**Madison’s Congressional Manifesto:**

The Philosophy Behind the Virginia Plan and Other Political Strategies

The American government faced a complete reconstruction when the Continental Congress gathered for the Philadelphia Convention in May 1787. Originally designed to discuss the growing problems surrounding the Articles of Confederation, it became apparent to some that an entirely new Constitution was needed. James Madison, known today as the Father of the American Constitution, was an aspiring young politician during the American Revolution and witnessed the efforts of the 13 Colonies to declare independence from England. He also understood the failures of the Articles of Confederation and sought to reorganize the new government at the 1787 Convention. Madison arrived at the convention with proposals for an entirely new government. He compiled his research into a report, which his friend Edmund Randolph presented as the Virginia Plan. When the Virginia Plan was replaced with the Great Compromise, however, Madison still continued to apply the fruit of his research and studies to his political efforts in Congress. During the framing and ratification of the Constitution, as well as during Madison’s presidency, his education at the College of New Jersey framed his ideas about Locke and Aristotle’s political philosophies, which he applied to both his Virginia Plan and the works he contributed to the *Federalist Papers*.

Born to a wealthy, land and slave-owning Virginia family in March 1751, Madison seemed to have been born with the path to statesmanship already laid out before him. Madison described his own family background in a letter dated February 1st, 1834. After listing his immediate ancestors and their occupations, he concludes that his “ancestors, on both sides, were not among the most wealthy of the country, but in independent and comfortable circumstances.” (Gay) The son of James Madison and Nelly Conway, Madison’s family background consisted of high-spirited, well-to-do planters. Today, the Madisons are known as one of many families who eventually dominated Virginia politics and had a substantial impact on framing social life in the new United States.

The luxury of plantation life in Montpelier allowed Madison to study at home at an early age, and he continued on to the Donald Robertson boarding school when he was 11 years old. There he was immersed in Greek and Roman history and philosophy; he also learned Latin, Greek, French, Italian, and Spanish. In 1767, he began receiving advanced tutoring from a College of New Jersey graduate, the Reverend Thomas Martin, and in 1769, Madison left Montpelier altogether and joined Martin at the college in Princeton. His study of Greek and Roman history would greatly impact Madison’s ideas about forming the new American government, but nothing prepared him more than his studies at the College of New Jersey in Princeton.

Madison’s experiences at Princeton introduced him to a much deeper, richer education in government. The college was firmly based in Presbyterianism, so much so that Calvinist doctrine was a required study in the curriculum. During his studies, Madison was exposed to a vast quantity of ideas from his professors and mentors. However, the underlying impressions of Calvinist and Christian influences were ever-present in the classroom. His chief religious and intellectual inspiration was President John Witherspoon, a theological writer and minister from Scotland who declared himself an ‘opposer of lordly domination and sacredotal tyranny’ (Rowley). The Scottish educator was also the only college president and clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. Witherspoon had been raised in the parish of Yester in Scotland where his father was a minister. He attended the public school of Haddington where he established his reputation as a quick learner, and soon moved on to the University of Edinburgh to become a minister. At the age of twenty-one, he became assistant and successor to his father. The following year he received a presentation from the Earl of Eglinton, granting him a ministry position in the parish of Beith. As a minister, Witherspoon published many works concerning the flaws of certain ministerial practices and the implications of Christ’s righteousness on a holy life. He received a degree from a Scottish university in 1764, and he published three volumes of his “Essays on Important Subjects” in London later that year. These volumes prompted three ministry invitations: one from a church in Dublin and two in Scotland. Witherspoon was very attached to his parish, however, and was rather surprised to receive an invitation to become president at the College of New Jersey in Princeton, which he declined. A second invitation followed which finally convinced him to leave Scotland for America. Witherspoon’s reputation as a great theologian, teacher, and speaker had already preceded him, and the college gained a solid, positive reputation as a result of Witherspoon’s work and popularity. During the American Revolution, he preached a sermon in which he declared his thoughts on some of the current political issues in the new nation. This sermon was eventually published as “The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men.” His good judgment and ability to manage finances for the college, as well as his determination to expand the study of mathematical science and natural philosophy, eventually increased his popularity enough to result in his selection to represent the people of New Jersey in the Congress of the United States in 1776.

During his career as a president of the College of New Jersey, Witherspoon favored authors like John Milton, Algernon Sidney, and John Locke and he likely shared the works of these authors with his student, Madison. An essay published by the Locke Institute closely examines Madison and Witherspoon’s relationship, stating that while studying under Witherspoon, Madison learned the idea that “…liberty must be gained and preserved only at the price of eternal vigilance.” (Rowley) Witherspoon’s library, particularly the Memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz, fueled the fire of Madison’s revolutionary ideas. As he prepared his Virginia Plan, and eventually his essays for the *Federalist Papers*, Madison thrived on the knowledge he gained at the College of New Jersey. His commentary and ideas on national government, as we will soon discover, reflected those of Calvin, John Locke, Aristotle’s *Politics*, and many others.

Of all the political commentators that Madison became familiar with under Witherspoon’s instruction, John Locke was the greatest inspiration to Madison, especially through his publication *The Second Treatise on Government.* The idea of man in a state of nature that gradually evolved into civil society was a revolutionary concept during the 17th century. Both Locke and Thomas Hobbes discussed the idea of a social contract between the people and the government. However, Hobbes believed a monarch who ruled over the contract (and was therefore immune to any challenge by it) was the best form of government while Locke held that all men in their state of nature retained specific rights, namely life, liberty, and estate, until they voluntarily created or joined a communal society. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke states that “…for it is not every compact that puts an end to the state of Nature between men, but only this one of agreeing together mutually to enter into one community, and make one body politic.” (Rodriguez, 79) Here, Locke uses the word ‘compact’ rather than ‘contract’ as was the preferred language in Rousseau’s writings. In his scholarly essay entitled, *Was Madison an Original Thinker?*, Gary Rosen describes the revolutionist sense of the social compact in comparison to past governments that justified their authority by pointing to “…the will of God or the extraordinary qualities of a particular class.” (Rosen, 1)

Madison also preferred to use the word ‘compact’ when describing the social agreement among individuals to become a civil society and create a state of government. Modern historians in the Constitution Society believe that these writers’ compacts and contracts were likely identical and the terms were used interchangeably. They suggest that while Madison agreed with the *concept* of Rousseau’s contract, he used the word ‘compact’ “…because [the concept] is not a commercial contract, requiring express, informed consent.” (Social Contract) Locke would agree that consent to a set of rules or norms implies the establishment of society, and the concept of creating government arises from that society. In other words, Madison likely used the term ‘compact’ because he favored Locke’s approach and wanted to emphasize the individual’s submission into society as an act that precedes the creation of government. The term ‘contract’ may imply the simultaneous act of individual submission and state establishment, which, Madison determined, was not right or natural.

Madison also recognized Locke’s emphasis on representation and government rule by consent of the people. He read all of Locke’s works at the College of New Jersey and carried these ideals with him throughout his political career. Overall, this gave him a unique outlook on government; one that valued the rights of individuals and recognized the importance of their involvement in government for the good of the whole. Madison also recalled Locke’s ideas regarding human nature, and the right of every man to be free, a condition that could be reached by the individuals’ direct involvement in government. Witherspoon emphasized the idea that the purpose of government was to “…encourage and to nourish, not life alone, but the good life, the life of virtue.” (Rowley) As Madison became familiar with Locke’s ideas about representation and government by consent, he also embraced this politic of virtue. Under his studies of Locke, Madison understood that virtue was the foundation of government and that its supremacy came from a higher order than the majority rule.

In summary, regarding Madison’s early education and career in Princeton, the studies of history, politics, and religion all contributed to Madison’s future career in the Virginia legislature and United States Congress. Witherspoon’s political encouragement to study Locke armed the young Virginia statesman with the understanding that in order to become and remain free, man’s participation in government was imperative. Knowledge of the histories of Greek and Rome granted him a deep appreciation for and understanding of human nature and political obligation. Finally, thanks to Madison’s past religious experiences and Christian traditions, he embraced the importance of morality, human dignity, and integrity.

After attending the College of New Jersey, it is no surprise that Madison considered entering the ministry for a time, considering the heavy religious influence of the college and Dr. Witherspoon. However, he chose to pursue politics instead, and his career took off in the 1770’s. He was a delegate in the Williamsburg (Va.) Convention of May 1776, where Virginia delegates declared independence from Britain and encouraged Congressional delegates to do the same. The Williamsburg Convention also constructed Virginia’s new government. Although Madison was not a signer of the Declaration of Independence, it is clear that he helped build the earliest foundations for an independent America. During the construction of the new Virginia government, Madison pushed through statutes on religious freedom, a debate he was glad to undertake. In his commentary on Madison, entitled *American Statesman: James Madison*, Sydney Howard Gay states that “Religious freedom had to be once more fought for, and he was quick to come to the defense of a right which had first called forth his youthful enthusiasm.” (Gay, 65) No doubt, Madison relished the opportunity to exercise his religious familiarity and understanding in these debates. In October 1776, Madison was elected to Virginia’s House of Delegates. Custom and tradition called for candidates to supply a free barrel of liquor for voters on Election Day, but when Madison refused to comply, it cost him reelection in 1777. However, in 1778, the House of Delegates appointed him to the Virginia Council of State that reported to the Virginia Governor and directed state affairs during the Revolutionary War (Rowley). It was through this position that Madison formed a stronger relationship with his friend Thomas Jefferson, who was elected Virginia Governor in 1779.

Jefferson and Madison’s friendship extended beyond political affairs. Both were devoted readers on various subjects, including history, philosophy, agriculture, science, and economics. Their letters often included ongoing discussions about their ideas and thoughts concerning these areas. Together, they used one another as a sounding board to shape their ideas on government and legislation. Even before the Constitutional Convention, Madison and Jefferson shared their political agendas as they developed. On March 19th, 1787, Madison sent Jefferson a letter in which he laid out four measures he deemed necessary for establishing a new government. These measures included changing the representation principle and constitutional ratification by the people to emphasize the importance of the new government. (Roland) Second, he wanted to “…arm the federal head with a negative in all cases whatsoever on the local Legislatures.” (Roland, letter 21) Madison feared state encroachment on federal authority and he believed that without this veto power, federal authority would be overrun no matter how clearly the boundaries between these two institutions were defined. “The effects of this provision,” he told Jefferson, “would be not only to guard the national rights and interest against invasion, but also to restrain the States from thwarting and molesting each other, and even from oppressing the minority within themselves by paper money and other unrighteous measures which favor the interest of the majority.” (Roland, letter 21) This particular idea of a negative or veto power to serve as a check on the state governments arose from the philosophies Madison learned under Witherspoon at the College of New Jersey. Here, though, we see an interesting step in Madison’s political agenda. Using his education and past experiences in politics, Madison had framed his ideas about political philosophy and, desiring to apply it to the new United States, he now sought the opinion of his trusted friends for feedback and confirmation. Jefferson supported Madison’s research, encouraged him, provided responses in his letters and, while he visited France, sent Madison more than 200 books to advance his studies. Before the Constitution was written or thought of, Madison was already taking full advantage of his resources, planning how to carry out his Congressional Manifesto. He was already shaping a new nation in his mind that embraced the ideas of ancient Greece, Rome, John Locke, and others.

As Madison’s relationship with Jefferson developed, his research intensified, and his political reputation heightened. In December 1779, General Washington requested that Virginia’s best man attend the Third Continental Congress, and Madison was selected. March 1780 revealed a Congress significantly more frail and fragile than the one that led the race for independence in 1776. Madison’s four years there gave him a political education like none he had experienced before. By 1781, the states had ratified the Articles of Confederation, but much to his despair, Congress itself had little power under them. The thirteen states were nearly independent, naturally competitive, and not as willing to fund the war effort as Madison would have liked. Under the Articles, the states were sovereign, Congress could not levy a tax to pay for the Revolution, and a unanimous vote was needed to amend the Articles. This left the Congress unable to exercise much authority in any matter and without the means to acquire any new authority from the states. Madison worked hard in the face of a government weakened by war and fragmentation, calling for the use of force to obtain state funding for the revolution. He spent his last three years in office applying his knowledge and understanding to the issues at hand. Most historians recognize Madison’s zeal and motivation; no one came to a debate more prepared than he. He adamantly called for legislation granting more power to a strong central government, which he saw necessary to a military victory over Britain. His opponents, though, feared that a strong central government in the United States would evolve into a monarchal authority just like the one they had left in England. With such a fragile government, it really is a wonder the United States won the Revolution and without the French, would have no doubt suffered an embarrassing defeat.

In 1783, Madison’s term in Congress expired under the Articles of Confederation term limits, and he returned to Virginia. Fortunately, though, his time in Congress had opened his eyes to the difficulties of real-life politics. He now knew the weaknesses of the Confederacy and he had a pretty good idea about how to fix them. In 1784, he was reelected to the Virginia House of Delegates, where he served until 1787. He and Jefferson worked together to revise Virginia law with a special focus on individual freedoms, particularly the freedom of religion.

Lance Banning, a Professor of History at the University of Kentucky, presents an interesting view of Madison’s experience in Congress and his return to the Virginia legislature. In *The Sacred Fire of Liberty*, Banning presents Madison’s proposals to restrain majority abuses as a means by which he could advance Virginia’s power as a state. According to Banning, Madison “…advocated centralizing measures only in so far as they appeared compatible with the essential interests of Virginia and the fundamental character of the emerging, revolutionary nation.” (Banning, 45) Banning also argues that “in 1783...a small minority in Congress might have voted for a resolution to convene a federal convention,” but Madison opposed it because he did not desire such a quick transformation of the government (Banning, 45). That sentiment, Banning argued, did not arise until later in his career. “Only after he returned from Congress to struggle year after year in the Virginia House of Delegates against the advocates of paper money, tax abatements, and assessments for religion…did he begin to think of far more radical reforms.” (Banning, 46) “Even then,” Banning continues, “his revolutionary ardor and his long, determined effort to protect Virginia’s interests shaped a plan that was as incompatible as his desires had always been with a consolidated national system.” While it may be true that Madison’s call for radical reform became more ardent after his experience in Congress, Madison’s ideals and proposals were not rooted in his personal interests favoring Virginia alone. His letters to Jefferson, his appreciation for Lockean theory, and his intense relationship with Witherspoon support a more virtuous motivation. In summary, Madison’s political philosophies were well-established before he reached Congress and his love for Virginia was a secondary motivation for him to speak out.

Under the Articles of Confederation, state sovereignty made it nearly impossible for Congress to pass policies for states with conflicting interests. “The vice of [the] political system,” Madison declared, “[is] the abuse of legislative authority in the states and the debilitating dependence of the national government on those same legislatures.” (Zelizer, 9) Madison wanted above all to secure more power in the central government, but his attempts during his first term in Congress were opposed by fellow representatives afraid of tyranny. The federal government was weakening, and Madison knew it. After two terms in the Virginia legislature, he was eligible to return to Congress in 1787. For the Philadelphia Convention, Madison pulled together all his resources to form a master theory and a master plan. The theory was federalism, “…which rationalized a large republic in the face of the prevailing idea that only small ones could function; it was also one which justified a strong central government in the face of fears in the several states that central power meant tyranny.” (Elkins, 83) Madison’s master plan consisted of specific measures he felt imperative for the survival of a federal system. A system that required absolute state compliance with national measures would never succeed; the new government must be equipped to create, enforce, and judge its own laws. Since new Americans had a hard time investing power in a single legislature (which looked very much like the British Parliament) this required a bicameral legislature. Madison also knew that large states would not favor an equal representation system, so he proposed the use of proportional representation to give each state representation proportionate to its population, which he deemed the only legitimate base for representation. (Zelizer, 10) Guarding Congress against pressure from the states and the people was another necessary measure Madison believed would allow Congress to act more wisely than it had under the strong influence of competitive state legislatures. The final measure Madison proposed was a series of negative veto powers invested in the federal government to be exercised over the states, along with a veto power for the executive and judiciary branches to use against Congress itself. All of these measures were ground-breaking; the Philadelphia Convention had convened to amend and adjust the Articles of Confederation, but not nearly to the extent that Madison was suggesting. Julian E. Zelizer’s textbook *The American Congress* elaborates on the picture of Congress after Governor Edmund Randolph presented the Virginia Plan on May 29th, 1787:

“Before 1787, would-be reformers of the Confederation favored adding powers incrementally to those already enjoyed by the Continental Congress. Now Madison was proposing radical alterations in the powers and structure of the national legislature, in its relations to the states and their citizens, and also to its coordinate branches in the national government. Short of abolishing the states themselves, it would be difficult to imagine a more radical agenda.” (Zelizer, 12)

Those who opposed Madison’s ideas were not the only representatives who thought he was more than a little crazy. Before the Virginia Plan was presented to Congress, Madison himself admitted in a letter to Governor Randolph that “…in truth my ideas of a reform strike so deeply at the old Confederation, and lead to such a systematic change, that they scarcely admit of the expedient.” (Miller*,* 287) Madison also stated in this letter that, like Randolph, he thought it “…well to retain as much as possible of the old Confederation” but he doubted “…whether it may not be best to work the valuable articles into the new system, instead of engrafting the latter on the former.” (Miller, 287) In short, Madison was aware of the drastic effect his proposals would have on the Congress, but he felt so strongly about them that he was more than willing to re-write the Articles of Confederation to endorse them.

As Madison predicted, much of the opposition to his Virginia Plan arose in the debate between proportional or equal state representation in Congress. Madison himself kept careful record of the discussions and debates that occurred during Congressional sessions, and thanks to his notes, modern historians can get an accurate picture of what policies were favored by whom and how disagreements were addressed and presented. According to Madison’s notes, his primary supporters in this matter were James Wilson (PA), Charles Pinckney (SC), Alexander Hamilton (NY), and Governor Edmund Randolph (VA). Delegates from the less populous states naturally desired to keep the equal vote rule from the Articles intact and included “John Dickinson of Delaware, the principal framer of the Articles of Confederation; William Paterson of New Jersey…Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut…and his colleague Roger Sherman, who had attended the Stamp Act Congress of 1765 and signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation.” (Zelizer, 13) In the debates that surrounded the Virginia Plan, several arguments were raised in favor of state governments and equal representation. John Lansing, although from the larger state of New York, disliked Madison’s Virginia Plan because it would “…annihilate the State governments” (Miller 317-318) Lansing believed that “…this national government will, from their power, have great influence in the State governments; and the existence of the latter is only saved in appearance.” (Miller, 317-318) Dr. William Johnson of Connecticut suggested that “…a portion of government…be left to the states….with the right of appointing the second branch of the national legislature, to represent the States individually.” (Miller, 320) This may have been one of the first steps towards a compromise that allowed both equal and proportional representation in the national legislature. Luther Martin of Maryland also agreed with Dr. Johnson. “You must give each State an equal suffrage,” he declared, “or our business is at an end.” (Miller, 344)

In direct response to the Virginia Plan, the small-state representatives, and a few large-state representatives, created a second plan, known as the New Jersey Plan. This plan retained the unicameral legislature first established under the Articles of Confederation with an equal number of votes for each state. Lansing backed this plan, declaring in a debate on June 16th, that “…had the legislature of the State of New York apprehended that their powers would have been construed to extend the formation of a national government [through the Virginia Plan] to the extinguishment of their independency, no delegates would have here appeared on the part of that State.” (Miller, 300) Lansing also argued that “Great changes can only be gradually introduced.” This statement likely verbalized what other legislators believed: Madison’s plan changed the functions of the national government too drastically in too little time.

Madison’s supporters, however, quickly stated their opposing remarks against the New Jersey Plan. “The bravery of our troops is degraded by the weakness of our government.” Gov. Randolph declared, “Originally, our Confederation was founded on the weakness of each State to repel a foreign enemy; and we have found that the powers granted to Congress are insufficient.” (Miller, 305) Two days later, Alexander Hamilton of New York reopened the debate and gave a five hour speech in which he presented his *own* plan to revise the Articles of Confederation. According to Madison’s notes, the plan was appreciated, but not even referred to the committee of detail. Judge Yates remarked that “Hamilton was praised by everybody, but supported by none.” (Miller, 313)

Madison himself held strong sentiments against the New Jersey Plan, which he voiced publicly in his Milestone Speech. Madison’s asked those in favor of the small state plan, “Will it prevent those violations of the law of nations and of treaties which if not prevented must involve us in the calamities of foreign wars?” (Madison, *Milestone Documents*) Later, to clarify this position, Madison argued that the existing government left the states as uncontrolled as ever and did not provide guidance for any calamities that may arise between states or between the United States and other foreign powers. In the remainder of the speech, Madison continued to question the New Jersey Plan’s supporters, “Will it prevent encroachment on the federal authority?…Will it prevent trespasses of the States on each other?…Will it secure internal tranquility of the States themselves?…Will it secure good internal legislation and administration to the particular States?…Will it secure the Union against the influence of foreign powers over its members?” (Madison, *Milestone Documents*)

On July 16th, 1789, five states voted for equal representation in the Upper House of Congress (the Senate), four states voted against, and Massachusetts was divided. The Great Compromise, also known as the Connecticut Compromise, was a strategic mix of the New Jersey and Virginia Plans. It established a bicameral legislature with representation in the House of Representatives elected with proportional consideration to population and the Senate, representing each state equally, was elected by the state legislatures. In 1912, the 17th Amendment was passed, which called for popular election of Senators, but for now, that power was in the hand of the state legislatures. With the inclusion of the Great Compromise, the federal Constitution granted specific rights to Congress, including the substantial powers regarding war, taxation, commerce, the militia, and other matters. In *The American Congress,* Zelizer determines that “…those powers were nonetheless confined to particular objects…this limitation was a by-product of the facts of federalism and the belief that the regulation of the daily activities of Americans was primarily a matter of state law and local custom. But it also reflected the deeper conception of the limited nature of constitutional government.” (Zelizer, 17) Finally, the new Constitution was a congressionally-supported hybrid of state sovereignty and a strong central government. Power came from the people, as was evident in the limited powers of the federal government, but that same federal government also recognized what came to be known as the necessary-and-proper clause, which gave Congress authority to “…make all laws necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers” already stated in Article 1, Sect. 8 of the Constitution.

As can be imagined, Madison was not entirely thrilled with the Great Compromise since it did leave out some of his key points in the Virginia Plan. Madison saw each aspect of his proposal as vital to the survival of federalism and the ignorance of even one might have brought down the entire government. The two Virginia Plan components left out of the Great Compromise were 1) proportional state representation in the Senate and 2) the strong federal veto power over all state laws. Regarding the final decision to use equal representation in the Senate, Madison, in his own words, “was not only fixed in his opposition to the report of the committee but was prepared for any event that might follow a negative of it.” (Elkins, 83) Also, without a negative power over the states, Madison didn’t think the national government strong enough to keep those separate states under control. The authority of the judiciary branch did not suffice or appease him. Today, Madison is known as the Father of the Constitution, but one has to wonder just how pleased Madison was with the Great Compromise and how it differed from his own personal ideas about developing the Congress as a federal power.

The vote for the Great Compromise had passed, but ratification by the states was still needed before the Constitution could be enacted. At this point, Madison joined forces with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay to begin publishing a series of essays known as the *Federalist Papers* to convince the states to ratify the Constitution. Similar to his experiences in the Virginia legislature, Madison encouraged state governments to support Congress in its efforts. Today, Madison’s contributions to the *Federalist Papers* offer a clear, distinct outlook on his ideas about government, most of which were included in his Virginia Plan. Some historians and professors turn to these papers for confirmation about how Madison viewed the new government. They also seek support for the ideas he presented in the Virginia Plan and before Congress. Yet they often forget that the *Papers* were written to encourage ratification of a Constitution that already included the Great Compromise rather than Madison’s own Virginia Plan. His original strategy had been outvoted and, as he interpreted the Great Compromise, Madison saw the Constitution as something that would succeed, but not in a way that completely fulfilled or exemplified his ideals. Some historians today look at Madison’s *Federalist Papers* and argue that when he could not achieve his desired affect through the Virginia Plan, he sought to interpret the Constitution to fit his agenda. The Locke Institute also presents the interesting possibility that in his dissatisfaction with the Great Compromise, Madison turned his focus to the separation of powers to form a checks and balance system that would keep the new government under control. (Rowley)

While the *Federalist Papers* hold much evidence regarding Madison’s ideas, they also provide modern historians with a good look at the source of those ideas. The influence of Aristotle in Madison’s interpretations and favored philosophies is most evident in his *Federalist Papers*. Many historians believe that Montesquieu was Madison’s primary inspiration in writing the *Federalist Papers*. However, despite the vast amount of research connecting Madison’s ideals with Locke, Calvin, and Montesquieu, Michael J. Faber’s presentation entitled *The Aristotelian Federalist* uniquely discusses the commonalities of Madison’s arguments with others that dated even further back in history to Aristotle’s *Politics*. Naturally, Madison had studied this work under Witherspoon’s instruction at the College of New Jersey and in reality, his philosophies were more linear that some historians have previously debated. In summary, Aristotle continued to influence Madison’s political strategies even after the Virginia Plan was defeated.

In a presentation prepared for the 2008 meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Faber compares Madison’s writings with Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Ethics*. Faber particularly emphasizes Madison’s heavy references to Aristotle regarding the issues of factions, the separation of powers, and power stability. The first of these issues, that of factions, is discussed in what is likely Madison’s most popular essay, *Federalist No. 10.* While studying under Witherspoon, it is also quite possible, in fact very likely, that Madison came into contact with the works of David Hume, the Scottish political philosopher who published *Essay’s, Moral and Political*. Probably the most recognized Hume influence arises in Madison’s discussion of factions in *Federalist 10*. Hume believed that a democratic society ought to prevent factions based on religion, politics, and common interests. The founding fathers had no thought or futuristic ideas about political parties, so in the case of the new United States, factions were the name given to Congress members who shared common political viewpoints and agendas. In a sense, Madison agreed with Hume that factions were damaging and ought to be avoided in a republic. In *Federalist 10*, he describes faction members as “actuated by some common impulse or passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.” (*Fed. 10*) As Faber discusses in *The Aristotelian Federalist*, however, Madison’s statement also closely aligns with Aristotle’s declaration that “Those who think that all virtue is to be found in their own party principles push matters to extremes…they do not consider that disproportion destroys a state.” (*Politics)* The question then arises: Whose opinion did Madison favor concerning factions: Aristotle’s or Hume’s? This particular writer argues that both of these figures equally inspired Madison’s work. In his paper, *Of Parties in General*, Hume discusses two kinds of factions; those that form out of opposing personal or political sentiments between representatives in government (Hume). Aristotle, on the other hand, favored property and the distribution of income as the direct causes of party formation. In *Federalist No. 10*, Madison aligns with Aristotle, stating that the common source of factions as “…the various and unequal distribution of property.” (*Fed. 10*) and according Stanley Elkins’s *The Age of Federalism,* he also believed that factions could form due to differing opinions regarding class and religion. In short, Madison adopted his ideas concerning faction from the works of both Hume and Aristotle, and his education and political experience would have placed both sources at his disposal.

Now, regarding these factions within government, Madison recognized that the people were concerned about the public good being ignored “…in the conflict of rival parties” (*Fed. 10*) and that congressional measures would be passed by a corrupt or extravagant majority rather than by justice. In response, Madison states that a minority faction is of little or no consequence because the republican principle holds that they will be outvoted and thus defeated. He then presents the Aristotelian concept of a separation of powers in *Federalist No. 47*, viewing it as a means by which to avoid a majority faction’s unchecked domination in the passage of legislation and execution of good government. In *Politics*, Aristotle stated that advocates of good government recognize and lay out the three elements of each state: the first part being one that deliberates public affairs (legislators), the second having the power to execute authority (officers), and the third part having the judicial power (judges). In *Federalist No. 47*, Madison declared that combining the powers of these same three branches into one body “…may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.” (Madison, *Federalist 47*)

In *The Aristotelian Federalist*, Faber also holds that both Madison and Aristotle were concerned about government being “…administered in a manner contrary to the intentions of the writers.” (Faber, 5) and thus, not necessarily proving strong enough to promise the constant separation of these powers into different branches. To firmly secure this separation of powers, Madison’s *Federalist No. 44* celebrates the necessity of the Supremacy clause, which helped to established a limited but definite superiority of the federal government over the state governments. “Without the Supremacy Clause,” Madison observed in *Federalist No. 44*, “The world would have seen for the first time, a system of government founded on the inversion of the fundamental principles of all government; it would have seen the authority of the whole society every where subordinate to the authority of the parts; it would have seen a monster in which the head was under the direction of the members.” (Zelizer, 21)

Another aspect of the Constitution that Madison favored was the elastic clause, also a result of Aristotelian influence. Aristotle’s *Politics* offered a great amount of advice on how to build a Constitution, one of them was a reminder that the future could always change and that the written Constitution ought to include flexibility. “It is impossible that all things should be precisely set down in writing…great caution would seem to be required.” (*Politics)* With this in mind, Madison placed great value on the elastic clause that would eventually be included in the Constitution. Madison’s friend at the time, Alexander Hamilton also recognized the need for a governmental power that would allow it to “…make the necessary decisions to defend and preserve the state.” (Faber, 8) Later, during the debates regarding internal improvement, Madison favored dependence on the elastic clause to allow for federal involvement in state and local improvements rather than Thomas Jefferson’s call for a Constitutional amendment.

While Aristotle clearly influenced Madison’s writing and political career, he was not the only source that Madison drew upon from his early life. As was mentioned earlier, Madison received a Calvinistic education while studying under Witherspoon at the College of New Jersey. Witherspoon himself being a minister and renowned for his theological presentation and courage, Madison received a strong dose of the religious integrity that Witherspoon applied to his political writing. We can see some of the Calvinist influence in Madison’s ideals in *Federalist 51.* Madison’s words comparing men and angels directly echoes Calvin’s sermon on Galatians 3:19-20, entitled “The Many Functions of God’s Law”, published in Edinburgh’s 1997 volume, *Sermons on Galatians*. In his sermon, Calvin states that, “If we were like angels, blameless and freely able to exercise perfect self-control, we would not need rules or regulations. Why, then do we have so many laws and statutes?” (Calvin and Madison) He goes on to say that man’s evil actions and wickedness require that laws and regulations be established as a controlling remedy for society. In *Federalist 51*, Madison uses a similar comparison to express the need for government. “If men were angels,” he says, “No government would be necessary…in framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must enable to government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” (*Fed. 51)* Here, we see a beautiful presentation by Madison in which he combines his admiration for Calvin with his belief that a strong central government is needed to control the states. This is an idea that Madison pushed during the development and debates surrounding the Virginia Plan. *Federalist 51* also clarifies Madison’s call for a system of checks and balances on the various branches of the American government. (Calvin and Madison) Here, it is evident that he continued to maintain, support, and advocate these concepts while trying to convince the states to ratify the new American Constitution.

Recognizing the connection between Madison’s ideas in *Federalist 51* and Calvin’s ideas on government regulation brings an interesting question to the table: How much of the American Constitution can be attributed to Calvinistic principles? In November 2009, Harper’s Magazine published an article entitled *Calvin and Madison on Men, Angels and Government* that addresses this question directly. As stated before, Calvinist doctrine maintained a strong influence over the political and philosophical curriculum at Madison’s alma mater. Unlike some Protestant denominations of the period (Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism) Calvinism was not, in itself, a state religion and its philosophers sought to advance the idea of religious liberty via the separation of church and state. (Calvin and Madison) However, though the underlying principles of Calvinism and the Constitution appear similar, the article clearly states that “Saying that Calvinist theory helped support the architecture of the Constitution is different from saying that it rests on Calvinism or indeed any theology.” (Calvin and Madison) Madison himself attended a Presbyterian church, but he was married in the Anglican church, often attended Episcopal services, and seemed to drift away from religious gatherings altogether as his political popularity grew. In summary, Madison’s religious ideas did contribute to the vast array of ideas that shaped his political philosophies, and his situation is a perfect example of a stable but limited religious integrity applied to political reform.

Throughout history Madison has been referred to as the Father of the American Constitution. There is no doubt that so much research and political genius embodied in one man warrants such a title. However, the ideas behind Madison’s Virginia Plan and more particularly, his essays in the *Federalist Papers,* exhibit the political genius of other men. Madison’s work was deeply inspired by Dr. Witherspoon, David Hume, John Calvin, Aristotle, and especially John Locke. Later, Madison further developed his ideas with the help of close friends in the Virginia legislature and Continental Congress, especially Thomas Jefferson and Edmund Randolph. Ultimately, Madison was not as original and independent in his ideas as some historians believe. However, while the basic ideas behind Madison’s proposals were not entirely original, the precise combination of these other men’s work made his proposals radical and revolutionary. His careful blending of the political philosophies he studied warrants his historic title more so than the individual ideas he embraced. History itself provides a unique outlet for social reform. It allows mankind to observe and respect the past, examine the present, and built the future. In this sense, Madison embodied the ideal historian; he respected and understood the past to the extent that it inspired him to examine the present state of government and, upon realizing the faults of the present, led him to design and build a better future with the resources he had. Madison’s examination of the past began at the College of New Jersey under Dr. Witherspoon and laid a firm foundation for his Congressional Manifesto, for which he is held in great historical esteem to this day.

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