The "Many-Headed Monster" and its Critics in Revolutionary America

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Abstract

It is well known that during the American Revolution the popular tradition embodied in state constitutions was undermined by the building of a more unified central government, a government that would keep the common people at arm's length from power and decision making in the Union. The image of the American people as a disastrous monster gained ground before the "reign of terror" supplied the counter revolutionary forces with new arguments for restoring an earlier image of the multitude as a heinous Hydra. Anti-radical rhetoric in revolutionary America borrows images and argumentation from a highly articulated tradition of thought, a neglected aspect of which was linked to the image of a many-headed monster. In the first section of this essay I will present the aims of those who supported the construction of new constitutions in the former British colonies of North America. In the second and third sections I will focus on the representation of the "people" as a "many-headed monster" and the multiple implications that this had in 17th century England and revolutionary America. I will close with some thoughts concerning the long-term consequences of the fight against the "many headed monster" of radicalism in view of the advancement of a more conservative attitude towards the "people" embodied in the federal constitution of 1787.

Revolutionary America in "A State of Nature"

On May 14, 1776, Caesar Rodney, the Delaware delegate in the Continental Congress, expressed his unease at the "want of government" in the colonies: When the people are accustomed to irregular government, it is exceedingly difficult to recover them to the love of order and obedience to those laws which are the essential bands of society. Bad habits in the political, as well as the natural body, are very easy to be acquired and very hard to be eradicated (Smith et al., 1976-93, vol. 3. p. 674).[2] The same fear was also reflected by Richard Henry Lee when discussing the "indispensable necessity of establishing a government" in Massachusetts: "How long", Lee asked, "[may] popular commotions […] be suppressed without it, and anarchy be prevented?" He demanded a "wise and free government," for the prevention of "the numerous evils to be apprehended from popular rage & licence whenever they find the bonds of government removed" (Smith et al., vol.3, p.608). The belief that the colonies would enter into a state of nature after the renunciation of British control was prevalent among many Americans. In a county meeting held on August 15, 1774, the Pittsfield patriots, in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, decided "that the courts of justice [should] immediately cease, and the people of this province fall into a state of nature until our grievances are fully redressed" (Raphael, 2002, p. 66). In New Hampshire, many townsmen promulgated their "humble opinion that when the Declaration of Independence took place, the colonies were absolutely in a state of nature and the powers of government reverted to the people at large" (Dodd, 1908, pp. 545-546). These notions circulated widely as an exegesis of the actual state of the former colonies after the disintegration of the royal governments.

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On September 8, 1774, Richard Henry Lee, now trying to avoid the conciliatory strategy of the loyalists rather than the "rage" of the radicals, asked his colleagues in the first Continental Congress: "Why we should not lay our rights upon the broadest bottom, the ground of nature," and stressed that "life and liberty…cannot be given up when we enter into society" (Smith et al, vol. 1, p. 46). Many conservatives considered the above interpretation to be destructive or the established social order. That order, they argued, should not rest on the holders of natural rights – potentially the entire white male population- but on the possessors of the material wealth of society, the owners of real and not imaginary property. Consequently, John Rutledge of South Carolina declared that "our claims…are well founded on the British Constitution," and that "an emigrant would not have a right to set up what constitution they please. A subject could not alienate his allegiance." "Protection and allegiance," concurred Joseph Galloway of Massachusetts, "are reciprocal duties; the one cannot exist without the other." The denouncement of British control would leave the colonies "in a perfect state of nature, destitute of any supreme authority among themselves either to decide their disputes or to compel them to act in concert for their common safety" (Smith et al, vol. 1, pp. 46-48, 125, 288). Just as much as the proponents of conciliation with Britain, many supporters of Independence abhorred a "state of nature" similar to that described by such writers on politics as Thomas Hobbes. He (2006 [1651]) had already declared that "Nature had made men so equal…as that though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet…the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he."(pp. 86-87)

Hobbes concluded that the existing inequality was a consequence of political institutions and "has been introduced by the laws civil" (pp.107). The same conditions of equality in the state of nature were discerned by Jan-Jacques Rousseau in 1755 (1946). If we compare the prodigious diversity, which obtains in the education and manner of life of the various orders of men in the state of society, with the uniformity and simplicity of animal and savage life…it is easy to conceive how much less the difference between man and man must be in a state of nature than in a state of society, and how greatly the natural inequality of mankind must be increased by the inequalities of social institutions (p. 189). In assuming that the War of Independence had thrown the colonies into a state of nature, conservative republicans bore in mind not Rousseau's ideas about the essential peacefulness of the primitive men, but Hobbes' conviction that "during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man" (Hobbes, 2006, p. 88; Kokkinakis, 2012, pp. 470-471). The solution suggested by the supporters of Independence for the avoidance of this "state of war" was the drafting of new constitutions and the creation of new governments in the states (Smith et al, vol. 4, p. 97). During this process it proved extremely difficult to retain the structure and logic of pre-revolutionary institutions. Just as the promise of pensions and land-grants to the American soldiers and officers was thought necessary for the effective conduct of the war, so the erecting of popular state governments was a price to be paid in order to mobilize the lower strata for Independence won on the battlefield.

Indeed, the various definitions of "freemen" were indicative of the new concepts of citizenship arising in this period. The concept of freemen appears twenty three times in the Constitution of Pennsylvania, seventeen in the Constitution of Vermont, nine times in that of Maryland and eight in that of North Carolina, but is absent from those of Virginia, New Hampshire and New Jersey. It is also missing from the Federal Constitution of 1787, wherein the founding fathers chose the more neutral expression "citizen." If we identify freemen with enfranchised adult white men, then the most democratic formulation of this notion, which appeared in the Vermont Constitution, provided that "every man, of the full age of twenty-one years, having resided in this state for the space of one whole year, next before the election of representatives…shall be entitled to all the privileges of a freeman of this state" (Thorpe, 1909, vol. 6, pp. 3737-3749). Pennsylvania's Declaration of Rights provided "that all power [is] originally inherent in, and consequently derived from, the people; therefore all officers of government…are their trustees and servants, and at all times accountable to them," and empowered the people, whenever they ascertained that their officers were acting in a high-handed manner, "to reduce" them "to a private station" and "supply the vacancies by certain and regular elections" (Thorpe, 1909, vol. 6, pp. 3082-3084; Kruman, 1997, pp. 94-94). The principle of rotation and the periodic renewal of representatives in state legislatures and executives via frequent elections was a further safeguard against officialdom's disregard for the people's will. Once the twelve members of the popularly elected council of Pennsylvania had been in office for three successive years, they were automatically ineligible for the next four. The president was elected annually by the legislative chamber and the council.

"By this mode" explained the legislators of Pennsylvania, "more men will be trained to public business…and moreover the danger of establishing an inconvenient aristocracy will be effectually prevented" (Thorpe, vol. 6, pp. 3083, 3086-87; Kruman, pp. 51, 56). Furthermore, the state conventions either adopted a formal Declaration of Rights as a preamble to the "plan", "frame" or "formof government," or incorporated a list of "unalienable and inherent" rights as an integral part of the document (Kruman, p. 37; Kokkinakis, 2012, pp. 92-96). The Declarations were an inseparable part of state constitutions –taking up between a third and a quarter of the whole, -in contrast with the Bill of Rights incorporated in the Federal Constitution, which only constituted ten percent of that document. This, to a certain degree, was an indication of state legislators' intensions. A declaration of rights was for them equal in value to the frame of government. The government outlined in these constitutions did not have the depth and weight which would be vested in the federal government of 1787. The revolutionary Bill of Rights was essentially destined to protect the common man against the encroachments of a potentially oppressive state power –and certainly not, as was the case in the 19th century, an indirect method of protecting the legally constructed "individuality" of the great corporations against state or federal regulation.

The Rage of a Savage Beast

In their "history of the Atlantic working class" comprised by "Irish, English, Hispanic, African and Native American men and women" Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker argued that the ruling classes in the 16th-18th century used the Greek hero Hercules as "a symbol of power", "order" and "economic development", and the mythical Hydra as "an antithetical symbol of disorder and resistance, a powerful threat to the building of state, empire, and capitalism." To the extent that this multinational working class "was rebellious and self-active, it was described as a monster, a many-headed hydra. Its heads included food rioters…heretics, army agitators, antinomians and independent women…maroons…motley urban mobs…general strikers…rural barbarians of the commons…aquatic laborers…free thinkers…striking textile workers…peasant rebels, Levellers, pirates and slave insurrectionists." The emerging capitalists "referred to the Hercules-hydra myth to describe the difficulty of imposing order on an increasingly global system of labor" and upon a multiracial labor force which "unfolds a popular world of vital cooperation and accomplishment" (Linebaugh and Rediker, 1990, pp. 225-252; Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000, pp. 2-3, 7, 329; Hill, 1991, pp. 181-204). The image of the Many-Headed Monster -usually referring to the Lernaean Hydra, the nine-headed serpent of Greek mythology slain by Hercules in the second of his twelve labors- has retained remarkable symbolic power from antiquity to the present day (Rose, 1991, p. 212). Analysing Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England David Cressy (2000) notes that "under God's guidance, the natural world operated according to accustomed regularities. Irregular occurrences indicated disturbance…a disruption of the great chain of being" (p. 37). The natural order of God's universe had its equivalence in the earthly kingdoms of god's chosens: "One sun rules over the day, and one moon over the night." Therefore, "the best and most sure governance," argued Thomas Elyot (1962) is only that which is ruled "by one king or prince…For who can deny but that all things in heaven and earth is governed by one God, by one perpetual order, by one providence?" (p. 7).

So, the visible order of the natural world was used "as an argument to defend the stratified social structure" and "as evidence that the social system, as it had evolved, was essential or even inevitable" (Briggs, 1997, p. 108). The growing demand of the multitude to participate in politics was damned as a subversion of the natural order, a process generating disorders, convulsions and monstrosities. "Plebsin English is called the commonalty, which signified only the multitude, wherein be contained the base and vulgar inhabitants not advanced to any honour or dignity." This extract from Thomas Elyot The Book Named the Governor (1531) was an early description of what was to evolve as a typical Renaissance approach towards the "multitude." Elyot (1962) condemned the Athenian "Democratia," "where equality was of estate among the people, and only by their whole consent their city and dominions were governed: which might well be called a monster with many heads" (pp. vii, 6-7). John Walter (1999, pp. 9, 19) has recently refuted arguments for the absence of political consciousness and the alleged traditional and primitive political behaviour of the rebellious multitude in early modern England. Yet in the poetical, literary and political cosmos of Tudor and Stuart England, the multitude was an entity of negative connotations, a "many headed monster," a "volatile" and "unruly populace." Shakespeare (1938) allows his heroes to speak with outward contempt for the "giddy," "rude" and "ragged multitude" (pp. 43, 49, 57).

His sentiments towards the common people could be traced to the parallel Henry VI drew between the "lightness" of the "common men," and a feather "commanded always by the greater gust," or to Coriolanus where the hero speaks with disdain for the "monster of the multitude," that is, the people of Rome (1938, pp. 80, 967; 1998, p 118).Even if we must be cautious in equating these "violent outbursts with Shakespeare's own sentiments" because they "occur not in a treatise, but within the context of a dramatic situation," their appearance in almost all Shakespearean dramaturgy denotes his posture towards the common people (Patrides 1965, pp. 242-243; Friesner, 1969, pp. 165, 171; Fripp, 1938, pp. 706-710; Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000, pp. 30-32).The same disdain for the lower classes, which exhibited signs of unruliness in England and Ireland at the end of the Elizabethan period, brought on by bad harvest, trade depression, unemployment and enclosures, was well documented in Edmund Spencer's (1552-1599) epic poem The Faerie Queene(Spencer, 1908, p. 41; Greene, 1974, pp. 389-406; Greenblatt, 1983, pp. 1-29; Reid,1982,pp. 359-375; Fletcher, 1968, pp. 112; Walter, 1985, p. 137). "The multitude of the people, the greatest part of them, are ignorant of the best things; they are evermore desirous of change, hating still what is present," observed Barnaby Rich,the "sworn servant" and favourite of two sovereigns, Elizabeth and James, in 1606 (Bruce & Cranfill, 1953, p. 4; Patrides, 1965, p. 241-242). In a work translated into English the same year, Pierre Sharron endowed the masses with the same animal-like passions, describing the people as "a strange beast with many heads…inconstant and variable, without stay, like the waves of the sea" (cited in Patrides, p. 246).In the decades before the Civil War, references to this volatile many-headed monster multiplied. Lord Charles Stanhope expressed a sentiment which enjoyed wide currency in his circles arguing that "the commons, or the common people are like a drove of sheep, or a flock of cranes as one does fly all will follow. It is belluamultorumcapitum & so is the lower house of Parliament" (Akrigg, 1948, pp. 793-794)

Charles I warned the Commons in 1642 that the enfeeblement of his power would make "the common people…grow weary of journey-work, and set up for themselves, call parity and independence liberty…destroy all rights and properties, all distinctions of families and merit" (Wootton, 1986, p. 174). During the Civil War, the "ungovernable multitude" terrorized both the royalists and the adherents of the parliamentary cause. "Whatsoever necessity shall enforce us to make use of the multitude I do not promise myself safety," wrote John Pott to Simonds D'Ewes in August of 1642. Essex, too, was "determined to devote" his life "to repressing the audacity of the people," because "our posterity will say that to deliver them from the yoke of the king we have subjected them to that of the common people." In April 1651, Richard Baxter confessed that "all history convince me that the belluamultorumcapitum is the greatest tyrant in the world" (Kastan, 1999, pp. 211-212; Hill, p. 198; Kebble & Nuttall, 1991, p. 67). In a similar vein, the staunch royalist Robert Filmer was to declaim in 1652 that "it is impossible for the people…to be able to" choose a government, "for the people…is a thing or body in continual alteration and change." He went on to argue that "there never was any such thing as an independent multitude who at first had a natural right to a community" and "concluded that "anarchy is nothing else but a broke monarchy, where every man is his own monarch or governor" (Wootton, pp. 110-115). In the loyalist Civil War ballad The Rebellion, the voice of the populace is the voice of anarchy and confusion bringing "disintegration of political unity," and finally regicide. Furthermore, in the works of such loyalists poets and authors as John Ogilby, Abraham Cowleyand John Dryde, the figure of Hydra was synonymous with sedition and "Charles [the second] was not infrequently described as the Hercules who had strangled the viper of sedition, had cleansed the Auegean stables of a Commonwealth England, in short, had accomplished those labors that guaranteed felicity to England." It is therefore no accident that Thomas Hobbes entitled his history of the English Civil War Behemoth, the name of the biggest biblical creature on earth, which in Hebrew signified the "beast" (Sauer, pp. 15-16; Revard, 1993, pp. 391-418; Davidson, 1998, pp. 501-502; Montaño, 2002, p. 83; Borot, 2000, pp.145-146).

The political and ideological climate of the American and French Revolutions temporarily subverted the equation of the revolting multitude with an irrational monster. The renovation of "the natural order of things," the "beam of light" that the two great revolutionary events of the second half of the 18th century "have thrown…over the world," convinced people like Thomas Paine that aristocracy "it is still a monster," and one "to exterminate." Paine (1989) had already emphasized that Americans pursuing political independence, "fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster" (pp. 18, 91, 120, 141). For him and other revolutionaries, Hercules represented "the strength, courage, labors, and unity of the common man…as he destroyed the many-headed Hydra of monarchical, aristocratic, and clerical tyranny."

But with the progress of the Revolution and the rise of Jacobinism, the Herculean myth "came to embody both a gigantic liberating energy, the power of the people incarnate, and a potential monster, the Terror embodied in the strength and fury of the maddened Hercules" (Mellor, 1992, p. 265;Hunt, 1983, pp. 95-117;Linebaugh & Rediker, 2000, pp. 330-331). This personification of the French Revolution as a gigantic, catastrophic monster, a creation of science, philosophy and the abstract principle of universal rights and equality, destined to be perfect but finally driven, according to the critics of the Revolution, to violence and murder, was apparent in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novel Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus (1818) (Mellor, pp. 266-270). The invocation of the Many-Headed Monster image has to this day retained its symbolical connotations and its, largely, conservative allusions. If the Hydra of the revolting people was invoked in the 19th century in order to alienate social groups, like the farmers or the petit bourgeoisie from radical politics, in the common language of the 21st century theHydra of terrorism has been raised–mutatis mutandis- to produce similar results. Henri Boshoff, Anneli Bootha and Martin Schönteich (2001) have traced the "multi-headed-monster" of our times in "different forms of terrorism." Expressing his backing for George Bush's war on terror, in an attempt to persuade his fellow Democrats to support the "changing [of] the regime in Baghdad," Senator Joe Lieberman (2002) declared: "If we are serious about eradicating this many-headed monster, we must be ready to root out al Qaeda and other terrorist groups in the mountains of Afghanistan, in Yemen, in Georgia, in the Philippines and wherever else they may seek refuge" (Boshoff, H., Botha, A. & Schönteich, M., 2001; Lieberman, 2002). From another point of view, in trying to express philosophical ideas in "understandable" and "practical" language, Dr. Steven C. Riser (2004) forewarns visitors to the Ankerberg Theological Research Institute website: "There is a "hydra" loose in our contemporary culture and it is not a myth;…this many-headed monster, which is even more dangerous is called secularism, and it threatens you, your faith, your family, the church and our nation." Among the various heads of this monster he detected several "isms," such as "pessimistic existentialism," "moral relativism," "pragmatic utilitarianism," "logical positivism," "Darwinian evolution," "pagan hedonism," "crass materialism," "secular humanism," "marxist communism," "atheism," "historical revisionism," "narcissism," "multiculturalism, etc."

The conservatism of these allegations is apparent when we turn from the ideological war against the descendants of the Enlightenment, to the frontal attack on the modern "welfare state." For physician and former US Air Force officer Steven La Tulippe (2007), The American version of statism is a four-headed monster…In foreign policy, it expresses itself as imperialism (either the liberal kind, such as our assault on Serbia, or the conservative kind, such as our destruction of Iraq). In domestic politics, it takes the form of social democracy, with its choking, all-encompassing micromanagement of our lives…In the realm of culture, statism expresses itself as post-modernism, the disconnected, degenerate lifestyle that has spread throughout the Western world. The author recommends "several simple actions" for the reversal of this trend towards "deculturalization:" a) the abolition of the welfare state because it "functions primarily to replace fathers with government subsidies," causing "the debasement and disintegration of the family and, therefore, of civilization itself," b) "the privatization of marriage and illegitimacy," because, "marriage is a private contract between two people" and "not an opportunity for social engineering," and c) the abandonment of "welfare and state-mandated child support" and reliance on charity, for "since most charities are religious organizations (rather than soulless government bureaucracies) they will be able to more effectively address underlying causes of social pathology rather than merely subsidizing them." This appeal for a return to Victorian socioeconomic philosophy ends with the abolishment of "public schools" and the restoration of a gold standard basis for the American currency in order to prevent "the government…[from being able] to finance the plethora of destructive programs."

Dianna Gordon (1994) shared Steven La Tulippe views, albeit in a less extended context. She believes that "the welfare system has become a multi-headed monster and equates reform of it to [a] battle with the mythical Hydra. For every problem solved, two more crop up like regenerating heads. If you cut off one head by putting people in jobs, they lose vital health and child care. Tighten up on who is eligible, and children may go hungry. Attack hunger by increasing benefits, and there is less incentive for people to leave the system. "Welfare became a monster of society's own making," echoed USA Today editor Dr. Gerald F. Kreyche (1995) in an article entitled "A pox on multiculturalism." William F. Jasper (2004) issued a similar exhortation from the pages of The New American. Jasper argued for lower income taxes, reduced social security programs, the enforcement of "sensible reduced immigration," and the abolishment of the "socialist regulatory monster that is destroying our country's competitiveness."

Bearing the above brief survey in mind, a detailed, in depth analysis of the social and political aspects connected with uses of the Herculean myth and with the image of the many-headed monster in current public discourse is beyond the scope and intentions of this article.

Against "A Visionary System of Government"

In 1783 David Ramsay, a South Carolina doctor, politician and author of a two volume History of the American Revolution (1789), expressed his concern to Benjamin Rush that "this revolution has introduced so much anarchy that it will take half a century to eradicate the licentiousness of the people" (Ramsay, 1990, vol. 1, p. xxiii).Fortunately for him, this prediction proved -at least in the short-term- short-sighted. Four years later, the federal constitution rectified "fundamental disorders," putting aside a "visionary fabric of government." Ramsay qualified revolutionary constitutions as products of men "called from the ordinary walks of life to make laws" and dismissed the culture of direct democracy embodied in them as "sundry opinions, unsuitable to the state of society in America" (Ramsay, vol. 1, pp. xvi, 329, vol. 2, p. 653).His critique of the popular institutions emerging from the Revolution was a later occurrence in the fierce fight that took place in revolutionary America between the supporters of radical state constitutions and their opponents (Holton, 2005, pp. 339-382). A careful reading of correspondence by congressional delegates in the second half of 1776 testifies that the Pennsylvania frame of government attracted the attention of the whole continent, and constituted a dire threat to the conservatives, sometimes surpassing that represented by the British army and its supporters in the colonies (Wood, 1998, p. 85).

The "rage" against the constitutions of Pennsylvania and Vermont originated principally from the lack of a second legislative body to control and advise the popular assembly. Pennsylvania entrusted "supreme legislative power" to a "house of representatives" annually elected by "every freemen of the full age of twenty-one years" (Thorpe, vol. 6, p. 3084). On October 26, 1776, William Hooper invited his friend in North Carolina to benefit from the wise decisions of legislators in South Carolina, New Jersey and Delaware, which provided for bicameral legislatures. Hooper called "a single branch of legislation…a many headed monster which without any check must soon defeat the very purposes for which it was created, and its members become a tyranny dreadful in proportion to the numbers which compose it" (Smith et al, vol. 5, p. 401; Kokkinakis, 2008, pp. 411-412). Benjamin Franklin, one of the principal architects of Pennsylvania's constitution, had already resorted to the image of a "many headed monster," in his case a snake with two heads, yet had done so in order to defend a single legislative chamber: "She [the snake] was going to a brook to drink, and in her way was to pass through a hedge, a twig of which opposed her direct course; one head chose to go on the right side of the twig, the other on the left; so that time was spent in the contest, and before the decision was completed, the poor snake died with thirst"(Isaacson, 2003, p. 315). In contrast, Hooper's version of the story underlined: "the necessity of another branch of legislation at least, which may be a refinement of the first choice of the people at large selected for their wisdom, remarkable integrity, or that weight which arises from property and gives independence and impartiality to the human mind" (Smith et al, p. 401).

Hooper concluded by praying that the people of Pennsylvania who "adopted the visionary system of a single branch…soon saw the monster the convention had framed for them with horror & with one accord stifled it [in] its cradle before it had begun its outrages" (Smith et al, ibid.). Hooper repeatedly employed the many-headed monster metaphor in his correspondence: "You have seen the constitution of Pennsylvania," he remarked to Samuel Johnston (1733-1816), North Carolina's moderate revolutionary and later governor of the state, the motley mixture of limited monarchy, and an execrable democracy-a beast without a head. The mob made a second branch of legislation -laws subjected to their revisal in order to refine them, a washing in ordure by way of purification. Taverns and dram shops are the councils to which the laws of this state are to be referred for approbation before they possess a binding Influence" (Smith et al, vol. 5, pp. 248-49). In speaking of "taverns and dram shops" Hooper referred to the clause of the constitution provided that all bills of public nature shall be printed for the consideration of the people, before they are read in general assembly the last time for debate and amendment," in order to be "more maturely considered and the inconvenience of hasty determinations as much as possible prevented (Thorpe, vol. 6, p. 3086). Hooper preferred this mature consideration to be executed not by the tavern-goer but by men selected for their "wisdom," "integrity" and "property." In March 1777 Thomas Burke, the new delegate for North Carolina in Congress, wrote to Governor Richard Caswell of the "very unhappy" situation in which Pennsylvania found itself, since "so powerful a party opposes the new constitution" (Smith et al, vol. 6, pp. 429-430). With such mobilization within and beyond Congress against Pennsylvania's political institutions, the coming elections for the new state government acquired a continental character. After all, Pennsylvania was important not only on account of its magnitude and wealth, but even more so because Philadelphia was the strategic point for decision making in revolutionary America.

Many delegates in Congress felt at least uncomfortable in a place where the "breath of the people" was so close to them. Mobilization of those opposing the Constitution would produce an anti-radical majority in the city of Philadelphia. On October 27, 1776, William Hooper wrote triumphantly to his friend Joseph Hewes: "The monster which they called a government has expired with the political existence of those who created it." George Ross reported with equal joy to the Lancaster Committee of Safety: "I have the pleasure of informing you that I have now hopes of seeing a happy Constitution settled for our distracted state" (Thayer, 1953, pp. 186-190; Smith et al, vol. 5, pp. 410, 443, 446). A few months later, in April 1777, when Pennsylvania's legislature was in adjournment and the council unable to act due to multiple absences, Congress, fearing an advance of the enemy towards Philadelphia, declared Pennsylvania's executive "incapable of any exertion adequate to the present crisis," and appointed an emergency government in Philadelphia. James Duane, the New York delegate, assured that this was the only way to relieve Pennsylvania from "these refined speculative plans", noting that, "in times of peace they may produce happiness; but flagrante bello they afford no hope of success, no prospect of advantage" (Smith et al, vol. 5, p 603, note 2, vol. 6, p. 617). The frequent references by New York delegates to the evils accumulated by the "unhappy" constitution of Pennsylvania were no accident. Being ardent supporters of strong executives and inasmuch as Pennsylvania's unicameral legislature and plural executive were seen as a hindrance to a "wholesome" and vigorous government, they wanted to convince the New York constitutional convention to consider Pennsylvania's frame of government as a negative example. It is interesting that Duer, Duane and Livingston wished, together with "every wise man here [in Philadelphia]…that the establishment of new forms of government had been deferred." This need of "deferment" in the establishing of the new state governments was one reason for men like John Dickinson and Robert Morris to withdraw their signature from the Declaration of Independence. But the fact that Morris, Edward Rutledge, James Duane andeven Dickinson himself would not dissociate themselves from the revolutionary movement, in spite of their objections to the Declaration, was an indication of their belief that they could effectually direct it along a more traditional path (Brunhouse, 1942, vol. 14-15; Smith et al, vol. 6, pp. 686, vol. 4, p. 511, vol. 5, p. 412).

In some respects, this occurred in states like New York and Maryland. The constitution of New York was the only one of the period vesting important powers in the executive. The governor together with the judges of the Supreme Court "constituted a council to revise all bills about to be passed into laws by the legislature." The endorsement of a strong executive in New York was not unconnected to the fact that the state was a major theatre of war and abounded with loyalists. On November 24, 1776, observing the necessity of "a good government" in New York,Edward Rutledge of South Carolina stressed to John Jay that a pure democracy may possibly do when patriotism is the ruling passion, but when a state abounds in rascals…you must suppress a little of that popular spirit, vest the executive powers of government in an individual that they may have vigor, & let them be as ample as is consistent with the great outline of freedom" (Smith et al, vol. 5, p. 538). With the prolongation of the war, such recipes gained ground. The fact that after Washington's success at Trenton, New Jersey, on December 26, 1776, Congress decided to vest the Commander in Chief with enhanced powers for six months was not unrelated to this general consensus for firm measures in the states, the army, and Congress. The same patriots who opposed the "plebeian" and popular character of state constitutions generally supported a strong executive in the army. On December 30, 1776, Benjamin Rush, candidly declared to Richard Henry Lee that "Gen[eral] Washington must be invested with dictatorial power for a few months or we are undone" (Smith et al, vol. 5, p. 706; Kokkinakis, 2008, p. 412-413).

On July 3, 1776, John Adams, observed to his wife that "the new governments…will require a purification from our vices, and an augmentation of our virtues or they will be no blessings." He likewise expressed his fear at the fact that "the people will have unbounded power. And the people are extremely addicted to corruption and venality, as well as the great" (Smith et al, vol. 4, pp. 374-375). Writing to Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814), the future historian of the Revolution, repeated his belief that virtue is the only foundation of republics. There must be a positive passion for the public good, the public interest, honour, power, and glory, established in the minds of the people, or there can be no republican government, nor any real liberty" (Smith et al, vol. 3, pp. 537-538). Adams' concern over the lack of adequate virtue in America for the working of a republican government, made him suspicious of any political arrangement based upon a single legislative elective by the people.

In his now famous letter of May 1776 to James Sullivan, he stressed that the Haringtonian "maxim" that "power always follows property" is "as infallible…in politics, as, that action and reaction are equal, is in mechanics", and he concluded: the only possible way…of preserving the balance of power on the side of equal liberty and public virtue, is to make the acquisition of land easy to every member of society: to make a division of the land into small quantities, so that the multitude may be possessed of landed estates" (Smith et al, vol. 4, pp. 74-75). Until such time as this occurred, he was not prepared to entrust the right to vote to the landless multitude, since, moreover, "very few men, who have no property, have any judgment of their own" (Smith et al, ibid.). Many conservative and moderate Republicans joined with Adams in considering property or the inextricably connected notion of "character," to be a proper indication of men's ability to endow others with the right to govern. The link between property and character is reflected in Joseph Reed's protestation to the president of Congress Henry Laurens that "men without morals, without character, & without property have been, & are intrusted with the disposal of public money, & private property" (Smith et al, vol.9, pp.169). In this respect, Robert Morris believed that the refusal of Andrew Allen, John Dickinson and other men of property to support the Revolution greatly impaired the fight for a "wholesome" constitution in Pennsylvania. Morris stressed that their behaviour seems to pierce through their sides into the vitals of those who have similar pretentions to fortune & good character," because their "defection…is supposed to originate in a desire to preserve their estates & consequently glances a suspicion on all that have estates to loose (Smith et al, 3: 87-88).

The manifold ways in which John Adams approaches Tom Paine's Common Sense is indicative of the changing attitude of many revolutionary leaders towards the new governments in the states. In February 1776, when fighting to convince Congress of the necessity of separation from Great Britain, Adams sent his wife "a pamphlet entitled Common Sense, written," as he observed, "in vindication of doctrines which there is reason to expect that the further encroachments of tyranny and depredations of oppression, will soon make the common faith." But when he realized that Paine's "doctrines" were not serving the shaping of moderate governments in the states, he took a much more reserved stance towards the same work. "You ask, what is thought of common sense," he wrote to Abigail on March 19, 1776: "His sentiments of the abilities of America, and of the difficulty of a reconciliation with G[reat] B[ritain] are generally approved. But his notions and plans of continental government are not much applauded." He also pointed out that "I should have made a more respectable figure as an architect, if I had undertaken such a work" (Smith et al, vol. 3, pp. 271, 399-400; Hoffman, 2006, p. 379). It was this architecture, serving as a paradigm not only for the new state governments but also "as a great model of union for the whole," that Adams attempted to erect in his Thoughts on Government. Thirty three years after its publication, he observed to Benjamin Rush that "this pamphlet…was very unpopular. No man appeared in public to support it but yourself…but without much success" (Smith et al, vol. 3, pp. 399-400; Schutz & Adair, 2000, p. 89).He was of course exaggerating in this respect. Though his Thoughts were never destined to become as popular as Common Sense, the majority of states adopted his advice and vested legislative power in two chambers. On the other hand, they did not take the second step he exhorted, which was to establish strong executives.

In his Thoughts, Adams declared "that the happiness of society is the end of government" and "that the form of government which communicates…happiness, to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best." But a government, he emphasized, which invested all legislative power in a single assembly "is subject to fits of humour, starts of passion, flights of enthusiasm, partialities, or prejudice, and consequently productive of hasty results and absurd judgments." Furthermore it "is apt to be avaricious…is apt to grow ambitious…is unfit to exercise the executive power, for want of two essential properties, secrecy and despatch." After this recital of defects associated with a single legislative, Adams suggested that "a distinct assembly be constituted, as a mediator between the two extreme branches of the legislature, that which represents the people, and that which is vested with the executive power" (Adams, 2000, pp. 287-290; Kokkinakis, 2008, pp. 413-418). Awareness that state politics should be properly guided in order to produce "wiser" results led Adams to assume a central role in the Massachusetts constitution-making process. In 1779 he was elected to the state constitutional convention and afterwards entrusted with the task of writing the first draft of the document, which was to be approved with minor alterations (Schutz & Adair, 2000, p. 158).The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 stands on the threshold between two historical periods and two political perceptions concerning the physiognomy of the Union. Yet ultimately, in aiming at the "institutional isolation" of the popular element under the watchful eye of the senate and the executive power and in intending to give "vigor" to a popular but properly limited and "balanced" government, the document revealed the new directions the Union was to pursue after the first turbulent years of the revolution (Adams, 2000, pp. 297-298, 307-310).

The carefully cultivated awareness that Pennsylvania provided a bad example and Massachusetts a good one was so prevalent during the federal convention that when the model government of Massachusetts tottered during Shays' Rebellion, almost no one dared to assert that the "rebellion" was the result of a defective constitution. Despite the repressive measures taken by the state government to curtail the "rebellion", Shays' Rebellion was to be interpreted as a sign of the impotency and weakness of the Confederacy to provide for public peace and as proof of the need for a standing army (Farrand, 1966, vol. 1, pp. 263, 285). Had the "rebellion" broken out in Pennsylvania, it would have been taken as undisputed proof that a single legislature was finally "a beast without a head" and that Pennsylvania should introduce a senate and a strong executive for prosperity to be restored in "this once flourishing country" (Smith et al, vol. 5, pp. 248-249). This deeply rooted prejudice against Pennsylvania's popular institutions is evidenced by the fact that among the arguments raised against the candidacy of Philadelphia as a permanent "seat of general government" was the unfitness of its Constitution for this task. In November 1782, George Lux, a merchant from Baltimore, Maryland, recommended Annapolis as the ideal capital of the Union, observing in corroboration of his argument that "the constitution of Maryland being...opposite to every principle of anarchy and levelism, Congress would be more agreeably fixed in it than in Pennsylvania, where an unlimited democracy... prevails." What Lux dreaded most was that the members of the national government would be affected by a state demonstrating a tendency toward democracy:"the prospect," Lux declared, must be very disagreeable, when it is considered that congress may possibly be in danger of being mobbed, if they do not flatter the prejudices of the majority of the lower class of citizens, and the measures they may wish to be adopted, may not constantly be right and proper (Smith et al, vol. 20, p. 164, note 3; Kokkinakis, 2008, pp. 421-422).

Introducing "An Aristocracy at One Stroke of Pen"?

In May, 1777, William Whipple, delegate for New Hampshire in Congress, protested to Josiah Bartlett against the "internal &secret enemies," of the revolution, who "embarrass us much more than is in the power of all the force that can be raised by Great Britain." In advocating the "free exercise" of "the whip, pillory &gibbet," and, for those escaping hanging, banishment and confiscation of their estates, Whipple reflected the opinions of many patriots who demanded "vigorous exertions" against the "Tories" and the "disaffected." Justifying the same necessity, John Adams stressed to Abigail that while "saviour taught the immorality of revenge" there are "some instances" that "we must practice retaliation in order to make our barbarous foes respect in some degree the rights of humanity" (Smith et al, vol. 7, pp. 45-46, 161-162, 347-448). The very real threat of Philadelphia being seized by the British army was employed by conservatives as tangible proof of the radicals' incapacity to provide vigorous government in a time of crisis. Nevertheless, the British troops were to march across almost all of the Union, without this "want of resistance" being directly attributed to any shortcomings in state constitutions. On the contrary, for New York delegates William Duer, Philip Livingstone and James Duane, "the feeble, inactive condition of Pennsylvania is a sad proof of how little their new constitution is calculated for security or defence in time of danger" (Smith et al, vol. 6, p. 631). Over the following years, men with "fortune," "estates" and "character," like James Wilson, Robert Morris and his business partner Thomas Willing, first president of the Bank of North America, were to engage themselves energetically in Pennsylvanian politics. New tensions between the conflicting parties were created by the seizure of 182 barrels of flour bought in violation of existing maximum prices by Robert Morris and Jean Holker, the French Consul in Philadelphia. These tensions culminated in the famous "Fort Wilson incident" [October 4, 1779], ending in the violent intervention of state and federal troops against the militia and "labouring part of the city", who had been driven to desperation by "the high price of the necessaries of life" (Smith, 1909, pp. 228-229; Brunhouse, 1971, p 71;Rosswurn, 1987, p. 71; Ireland, 1973, pp. 440-442). In a letter to John Adams on the day of the incident, Henry Laurens claimed that "we are at this moment on a precipice and what I have long dreaded…seems to be breaking forth -a convulsion among the people" (cited in Alexander, 1904, p. 604). Conservative reaction resulted in the denial of continental currency from its legal tender quality, the abolition of laws concerning forestalling and engrossing, and a return to a market oriented economic policy. The general shift towards establishing modes of governing was galvanized by Thomas Paine's support for the new nationalist endeavors to create a more vigorous federal government. His alignment with his former enemy, Robert Morris, with whom he shared an aversion towards state-issued paper money and economic regulation, were signs of a rupture among the Constitutionalists (Foner, 2005, pp. 183-192; Engels, 2005, pp.82-83).

The changing climate in Pennsylvania was reflected by the reinforcement of Republicans in the 1781 election and their predominance in state politics in the 1783 election. John Dickinson, who declared in 1778 that "he never would accept any office…in the state, whilst the present constitution had existence," was now (in 1783) happy to accept the highest office of the president of the state and to swear allegiance to its unicameral constitution. For men like Dickinson and Morris what really mattered was their ability to promote a certain economic and social policy, not the specific political edifice under which this promotion would materialize. Of course, knowing that a popularly elected unicameral assembly with a council dependent on it was unlikely to become a "disinterested and dispassionate umpire," they were to support a model government for the union which constituted an expressed rejection of Pennsylvania's political institutions (Smith, 1909, pp. 230-233; Ketcham 1986, p. 33; Kokkinakis, 2008, pp. 422-425). In the meantime, the election of the Council of Censors, the body invested with the power to "enquire whether the constitution has been preserve inviolate in every part and whether the legislative and executive branches of government have performed their duty, as guardian of the people," provided conservatives with a vital opportunity to amend the constitution. On January 19, 1784, the majority of the Council detected three major "defects" in it: the assignment of the "supreme legislative power…in one body," the commissioning of the judges of the Supreme Court for a period of seven years by the assembly, and the principle of rotation in office. However, lack of the necessary two-thirds majority for the calling of a constitutional convention annulled republican plans to restore "harmony…and dignity" in Pennsylvania through a new bicameral form of government (Thorpe, vol. 6, pp. 70-83).

A few months later the majority of the body specifically condemned all "acts of assembly…for seizing and taking the goods of the inhabitants of this state," all attempts at preventing "forestalling," and regulating "the prices of commodities," as "absurd and impossible," tending to "produce the very opposite effects to those which they were designed to produce" and as "unconstitutional invasions of the rights of property." They accused the assembly of legislating too hastily and for teaching citizens "to consider an application to the legislature as a shorter and more certain mode of obtaining relief from hardship and losses, than the usual process of law" (**Proceedings**, 1825, pp. 83-93, 100-103, 107, 114, 123). This distrust towards popular assemblies was to be expressed on many subsequent occasions during the federal convention of 1787. "The people," emerged from the proceedings of the federal convention as an entity of contradictory and essentially negative attributes, not a trustee but a "lawless mob" needing advice and restraint (Farrand, vol. 1, p. 298; Hamilton, Madison & Jay, 2000, p. 261). For example, Gouverneur Morris entreated the convention not to entrust voting rights to those "who have no property," because "they will sell them to the rich who will be able to buy them." Simultaneously, he urged his colleagues to decide this matter with an eye to the future: "The time is not distant when this country will abound with mechanics & manufacturers who will receive their bread from their employers. Will such men," he wondered, "be the secure & faithful guardians of liberty?" John Dickinson also considered limitations on the franchise "as a necessary defence against the dangerous influence of those multitudes without property & without principle with which our country like all others will in time abound" (Farrand, vol. 2, pp. 202-203, 205). We may presume that Morris and Dickinson's assumptions were a by-product not so much of speculative thought but of their experience in fighting the political aspirations of Pennsylvania's "mechanics" and property less classes. Even the election of the representatives by the people was an unpleasant but necessary concession, stemming from the fear of federal delegates that "the people will not readily subscribe to the national Constitution if it should subject them to be disfranchised." Besides, the Federal Convention saw no revival of the old dividing line between the supporters of unicameralism and their opponents. Illustrative of the ideological conservatism in the ranks of federal delegates was the fact that James Wilson, the great enemy of Pennsylvania radicals, was one of the more democratic members of the convention, a vigorous defender of popular election not only of the Representatives but of Senators as well. The only ones to disagree openly about the need for two Legislative Chambers were delegates William Patterson of New Jersey and Luther Martin of Maryland (Farrand, vol. 1, pp. 49, 251, 437-439, vol. 2, p. 201).

Exasperated at those who "depress the virtue & public spirit of our common people," an ageing Benjamin Franklin reminded delegates that the outcome of the war would have been different without the aid of the common people (Farrand, vol. 1, p. 48, vol. 2, pp. 204-205).In November of 1789, when the process for a new constitution in Pennsylvania had already commenced, he was critical of the prospect of an upper house "chosen by freemen possessing in lands and houses one thousand pounds." "If" this property-owning minority "is to choose a body expressly to control that which is to be chosen by the great majority of the freemen…Why," he asked, "is this power of control, contrary to the spirit of all democracies, to be vested in a minority, instead of a majority?"

His emphasis on the majority principle stemmed from his essential belief that property is "a creature of society and is subject to the calls of that society whenever its necessities shall require it", that property owners are not entitled "to the distinctions of honor and power" and that "the poorest continues to have an equal claim to them [to life and liberty] with the most opulent, whatever difference time, chance or industry may occasion in their circumstances" (Franklin, 1789; Kokkinakis, 2008, p. 433). Nonetheless, the above arguments and similar were not powerful enough to influence political developments in either the Union or Pennsylvania. Even if the new state upper house, introduced by the constitutional convention of 1789-90, was not the aristocratic body that many republicans espoused during the 1770s and 1780s, the convention instituted a bicameral legislature, a governor with a veto power, and an independent judiciary, in order to "refine" the judgments and prevent the "abuses" of the "dreadful tyrant" unleashed by the Constitution of 1776 (Foster, 1992, pp. 122-124).

Conclusion

The enfranchised masses in the new republic would soon come to realize that notions such as "Law," and "Justice" were usually something rigid and "neutral" in relation to their claims, yet flexible and adaptable enough in relation to the demands of men of "power and property." In March 1789, anti-constitutionalists in Pennsylvania willing to surpass the strict amendment process prescribed by the 1776 Constitution for the calling of a convention declared that: "the people have at all times an inherent right to alter and amend the form of government, in such manner as they shall think proper; and also that they cannot be limited to any certain rule or mode of accomplishing the same, but may make choice of such method as to them may appear best adapted to the end proposed" (Proceedings, 1825, p. 142). However, the above example was not the rule as regards moderate and conservative behavior after the signing of the 1787 Constitution. When the Federal Constitution replaced the Declaration of Independence as the sacred text of the American political tradition the new motto of the cautious federalists and republicans was "back to legality." Madison warned his audience that the new federal experiment differed fundamentally from those during the War of Independence, and that "the [revolutionary] experiments are of too ticklish a nature to be unnecessarily multiplied." In the particular context of the Federalist these allusions stressed that, now, after the introduction of the right Constitution, there was no need for "frequent appeals" to the "only legitimate fountain of power," meaning the American people. The new republican theory placed considerable value on "governmental veneration," stemming from tradition and stability and, after the introduction of "the scheme of representation as a substitute for a meeting of the citizen in person," demonized the "frequent reference of constitutional questions to the decision of the whole society" (Hamilton, Madison & Jay, pp. 258-260, 271). These signs indicated that the steady pace toward republicanism in the United States or toward parliamentarianism in Europe and the growing emancipation of the lower classes in politics and society had to be carefully circumscribed. Not surprisingly, the people came once again to embody the vicious multitude of the Shakespearean mob, not only in the counter revolutionary thought of Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, Abbé Barruel etc. or of Fisher Ames and the late John Adams, but also in the new "liberal" tradition in the late 18th and 19th centuries (Burke, 1993, pp. 78, 241, 251; Kirk, 1953, pp. 62-98).The "people," who "ordain and establish" the United States government had to be "virtuous," "far sighted," "prudential," capable of respecting social divisions and understanding the subtle nuances between legitimate political action and "mobbish" activity. The monster of democracy had to be kept alive, but only in a very carefully guarded cage, and released once every two or four years in order to elect its keepers.

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