

Excerpts from “Federalist No. 51,” February 8, 1788

In order to lay a due foundation for that separate and distinct exercise of the different powers of government, . . . essential to the preservation of liberty, it is evident that each department should have a will of its own; . . . so constituted that . . . each should have as little agency as possible in the appointment of the members of the others . . . But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department, the necessary constitutional means . . . to resist encroachments of the others . . . It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. . . . If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself. . . .

In republican government, the legislative authority necessarily predominates. The remedy for this inconveniency is, to divide the legislature into different branches; . . . as little connected with each other, as the nature of their common functions, and their common dependence on the society, will admit. It may even be necessary to guard against dangerous encroachments by still further precautions. As the weight of the legislative authority requires that it should be thus divided, the weakness of the executive may require, on the other hand, that it should be fortified. . . . In a single republic, all the power surrendered by the people, is submitted to the administration of a single government; and the usurpations are guarded against by a division of the government into distinct and separate departments. . . .

Source: Alexander Hamilton or James Madison, “Federalist No. 51,” *The Federalist: A Collection of Essays, Written in Favour of the New Constitution, as Agreed Upon by the Federal Convention, September 17, 1787*, Vol. 2 (New York: J. & A. McLean, 1788), pp. 116–122, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01551