Chapter 3

The Political Theories of John Adams

The political writings of John Adams naturally are important in establishing his position in the Federalist party. The number of these works and the strong influence of the views expressed concerning his administration and general political career make them of especial interest. There have been a number of surveys of the political ideas of John Adams.\(^1\) However, the purpose of this and the succeeding chapter is somewhat different from the studies of those who have previously treated the subject.


Zoltan Haraszti has published an excellent analysis of the thought of John Adams in his *John Adams & the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952); a work which appeared too late for detailed use in my own book. Alfred Iacuzzi's, *John Adams, Scholar* (New York, 1952) is also too recent to have been extensively used.
The purpose here is not to study the views of John Adams as an end in itself, but rather to lay the foundation for the analysis of the Federalist party. The writings of Adams on government fall into three periods. The first period lasted until about 1786, marking a time in which his views were in virtual conformity with those of Jefferson, Madison, and similar leaders. The second period begins with his residence in England in 1786. By this time the unsettled conditions under the Articles of Confederation together with his study of the British Constitution caused him to conceive a deep admiration for the British system. Further Adams had never liked the unicameral legislature of certain American states. The operation of these unicameral legislative systems—that sponsored by Franklin in Pennsylvania, and imitated by the State of Georgia—was abhorrent to Adams. Such disturbances as Shays's Rebellion in Massachusetts, accompanied by agitation for the abolition of the Senate, interference with the courts, and threats to the rights of property, had an even deeper

2 The chief of these are: *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765); (Works), III, 447; *Novanglus* (1774); (Ibid.), IV, 3; *Thoughts on Government* (1776); (Ibid.), 189; *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, 3 vols. (1787, 1788); (Ibid.), IV, 271, V, VI, 3; *Discourses on Davila* (1790); (Ibid.), VI, 223; *Four Letters—between John Adams and Samuel Adams on Government* (1790); (Ibid.), VI, 405; *Three Letters to Roger Sherman on the Constitution of the United States* (1789); (Ibid.), VI, 427; *Letters to John Taylor . . .* (1814); (Ibid.), 443; *Review of the Propositions for Amending the Constitution, Submitted by Mr. Hillhouse to the Senate of the United States, in 1808*; (Ibid.), VI, 523.

3 The system he advocated in his *Thoughts on Government* is perhaps the best criterion. (Works), IV, 189 ff. This provided for a bicameral legislature, the lower house of which was to be elected by the people. This house was to choose the members of the upper chamber. The executive should be chosen by joint vote of the two houses. He should have a negative vote on all laws (one feature certainly, which was not very popular at this period). Elections should be annual, "there not being in the whole circle of the sciences, a maxim more infallible than this, 'where annual elections end, there slavery begins.'" The central government should consist of a Congress with adequate representation, whose "authority should sacredly be confined to . . . : war, trade, disputes between colony and colony, and the post office, and the unappropriated lands of the crown . . ." This was written in January, 1776. Adams, Charles Francis, *Letters of John Adams, Addressed to His Wife* (Boston, 1841), I, 273.
Another factor which was probably not without weight, arose from the status of Adams himself. No longer was he a rebel. He had made a name for himself and held a position in society. This was not without its effect.

At any rate, despite frequent denials to old friends, it is perfectly clear that during these years in England his point of view underwent a great transition. The system which he outlined at this time may be regarded as dominating his outlook during the rest of the time that he remained active in politics. Consequently it is important to examine it in some detail.

The third period of Adams' political thought came after his retirement from active politics in 1801. In it he returns to his earlier, more liberal position on many points. But even then he retained many of the ideas of his second period.

Naturally the ideas of Adams in his second period, 1786-1801, are most important for the Federalist era. Therefore attention is centered on them here. His ideas are systematically presented, chiefly in the *Defense*, the first part of which was written before the Philadelphia Convention. Starting with a view of human nature, which Adams, with Hobbes, believed was dominated by a seeking for self-interest, he never ceased to emphasize that self-interest exceeds all other human motivating forces. This, he believed, must be recognized in formulating any successful system of government. Perhaps the best generalization which he felt could be drawn from the importance of self-interest is that the passion for distinction is the dominating motive in man. With some this is expressed by the pursuit of riches. With scholars it is expressed in a seeking for acclaim. Men do not learn dead

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6 *Defense*, III (Works), VI, 57. The extent to which the *Defense*, Adams' longest work is a "paste and scissors" compilation of quotations from earlier works, is interestingly brought out by Haraszti in his *John Adams & the Prophets of Progress*, 155-64.

7 *Discourses on Davila* (Works), VI, 232.

languages and toil through research for pleasure. Because individuals have conflicting aims, human existence is a struggle among the various classes. "It is very easy to flatter the democratical portion of society, by making such distinctions (based on their supposed superior virtue) between them and the monarchical and aristocratic; but flattery is as base an artifice, and as pernicious a vice, when offered to the people, as when given to others. There is no reason to believe the one much honester or wiser than the other; they are all of the same clay; their minds and bodies are alike. The two latter have more knowledge and sagacity, derived from education, and more advantages for acquiring wisdom and virtue. As to usurping others' rights, they are all three equally guilty when unlimited in power...."

It will be noted that Adams emphasizes a difference in classes, which, he held, arise naturally from society due to differences in ability. Such a thing as complete equality is absurd. "The people in all nations are naturally divided into two sorts, the gentlemen and simplemen, a word which is here chosen to signify the common people." Who are gentlemen? "By gentlemen are not meant the rich or the poor, the high-born or the low-born, the industrious or the idle; but all those who have received a liberal education, an ordinary degree of erudition in liberal arts and sciences. . . ." On the other hand, "By the common people we mean laborers, husbandmen, mechanics, and merchants, in general, who pursue their occupations and industry without any knowledge in liberal arts and sciences. . . ." But would there be, from generation to generation, a considerable transition from one class to the other? Not at all, for, "We must nevertheless, remember, that generally those who are rich, and descended from families in public life, will have the best education in arts and sciences, and therefore the gentlemen will ordinarily, notwithstanding some exceptions to the rule, be the richer, and born of more noted families."
Adams believed the differences among classes are based on nature, and that among these classes a constant struggle takes place in society, the aristocracy against the democracy. This has always been the case, and always will be.\textsuperscript{14} Where the system of government is not designed to place a check upon this conflict, the aristocracy usually gain control.\textsuperscript{15} Even in America, where property is widely diffused, this is the case.\textsuperscript{16} Whenever it has happened that the people temporarily secure all power, they have fallen under the sway of demagogues who have set up a new aristocracy,\textsuperscript{17} or have fallen into a state of anarchy, from which the result has been the same.\textsuperscript{18} The outcome is that the only way of securing liberty and preventing oppression is to arrange a system of government in which there will be a balance of the rich against the poor; while an independent arbitrator, holding equal power with these two groups, is a sine qua non for a successful system.\textsuperscript{19}

For Adams the legislature, the body which made the laws, was the crucial point of the system. The inspiration for his most detailed work, the \textit{Defense}, arose from a desire to refute a letter of M. Turgot,\textsuperscript{20} which Adams looked upon as advocating the concentration of all legislative power in one assembly. Consequently, it is to the balancing of power in this branch of the government that he gives most attention.

The power of government, sovereignty, resides in the people.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{14} Adams to Alexander Jardine, New York, June 1, 1790; \textit{Works}, IX, 569.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Defense}, I (\textit{Works}), IV, 381.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, 444.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Defense}, III (\textit{Works}), VI, 11.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Defense}, I (\textit{Works}), IV, 298; more exactly, handwritten note by John Adams in his copy of William Godwin's \textit{Enquiry Concerning Political Justice} (Philadelphia, 1796), I, 133. Godwin had written, "... Anarchy is a short lived [underlined by Adams to show the point to which his note has reference] mischief, while despotism is all but immortal." Note in the handwriting of Adams: "Why? because it soon convinces Men that Despotism is the least evil of the Two." The bulk of the John Adams library is now in the Boston Public Library, where it was examined.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Defense}, I (\textit{Works}), IV, 285.
\textsuperscript{20} The letter is printed in Adams, \textit{Works}, IV, 278-81.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Defense}, I (\textit{Works}), IV, 404-405.
But, the people do not form a coherent body. Hence it is necessary that they be represented in chambers conforming to their divisions; one for the rich and one for the poor. It is an absolute necessity that the legislature shall thus mirror the composition of the country at large. Each of the branches, the senate and house, must agree upon a measure before it can become a law.

Yet, these two equal elements could not alone be expected to form the correctly balanced system. The third element, which is raised to the level of an equivalent order, is the executive. The executive must have an absolute veto over the acts of the senate and house. Thus he becomes a part of the legislative system. His function is to hold the balance between the two contending orders. It is to his self interest not to permit either to gain the supremacy.

. . . It is the true policy of the common people to place the whole executive power in one man, to make him a distinct order in the state, from whence rises an inevitable jealousy between him and the gentlemen; this forces him to become a father and protector of the common people, and to endeavor always to humble every proud, aspiring senator, or other officer in the state, who is in danger of acquiring an influence too great for the law or the spirit of the constitution. This influences him to look for merit among the common people, and to promote from among them such as are capable of public employments; so that the road to preferment is open to the common people much more generally and equitably in such a government than in an aristocracy, or one in which the gentlemen have any share in appointments to office.

From this deduction, it follows, that the precept of our author, [Marchamont Nedham] 'to educate children (of the common people) in principles of dislike and enmity against kingly government, and enter into an oath of abjuration to abjure a toleration of kings and kingly powers,' is a most iniquitous and infamous aristocratical arti-

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22 Ibid., 284.
23 Ibid., 228.
24 Defense, III (Works), VI, 65.
25 Davila (Works), VI, 340-41.
26 Defense, I (Works), IV, 579, 358.
fice, a most formal conspiracy against the rights of mankind, and against that equality between the gentlemen and the common people which nations have established as a moral right, and law should ordain as a political right, for the preservation of liberty.

By kings and kingly power, is meant both by our author and me, the executive power in a single person. . . .

Thus the people should support the executive who would assure justice for them against the aristocracy. In similar manner he functions as a prop for the rights of the aristocracy. "If it is asked, when will this negative be used? it may be answered, perhaps never. The known existence of it will prevent all occasion to exercise it; but if it has not a being, the want of it will be felt every day."  

This executive should have the absolute power of appointment to office, making treaties, and declaring war, in addition to the veto. This will enable him to maintain his independent position and will assure his freedom of action in maintaining the balance. His position is, in many respects, the keystone of the system.

As contrasted with this system, Adams strongly believed no other could be permitted. Some have contended, he argued, that a benevolent absolute monarchy is the best of all possible systems, but this is denied. In Europe, even monarchical courts are realizing the advantages to be derived from the balanced system, and are introducing some of its features. The two worst possible types of government, where there is least regard for life, liberty, and property, are an oligarchy, in which an unchecked aristocracy controls, and a democracy, in which the common people hold unchecked sway. The former type has many examples in Greek and Roman history, in Italian history, and at present, in

27 Defense, III (Works), VI, 186.
28 Ibid., 65.
29 Adams to Samuel Adams, Richmond Hill (N. Y.), July 18, 1789, Works VI, 43-51. Reference is to the American Constitution.
30 Defense, I (Works), IV, 289.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 271 ff.
33 Defense, II and III (Works), V, passim.
Poland. In the last instance the powerful nobility have had all control, their estates being hereditary, while that of the monarch is elective, and the people are unrepresented.\textsuperscript{34}

In regard to democracy, the results are equally destructive.

Suppose a nation, rich and poor, high and low, ten millions in number, all assembled together; not more than one or two millions will have lands, houses, or personal property; if we take into the account the women and children, or even if we leave them out of the question, a great majority of every nation is destitute of property, except a small quantity of clothes, and a few trifles of other moveables. Would Mr. Nedham be responsible that, if all were to be decided by a vote of the majority, the eight or nine millions who have no property, would not think of usurping over the rights of the one or two millions who have? Property is surely a right of mankind as really as liberty. Perhaps, at first, prejudice, habit, shame or fear, principle or religion, would restrain the poor from attacking the rich, and the idle from usurping on the industrious; but the time would not be long before courage and enterprise would come, and pretexts be invented by degrees, to countenance the majority in dividing all the property among them, or at least, in sharing it equally with the present possessors. Debts would be abolished first; taxes laid heavy on the rich, and not at all on the others; and at last a downright equal division of every thing be demanded and voted. What would be the consequence of this? The idle, the vicious, the intemperate, would rush into the utmost extravagance of debauchery, sell and spend all their share, and then demand a new division of those who purchased from them. The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If ‘Thou shalt not Covet,’ and ‘Thou shalt not steal,’ were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be organized or made free.\textsuperscript{35}

Under neither of these forms, oligarchy or democracy, is liberty to be expected. For liberty is only the enjoyment of the operation of equal laws; it does not presuppose equality in any other respect.

\textsuperscript{34} Defense, I (Works), IV, 361; Ibid., 366.  
\textsuperscript{35} Defense, III (Works), VI, 8-9.
Although, among men, all are subject by nature to equal laws of morality, and in society have a right to equal laws for their government, yet no two men are perfectly equal in person, property, understanding, activity and virtue, or ever can be made so by any power less than that which created them. . . .

These equal laws enable the rich and poor to “have equal powers to defend themselves. . . .” But this cannot be without a balanced system, which must include a moderator, “Always ready, always able, and always interested to assist the weakest.” Without this balance, judiciary, bar and the press will represent only the tyrannical majority.

It may be noted here, that while Adams regards the three separate departments of government, legislative, executive, and judicial, as constituting one form of balance, this is not that form of balance with which he is chiefly concerned. The function of the judiciary, for example, is of vital importance in administering equal laws, but this branch is dependent upon the perfection of the legislative balance. Moreover, the inclusion of the executive, with his absolute veto, in the legislative department is another illustration of the violation of the departmental balance in his system. In fact, it is logical to draw the conclusion that the system of division of departmental functions into legislative, executive, and judicial branches is, with Adams, merely a matter of administrative convenience. In his mind it is the legislative balance which is of vital importance, and the legislature is regarded as the predominating part of the governmental system. The chief reason for delegating such strong executive powers to the head of the government is to enable him to be independent in his relations with the two houses.

36 Davila (Works), VI, 285-86.
37 Adams to Thomas Brand-Hollis, of London; Quincy, June 11, 1790, Works, IX, 570.
38 Ibid.
39 Defense, III (Works), VI, 58.
40 Adams to Benjamin Rush, Braintree, December 2, 1788, Works, IX, 556.
41 Defense, I (Works), IV, 290. "... If the executive power, or any considerable part of it, is left in the hands either of an aristocratical or a democratical assembly, it will corrupt the legislature as necessarily as rust corrupts iron. . . ."
Clearly, this projected system is based upon the idea of the English Constitution in vogue at the time. In particular Adams follows, quotes at great length, and has the highest praise for De Lolme. There is a similar use of such authorities as Bolingbroke, Harrington, and Locke. For the English Constitution Adams has the highest praise: "I only contend that the English Constitution is, in history, both for the adjustment of the balance and the prevention of its vibrations [i.e., the prevention of violent changes of control between complete aristocratic domination, and complete democratic control], the most stupendous fabric of human invention; and that the Americans ought to be applauded instead of censured, for imitating it as far as they have done." In regard to this constitution, the only reform which would be of value is the reform of the representation in the commons. Not only the people of England, but also the people of Europe, are warned that they will defeat themselves by seeking to overthrow the King and the nobles. The only justifiable reform is the introduction of a representative democratic branch in order to perfect a balanced system. Next to the British system, highest praise is bestowed upon the Macedonian republic of ancient Greece: "The Macedonian republic may then, with propriety, be called monarchical, and had the three essential parts of the best of all possible government; it was a mixture of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy."


43 Lord Bolingbroke (Henry St. John), Dissertation on Parties (1734); Idea of a Patriot King (1738). The influence of these works on Adams' concept of the function of the executive is strong. Locke, John, Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690); Letter Concerning Toleration (1690); Harrington, James, Oceana (1656) were others who strongly influenced Adams. In addition he had read the leading Roman and Greek philosophers and historians and was thoroughly familiar with the French writers. Of these he especially admired Montesquieu.

44 Defense, I (Works), IV, 358.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 468.
47 Ibid., 297.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 553.
Adams next considers whether or not it is possible to have such a balanced system without two hereditary branches to the government. In regard to America, the answer is that at present it is well not to follow England in the matter of an hereditary first magistrate and senate; but if property becomes concentrated in a few hands, it may be necessary to hold a new convention to change nearer to the British Constitution. Should elections become turbulent, of which there is no appearance at present, this change would need to be instituted.

Past history has never revealed a long continued success for the experiment of a government entirely elective.

It should always be remembered, that this is not the first experiment that ever was made in the world of elections to great offices of state; how they have hitherto operated in every great nation, and what has been their end is very well known. Mankind have universally discovered that chance was preferable to corrupt choice, and have trusted Providence rather than themselves. First magistrates and senators had better be made hereditary at once, than that the people should be universally debauched and bribed, go to loggerheads, and fly to arms regularly every year. Thank Heaven! Americans understand calling conventions; and if the time should come, as it is very possible it may, when hereditary descent shall become a less evil than fraud and violence, such a convention may still prevent the first magistrate from becoming absolute as well as hereditary.

The private correspondence of Adams is equally explicit. To Rush he wrote:

50 Ibid., 339.
51 Ibid.
52 Defense, III (Works), VI, 56-57. For the same idea, see also Ibid., 25; 67: Where turbulence has resulted from a completely elective system, “The evils may be lessened and postponed, by elections for longer periods of years, till they become for life; and if this is not found an adequate remedy, there will remain no other but to make them hereditary. The delicacy or the dread of unpopularity that should induce any man to conceal this important truth from the full view and contemplation of the people, would be a weakness, if not a vice.” In Davila, written in 1790, and appearing in installments in the Gazette of the United States of that year, he is particularly concerned over the dangers of an elective first magistrate. Works, VI, 254.
I do not 'consider hereditary Monarchy or Aristocracy as Rebellion against Nature.' On the contrary I esteem them both as Institutions of admirable wisdom and exemplary Virtue in a certain stage of Society in a great nation. The only Institutions that can possibly preserve the laws and Liberties of the People, and I am clear that America must resort to them as an Asylum against discord, Seditions and Civil War, and that at no very distant period of time. I shall not live to see it—but you may. I think it therefore impolitic to cherish prejudices against Institutions which must be kept in view as the hope of our Posterity. I am by no means for attempting any such thing at present. Our Country is not ripe for it in many respects [one, he later stated, being the lack of basis for an hereditary nobility, which must accompany the establishment of an hereditary executive], and it is not yet necessary, but our ship must ultimately land on that shore or be cast away.53

Likewise, in private conversation, Adams at times voiced a preference for an hereditary aristocracy and executive.54

53 Adams to Rush, New York, June 9, 1789, Old Family Letters, 38. Adams' Works, IX, 566, contain a later letter to Rush, written from New York, April 18, 1790, which was prompted by a memorandum on Adams which Rush drew up and submitted to him. Not liking the statements there made, he wrote a denial, totally incompatible with sentiments expressed in earlier letters, from which series the above quotation comes. None of these earlier letters are given in the Works, and the denial alone is printed. For the statement by Rush, cf. f. 52 to this chapter, post.

54 John Langdon (Senator from New Hampshire), Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to Samuel Ringgold of Hagerstown, Md.; October 10, 1800; Boston, Massachusetts, Independent Chronicle, November 24, 1800; "In the conversation held between Mr. Adams, Mr. Taylor [Senator John Taylor of Virginia] and myself, Mr. Adams certainly expressed himself (as far as my memory serves me) in the very words mentioned in your letter, viz., that he hoped or expected to see the day when Mr. Taylor or his friend Mr. Giles [William Branch Giles, Representative from Virginia] would be convinced that the people of America would not be happy without an hereditary Chief Magistrate and Senate—or at least during life . . ." From Taylor's account of the same incident, John Taylor to Daniel Carrol Brent; Caroline (Va.), October 9, 1796. Dodd, William E., "Letters of John Taylor," Branch Historical Papers (Richmond, 1903); II, 267, it appears that this conversation took place in 1794. Adams later wrote an explanation to Langdon, Quincy, February 27, 1812; Letters By Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Others . . . to John Langdon (Philadelphia, 1880), 18-19.
this, his preference for such a system was known to his contemporaries, and has been recognized by modern writers.\textsuperscript{55}

It will be noticed that the English system, as Adams conceived it, was not that which actually existed at the time he was writing. In the actual system there was little power in the hands of the monarch. The ministry, responsible to Parliament, exercised the executive powers. Adams' concept of the government was that of De Lolme and other contemporary commentators who had advanced but little beyond the concept first definitely, and erroneously, formulated by Montesquieu.

In regard to other features of Adams' system, a few deserve to be noticed here. The people are regarded as "the original and fountain of all power and government."\textsuperscript{56} For maladministration hereditary officials may always be subject to deposition, for after having been set up by the people, they may be changed by the same power.\textsuperscript{57} Apparently, however, while elective or administrative officials may be impeached, only revolution could accomplish this in the case of hereditary officers. Tyrannicide is upheld, in case of necessity, to be as justifiable as, "To hang a robber or kill a flea."\textsuperscript{58} From this it is apparent that he subscribed to the theory of the social contract, and believed in the right of revolution. He also clearly held that no man could be above the law.\textsuperscript{59}

Adams believed that there should be a permanent navy, but not a standing army.\textsuperscript{60} He strongly upheld the ideal of universal education.\textsuperscript{61} He did not subscribe to the idea of rotation in office.\textsuperscript{62} Finally, he held that public service should be sufficiently remunerative to attract good men.\textsuperscript{63} Judges, he held, should be appointed for life.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{55} Walsh, Chapter XVIII.
\textsuperscript{56} Defense, III (Works), VI, 117.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Defense, III (Works), VI, 130.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 168.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{64} Defense, II (Works), V, 180.
Having discussed the most perfect system, that having hereditary offices in certain branches, Adams next considered the effect of introducing the elective executive and elective senate. The balance in this latter elective system would not have the perfection to be derived from a completely independent executive. Obviously there does not exist a third group in the state to elect him, a group separate from that choosing the senate and house.

Yet, Adams emphasized, there must be a separate basis of representation for the three branches.\textsuperscript{65} The best Adams could propose was that the executive not be chosen by the legislature, but by the people. But this choice should be independent of party; from this idea, Adams never deviated throughout his entire career.\textsuperscript{66} The rich should be represented in the Senate — in fact segregated in that chamber, in order that they would not acquire too great influence.\textsuperscript{67} The lower chamber was to be representative of the common people. With these changes, there would be no other departure from the system already outlined.

But even if all officers be elective, titles would be absolutely necessary to uphold the dignity of the government, secure respect for it in foreign eyes, and reward those who have merit.\textsuperscript{68} It was

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Defense, III (Works), VI, 118.}  
\textsuperscript{66} For example, his review of a proposed amendment in 1808, \textit{Works, VI, 539.}  
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Defense, I (Works), IV, 290-91.}  
\textsuperscript{68} Adams to Rush, New York, June 9, 1789; \textit{Old Family Letters, 38.} "I do not abhor Titles, nor the Pageantry of Government. If I did I should abhor Government itself, for there never was, and never will be, because there never can be, any government without Titles and Pageantry. There is not a Quaker Family in Pennsylvania, governed without Titles and Pageantry; not a school, not a college, not a club can be governed without them.

"I love the people." with you — too well to cheat them, lie to them or deceive them."

Similarly, in \textit{Davila, (Works), VI, 243-44,} he states that titles and distinctions are necessary in a republic to provide adequate reward for the desire for distinction, "To such means as these, or to force and a standing army, recourse must be had for the guardianship of laws and the protection of the people. . . ."

In another letter to Rush, \textit{Old Family Letters, 41-43; Richmond Hill, July 5, 1789,} "It is to make offices and laws respected: and not so much by the virtuous part of the Community, as by the Profligate, the criminal and abandoned, who have little reverence for Reason, Right or Law, divine or human. These are overawed by Titles frequently, when Laws and Punishments cannot restrain them. . . ."
this belief which caused him to make such strenuous efforts for the adoption of a suitable system of titles at the first meeting of the Senate.\textsuperscript{69}

As to parties, Adams has no illusions but that political parties would exist. The advantage in a free government is that they operate in the open,\textsuperscript{70} while the balance secures the rights of the minority.\textsuperscript{71} Yet there is danger from this source in a system where all officers are elective. This is particularly the case in regard to the executive. An hereditary monarch is recognized as being above parties, and as being disinterested. He is the subject of universal respect and adulation. When there is an elective monarch, how would he be regarded?

In elective governments, something very like this always takes place towards the first character. His person, countenance, character, and actions, are made the daily contemplation and conversation of the whole people. Hence arises the danger of a division of this attention. Where there are rivals for the first place, the national attention and passions are divided, and thwart each other, the collision enkindles fires; the conflicting passions interest all ranks; they produce slanders and libels first, mobs and seditions next, and civil war, with all her hissing snakes, burning torches, and haggard horrors at last.

This is the true reason, why all civilized free nations have found, by experience, the necessity of separating from the body of the people, and even from the legislature, the distribution of honors, and conferring it on the executive authority of government. When the emulation of all the citizens looks up to one point, like the rays of a circle from all parts of the circumference, meeting and uniting in the center, you may hope for uniformity, consistency, and subordination; but when they look up to different individuals, or assemblies, or councils, you may expect all the deformities, eccentricities, and confusion of the Ptolemaic system.\textsuperscript{72}

From this it is apparent that Adams expected all parties in the state to accept the disinterestedness of the executive. The impli-

\textsuperscript{69} Maclay, William, \textit{Journal} (Beard edition, New York, 1927), 1 ff.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Defense, I (Works)}, IV, 587-88.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Defense, III (Works)}, IV, 109.
\textsuperscript{72} Davila (Works), VI, 255-56.
cation is that there are certain questions upon which all are supposed to be united. To carry party strife too far would be to approach disloyalty. Naturally, where the line of demarcation between party opposition and disloyalty was to be drawn would always be a question difficult to decide.

In the use of the words "democracy" and "republic" by Adams there is considerable significance. To him democracy was always a system in which the people choose representatives to an all-powerful unicameral legislature. This he never ceased to condemn. On the other hand Adams' conception of a republic comprised all possible variations of a system which he might approve. Perhaps the most inclusive definition is the following: "... Whenever I use the word republic with approbation, I mean a government in which the people have collectively, or by representation, an essential share in the sovereignty." Consequently, under the head of a republic a limited monarchy is included. To his friend Benjamin Rush he wrote: "You seem determined not to allow a limited monarchy to be a republican system, which it certainly is, and the best that has even been tried. ..." Both the English and the American governments are classified as limited monarchies, the American because its branches perform the same functions as the English. On one occasion the definition of a Republic is simply "a government whose sovereignty is vested in more than one person."

Adams was critical of those features of the American Constitution that departed from his own ideas. The first volume of his *Defense of American Constitutions* reached Philadelphia just as the Convention assembled. "A numerous edition of it was soon abroad in Philadelphia, another in New York and a third in Boston," wrote Adams, "and the public voice was so decidedly

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73 *Defense*, I (Works), IV, 301-302. Here he states that this system has never worked and never will.
in favor of it, that it revived the hopes and strengthened the hands of the convention. It soon dissipated the vapours of Franklin’s foggy system, demolished Hamilton’s airy castles, and united the Convention in the plan they finally adopted, and Franklin himself thought fit at last to yield in his assent. It contributed also to unite the assemblies of the several states in the acceptance and adoption of it.” Franklin, however, believing in a straight democratic system with a unicameral legislature, could only sign with a tear. Thus, Adams credited his own writings with great influence over the constitutional convention and approved, in general, the final draft as submitted for ratification to the states.

It so happened that the Constitution reached him as he was completing the third volume of the Defense. Consequently, he appended to this volume a note of praise for the Constitution: “It is now in our power to bring this work to a conclusion with unexpected dignity...,” he declared. The former Confederation had a council which was only a diplomatic body. Now, however, a new Constitution, on the principles advocated in his work, had been written. It was a result of “accommodation.” But provision was made for its amendment. “The conception of such an idea, and the deliberate union of so great and various a people in such a plan, is, without all partiality or prejudice, if not the greatest exertion of human understanding, the greatest single effort of national deliberation that the world has ever seen. . . .”

In his official capacity, he wrote to Jay, voicing the same sentiments.

In private letters, however, he was more critical. Jefferson wrote to him expressing the fear that the executive was too strong. In reply, Adams asserted that he feared this officer would not be sufficiently independent. The necessity of Senate approval for appointments strongly limited the independence of

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78 Boston Patriot, April 15, 1812; Quincy, February 9, 1812. This is one of a series written by Adams from 1809 to 1813 in the Patriot.
79 Defense, III (Works), VI, 219.
80 Adams to Jay, London, December 16, 1787; Works, VIII, 466.
the executive. He feared the influence of the aristocracy. Even more explicit was the statement in one of his letters to Samuel Adams, in which he asserted that there was great danger because of the powers given to the senate. Not only might this aristocratic body encroach upon the executive, but there was even the possibility that this branch would swallow up the house as well as the executive. Likewise, he believed the qualified veto to be too weak; it should be absolute, and the president should also have the unrestrained power of making treaties and declaring war. Changes such as these should be made as soon as possible. It is clear that he would have welcomed such modifications had the time been ripe for them.

In Adams' concept of the new American government the idea of a judicial negative never crossed his mind. In fact, he believed the important check would be that exercised by the executive over the legislative. Primarily the executive needed the absolute veto for this purpose. Without such a check he feared the legislature would be free to enact whatever laws it desired.

A divided sovereignty in one, a few or many has no balance, and therefore no laws. A divided sovereignty without a balance, in other words, where the division is unequal, is always at war, and consequently has no laws. In our constitution the sovereignty,—that is, the legislative power,—is divided into three branches. The house and senate are equal, but the third branch, though essential, is not equal. The president must pass judgment upon every law; but in some cases his judgment may be overruled. These cases will be such as attack

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82 Adams to Samuel Adams, Richmond Hill (N. Y.), July 18, 1789; Works, VI, 431.
83 Ibid. and Adams to R. Sherman, New York, July, 1789, Works, VI, 432-38.
84 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Cur new Constitution is found in part upon its [my book's] principles, and the enlightened part of our communities are generally convinced of the necessity of adopting it, by degrees, more completely.” Also see Adams to Richard Price, New York, April 19, 1790; Ibid., 564.
his constitutional power; it is, therefore, certain he has not equal power to defend himself, or the constitution, or the judicial power, as the senate and house have.\textsuperscript{86}

During the first years under the constitution, Adams was as concerned as the strongest of Federalists about checking the popular tide. "In this country the pendulum has vibrated too far to the popular side, driven by men without experience or judgment, and horrid ravages have been made upon property by arbitrary multitudes or majorities of multitudes. France has severe trials to endure from the same cause. Both have found, or will find, that to place property at the mercy of a majority who have no property is 'committere agnum lupo.' My fundamental maxim of government is, never to trust the lamb to the custody of the wolf. If you are not perfectly of my mind at present, I hereby promise and assure you that, you will live to see that I am precisely right. Thus arrogantly concludes your assured friend."\textsuperscript{87}

However, with the development of Hamilton's financial plans, the establishment of the Bank of the United States, and the growing speculation which went on in the country, Adams began to change his mind. He early took steps to deny imputations of monarchism which were certainly deserved.\textsuperscript{88} After his election to the presidency, he publicly denied, both in his farewell address to the senate \textsuperscript{89} and in his inaugural,\textsuperscript{90} that he had ever entertained the idea or had hoped for either an hereditary senate or executive, or that both should be hereditary; or further, that they should be for life. After leaving official life, these denials, which needed to be constantly repeated, were often given to his correspondents.\textsuperscript{91}

The point naturally arises as to how Adams could, with sincerity, give such a sweeping denial on all of these points. Even

\textsuperscript{86} Adams to Roger Sherman, Richmond Hill, N. Y., July 17, 1789; \textit{Works}, VI, 431.
\textsuperscript{87} Adams to Richard Brand-Hollis, June 11, 1790; \textit{Works}, IX, 571.
\textsuperscript{88} Adams to Jefferson, July 29, 1791; \textit{Works}, VIII, 506-509; also cf. IX, 566.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Annals of Congress} (Washington, 1849), VI, 1550, Feb. 15, 1797.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid.}, 1583; March 4, 1797.
\textsuperscript{91} See final chapter.
John Adams' closest friend, Benjamin Rush, accepted the argument that Adams had once turned to a favorable view of monarchism. In 1790 he wrote to Adams:

"In my notebook I have recorded a conversation that passed between Mr. Jefferson and myself on the 17th of March, of which you were the principal subject. We both deplored your attachment to monarchy and both agreed that you had changed your principles since the year 1776." Yet, in my mind there is no question but that Adams was sincere in his later denials. He was never one to check back on his earlier pronouncements or correspondence. He was probably able to believe that he had always merely considered monarchy proper as a way out in case of certain eventualities.

In his later career, particularly after 1809, when John Quincy Adams left the Federalists, Adams' condemnation of the American aristocracy became severe and bitter. Yet, in this change, there is no serious inconsistency with his system. If the aristocracy proved able to uphold their position without being hereditary, well and good. The position which Adams himself held was always that of his independent executive, looking over the field and placing his weight with that group whose rights appeared to be threatened.

Thus it should be apparent that there was a sharp line of demarcation between the thought of Adams on the one hand and that of Hamilton and the New England "Tie-Wig" (commercial Federalist) group on the other. The one thought that either the rich or the poor would be equally tyrannical when in power; the other believed that only the rich had the right to rule, and that it was necessary that the government should be conducted by them.


93 Haraszti, in John Adams & the Prophets of Progress has a good summary of the problem of Adams' monarchism, 40-42. Haraszti's view that Adams was merely endorsing monarchy to stir up thought, is not a sufficient explanation in my opinion.

94 See final chapter of this book.