from the conversation. This is not the case according to *The Federalist*. When Hamilton conceptualized the administration of government in “Federalist 72,” the “executive details” that constitute the administration of government are all shared powers. These details include the following: 1) the conduct of foreign negotiations, 2) preparatory plans of finance, 3) the application and disbursement of public monies in conformity with congressional appropriations, 4) the arrangement of the army and navy, and 5) the directions of the operations of war (Federalist 72). Closer inspection of these demonstrates that while the president may play the primary role in the exercise of these powers, they are all shared or limited powers. The ability to conduct foreign negotiations is limited by the requirement that the Senate must approve any treaty before it goes into effect. The ability to engage in the preparatory plans of finance is limited by the constitutional requirement that all revenue bills must originate in the House which also limits the ability of the president to allocate money. As for the final two, the arrangement of

the military forces is limited by congressional allocation and before a president can direct the operations of war, Congress must declare war.

The various elements of honorable ambition and its connection to the Constitution all come together in “Federalist 76.” There, Hamilton takes up the power of appointment and at the center of this account lies a president’s concern with his reputation. Central to a favorable or good reputation is the ability of the president to fulfill his constitutional obligations. Making appointments is one of these obligations and here one should be concerned with making appointments that will advance the public good. According to Hamilton, the fact that the Senate has confirmation power should cause the president to look beyond “his private inclinations and interests” (Federalist 76). This should happen because of the fear of having one’s nominees rejected by the Senate. Concerned that this may negatively affect his reputation and, ultimately, his “political existence,” Hamilton believes that a president would “be both ashamed and afraid to bring forward ... candidates ... personally allied to him [the president], or of possessing the necessary insignificance and pliancy to render them obsequious instruments of his pleasure” (Federalist 76). With the proper institutions in place, it thus becomes possible to take advantage of those principles of human nature that produce “independent and public spirited men” (Federalist 76). These principles include the love of honor and fame where the good is defined not in abstract philosophical principles, but in constitutional terms.

Based on the analysis and argument presented in this section, it is thus possible to conclude that Hamilton’s account of political ambition in the executive can be viewed as a combination of Mansfield’s idea of constitutional ambition and Faulkner’s honorable ambition. Mansfield (1989, 263) echoes the thoughts of Hamilton on the executive and Madison in “Federalist 51” in arguing that “The constitutional office is connected to the interest of man, not

determined by it.” Unlike the incentives associated with economic institutions that reward and encourage the narrowest form of self-interest, the institution of the presidency connects the interest or ambition of the person in office to the duties of his office. The office, according to Mansfield, “forms and appeals to his desire to excel” (Mansfield 1989, 263). Key to achieving this success is honorable ambition. Motivated by strong sense of duty and obligation to the good of the nation, the office of the president cannot properly fulfill its constitutional role when held by a person of something other than honorable ambition. While the Constitution equips government with the means of dealing with this situation (separation of powers, checks and balances, judicial review, etc.), the fact that there has been an expansion of executive power makes the topic of political ambition all the more important. To the extent that the presidency we have today is more powerful than the one envisioned by Hamilton, it seems more important today than when Washington was elected president in 1789 that the office is held by a person who is characterized by the political ambition envisioned by the Founders.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The argument and analysis of *The Federalist* presented here demonstrates that the nature of political ambition can be derived from multiple places. With regard to the object of one’s ambition, whether it be the desire for reelection or fame, ambition looks different in every aspect of politics. With the system of checks and balances in place as established by James Madison, the Constitution is able to mitigate ambition in a way that not only makes it safe by preventing and combatting majority tyranny, but also connects political ambition to the pursuit of the common good. As to how this happens, Madison’s analysis of representation and his argument for the proper size of the House point to the interaction of honorable and constitutional ambition. A similar understanding of ambition is also found in Hamilton’s presentation of executive power.

Here, the President's concern for honor leads him to ambitiously perform his constitutional responsibilities. Should he stray from his constitutional responsibilities, Congress is able to check his misguided ambition because they ambitiously protect "the constitutional right of the place" (Federalist 51). As shown here, Madison's contention that "ambition must be made to counteract ambition" presupposes a particular understanding of political ambition that is fundamentally different from the default that characterizes contemporary political science—the desire for reelection. While Hamilton is open to this consideration more than Madison, both argue that in order for the Constitution to work, it is necessary "to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of society ..." (Federalist 57). Without elected officials of this character, the government created by the Constitution cannot fill its larger purpose. Rather than being an instrument to further the interests of the nation, a government of officials characterized by lower political ambition degenerates into the lowest form of politics where the interests of party trump concern for the common good.

The convergence of honorable and constitutional political ambition is particularly important for us today. As shown above, Hamilton's account of political ambition in "Federalist 76" connects to Faulkner and Mansfield's accounts of ambition as well. What makes Faulkner's understanding of honorable ambition honorable is not strict adherence to a set of moral principles. Rather, it is strict adherence to performing the constitutional responsibilities of the office one holds. This has significant implications for how one should think about the executive in light of arguments in favor of unitary executive theory. Unitary executive theory maintains that the Constitution places the president alone in charge of executing the laws of the land. Therefore, no other branch of government may limit presidential discretion over executive matters. Assuming, for the moment, that this is an accurate reading of the Constitution, the

tremendous amount of discretion unitary executive theory grants the president makes the character of the national executive all the more important. Were the office to be held by a person characterized by “low intrigue, and the little arts of popularity,” the nation would find itself in position from which the poor administration of government may undermine public faith in both the government itself, but the Constitution more generally. As Madison contends in “Federalist 48-49,” lack of constitutional support inevitably leads to the breakdown of society.

Fortunately, close inspection of both the US Constitution and the argument made in *The Federalist* raises doubts as to the accuracy of unitary executive theory’s constitutionality. To interpret the Take Care Clause (Article II, Section 3) as rejecting both legislative and judicial oversight of the executive is inconsistent with the argument of *The Federalist* and the understanding of political ambition that drives the constitutional structure. Hamilton does argue that the executive plays the key role in the administration of the law. This role, however, does not occur in a constitutional vacuum. Hamilton’s discussion of executive power firmly places the executive within the context of a system of checks and balances (see Federalist 75-77).

All of this being said, critics of the analysis and argument developed here can legitimately argue that the understanding of political ambition provided in *The Federalist* borders on being utopian speculation. How could the authors of *The Federalist* omit from their argument an extended treatment of political parties? The debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists was, after all, a debate between two de facto political parties. It is possible to defend Madison and Hamilton and to point to a transformation of political parties in America that no system of government can adequately check. In his “Of Parties in General,” David Hume differentiates personal from real factions (parties) and says that real factions can be based on interest, principle, and affection (Hume 1987, 56). Of the three types of real parties, Hume is

least worried about parties of interest. This is because the parties motivated by interest are not typically destructive. Hume argues that parties of interest are easier to appease. One would simply need to satisfy or promise to satisfy their interests. In contrast, it is impossible to satisfy parties of principle. This is due to the fact that in order to satisfy parties of interest, it is necessary for there to be wholesale revolution of the established order (see Hume 1987, 60-62; Church 2007, 175; Livingston 1984, Ch. 12). The problem with these factions is that while they battle against one another, they often lose sight of and threaten to undermine the main purpose of our political society: industry, stability, and security. Where interest is predictable, principle is not. Thus, to the extent that political parties today closely resemble factions of principle, Hume would argue that American politics requires less principle and more interest. As long as at least one of our parties is governed by [religious] principle, it will be “engendered by a spirit of persecution” and this spirit, according to Hume, “has ever since been the poison of human society, and the source of the most inveterate factions in every government” (Hume 1987, 62). To move us away from a politics of victimhood, it is necessary to place in office persons who put the good of the Constitution first. We also need a public that understands the constitutional responsibilities of the various political offices and uses this understanding to make elections tests of constitutional merit. This may be too much to ask for, but one need look no further than a civic education that places the Constitution at its center as the starting point of making the American system of government function in the way envisioned by the authors of *The Federalist*.

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