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The Eighteenth-Century Debate About Party from Montesquieu to Madison

Hannah Arendt wrote in her book *On Revolution* (1963) that James Madison's appreciation of the politics of party represented a "flagrant contradiction to classical tradition, to which the Founding Fathers otherwise paid the closest attention." In Federalist No. 10, Madison argued that "party and faction in government correspond to the many voices and differences in opinion which must continue 'as long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it.'" In Federalist No. 51, Madison was even more unequivocal: an exemption of parties in the state "ought to be neither presumed nor desired; because an extinction of parties necessarily implies either a universal alarm for the public safety, or an absolute extinction of liberty." Arendt argued that the Founding Fathers did not invent anything new but rather sought to master and apply the best existing political theory available to them. In my essay, I will situate some of the Founders' and early Presidents' take on party against the backdrop of the European eighteenth-century debate about internecine discord, and the history of the British parliamentary monarchy. These contexts are as important as classical republicanism for understanding the party question in the early American republic.